

Peer Support Groups such as The Compassionate Friends can be a healing experience. You will be with other bereaved parents who know and understand the depth of your grief.

Making Decisions is very difficult while working through the grieving process. If possible, do not rush into any making any major decisions—such as moving, changing jobs, etc.. You are dealing with a devastating loss and further stress could complicate your recovery. If change is necessary, seek help through a friend or counsellor.

Those who care about you but have not walked your path need to be told what they can do to help. Tell them you need to hear your child's name mentioned, you need them to share their memories of your child and that you need to cry and to grieve. One of the most precious gifts a friend can give, now and in years to come, is to remember your child in conversation, with laughter or with tears.

Remember your child's birthday and the anniversary of death by doing something significant. Donate to a library or charity, see a movie your child would have enjoyed, make their favourite meal or cookies, light a candle, go through pictures or work on a special album. Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, holidays, the first day of school and family rites of passage will all hold a sadness because your child is missing. Do not be afraid to include your child in those special days by remembering in words, lighting a candle, wearing a butterfly or picture button, carrying a memento—something to help you get through the day. And, remember, tears can be a healthy release.



*We watched an illness
Ravage your body and
Change dreams into nightmares*

*We were helpless
Parents protect their children
We could do nothing*

*With awe we marveled
At your courage, your strength,
Your incredible wisdom*

*And held you as you made
Your transition into the light
Where pain no longer had you in its grip*

*We went home to face a grief
So painful, so unbelievable
Each of us alone in a world we didn't
know.*

© Authored by Ken and Pat Pinch
in memory of their son
Christopher Kenneth Pinch 1972-1980

For support in your area contact:

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA



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Grief after a Long-term Illness



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA

An international peer support
organization for bereaved parents
and their surviving children

Your Child Has Died After A Long-Term Illness...

- You may have been the main caregiver or maybe your child was in the hospital or long-term care and you spent every possible moment there. Your child's fight for survival is over—he/she is at peace. The pain and agony are over—or is it?
- You may have been in the system for years—doctors, nurses, social workers, child-care professionals, homecare, have all been part of your life and, with your child's death, they too are gone. Friends and family may think you need time to yourself. Maybe you do, or maybe you need people to support you in the emptiness.
- A long-term illness brought with it many changes. Your life revolved around hospital visits, emergency and medical rooms, medical terms, technology, procedures, small victories and lost battles. The other parents at such places as the cancer clinic became your friends, and your joy was related to the successes there.
- Family and friends care but, with their own hectic schedule of normal daily life and business, often many relationships change or disintegrate. People don't know how to relate to the family in crisis, or they get tired of the sadness and hopelessness.
- When your child died, you may have already lost so much: friends, career, hope, dreams, enthusiasm, self-worth, any semblance of a "normal" family. You have been "out of the world" for a long time and nothing makes sense or seems important.



- When a child dies suddenly, there is great shock and disbelief. You experienced similar feelings when told your child would die, that there was no hope of survival. Maybe it took a few months or many years, watching as your child lost battle after battle, but because there was time, there was always a glimmer of hope.
- Hope for a cure, hope for a miracle, hope for the nightmare to go away. When your child died, the shock had already been absorbed but hope was lost, and devastation and exhaustion coupled with immense grief took its place. Your grief is real and should not be minimized because "you had time to say goodbye."
- You may have been grieving lost dreams for years but now you must grieve the death of your child. Even though the death was anticipated, while your child was living, you could not grieve death.
- The pain of your loss will lessen with time but your love for your child never ends. Friends, family and professionals may expect you to be relieved when your child dies and expect you to get your "life back on track" to be "your old self." You may be relieved that the pain is over for your child, but you cannot suddenly close the door to that part of your life. Just as your love for your child never ends, you never "get over it." Closure is a term used by the media and others—not by bereaved parents!

*Time lets you heal.
Love lets you remember.
Give thanks
for love and time.*

Sascha

Each Person Grieves in Their Own Way

Do not expect your spouse or surviving children to express their grief or work through it in the same way as you. Some people find talking helps, others need to be alone, while others find physical work or exercise to be helpful. Some may withdraw, react in anger or seek spiritual answers. Some parents will appear "fine" and then experience deep grief a year or two later. Others grieve immediately. There are no standard timetables for recovery. Do what is right for you. Do not put expectations on yourself or others in your family. Keep the channels of communication open and let your surviving children know they are loved.

Be Patient with Yourself and Others

Grief lasts far longer than anyone expects. It is a normal reaction to loss; it cannot be avoided. It can be delayed but unless dealt with, it can manifest itself in some unhealthy way. Allow yourself to mourn. Learn all you can about the grieving process. Get all the help you can to learn to reconcile yourself to the terrible loss you have suffered and to find meaning in life once again. Your child has died after a long-term illness. Your energy and coping skills have been taxed to the limit. Recovery will take time and the grief process should not be rushed. Parents often express concern about being tired, depressed, angry, guilt-ridden, confused, tearful, unable to concentrate or unwilling to get back into life's routines.

Grief Counselling can be helpful when you choose a counsellor you can trust and with whom you feel comfortable.

