



The
Compassionate
Friends



Remembering Our Child

A nationwide organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering support after a child dies.

Remembering Our Child

As members of The Compassionate Friends, we know first-hand the agony of child bereavement, as we are bereaved parents or close family members of a child who has died.

We are each unique in our own ways, with our own families, backgrounds, circumstances, religions and cultures, but one thing we have in common is the desire to honour our child or sibling's memory.

This leaflet and the accompanying handbook have been put together to provide some practical suggestions for remembering and honouring the memories of our children. We also look at some of the issues that can arise as we remember. We invite you to select what you find helpful, or perhaps use this as a springboard for activities that are more appropriate for you.

Just as there is no wrong or right way to grieve, there is no wrong or right way to remember.

Memorialising or 'continuing bonds'

Memorialising is a way of marking the memory of our child, focusing on their life and not just their death. It allows us the opportunity to carry precious memories of our child forward with us. Our child may not be physically with us anymore, but the memory of them will live on and be in our hearts forever. There is no right or wrong way to do this, but there are a variety of things we can do. Whether we choose to remember our child through photos, by planting a tree, or some other method, memorialising gives us the opportunity to ensure that our child has an everlasting presence in our lives, the lives of other people who knew and loved them, and even those who never met them.

Some people refer to this type of memorialising as "continuing bonds". This term was first suggested in a book ***Continuing Bonds: Another View of Grief*** (edited by Klass, Silverman and Nickman) in which the authors proposed that grief isn't about working through 'stages' until we accept

and 'forget', but finding ways to slowly adjust to a changed relationship with the person who died, maintaining a continued bond, to the extent the person wishes. This includes, but is not limited to common activities such as keeping photos, treasuring certain items and sometimes talking to the deceased person, but also includes more innovative ways, such as running a marathon in their name, starting a charity, dedicating a bench, and so on.

Most of us do this already, of course, but the 'continuing bonds' theory explains why this can be a helpful part of our grieving.

For example, we can be creative with memorialising activities, combining what our child liked with what we enjoy, such as incorporating our love of painting with our child's love of animals, by painting pictures of animals. In a way, we will have created something with them.

You can read more about 'continuing bonds' here:

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/continuing-bonds-shifting-the-grief-paradigm>

Being aware

Remembrance activities are a poor substitute for the living presence of our child. None of this will bring our child back, but hopefully this type of activity can bring at least some comfort as we adjust to the reality of living without them.

The death of our child can make us feel as though we have lost control over so many things. 'Continuing bonds' is a way of taking back some of that control – investing our time, efforts and thoughts into appropriate memorial activities. Hopefully, we will reach a place where precious memories overtake the sadder thoughts relating to their death.

We should not put ourselves under pressure. We should only do what feels right for us. For instance, some of us love to have photographs of our children displayed in our home, whereas others cannot face continually seeing our child's picture, and this is also okay.

The amount of time we spend on these activities is extremely personal, but it is good to be self-aware. If at any time a remembrance activity becomes a trigger for really sad memories and flashbacks, or if we are spending long periods of time on it, we might need to give ourselves a bit of a break.

Finding the right balance could mean setting aside time for our remembrance activities, or it might mean keeping those activities within a specified time slot. This of course doesn't mean we cannot or should not think or talk about our child during this time, but it is important to try and live our own lives too. There might be some strategies we could use to help achieve this balance. For example, we could visualise putting our thoughts about our child in a safe place, like a safe or a chest, and closing the door for a while. The thoughts are not lost; they are waiting for us when we are ready to look at them again.

We should also be aware that on occasion, remembrance activities will not be the best for our own wellbeing. If we find that these activities bring us down, rather than strengthen us, we might want to set them aside for the time being, or try out some other activities. We can always come back to a remembrance activity at a later date.

Resources, talents, abilities and limitations

Resources, abilities and finances differ from person to person, but in the same way that everyone's relationship with their child is different, so too are the ways we remember them.

For some of us, finances and/or lack of time could hold us back from some activities. This can be frustrating but that doesn't mean we cannot find more affordable alternatives. We might not be able to pay for that trip to China for example, but we can still learn about the country and the culture, and what made our child like it so much. We might not be able to pay for a photo blanket to be made, but that doesn't mean we cannot make use of what we already have, such as saved photos on our phones or physical photos. We perhaps can't donate much money to a cause close to our child's heart, but we can give in other ways, such as our time, or via a small one-off donation. We can raise awareness of something important that relates to our child even by just talking about it with others.

For those of us who have lost a child to miscarriage or a stillbirth, although their life was very short, we can still find ways to honour their memories. Photographs are incredibly precious – whether they are scans or snaps taken on phones. We may want to keep a memory book or box and include other precious items such as a lock of hair, or a copy of their footprint. We will all have special things that are vital to us to keep. These affirm that our child existed and is part of the fabric of our family. (For more on this, see the TCF Leaflet ***Grieving for our Baby.***)

Loving and remembering our child, no matter what

If our child had a troubled life, it can be a struggle to remember good and happier times. Similarly, if our child died in traumatic circumstances, this can make remembrance activities more difficult, as we might be overwhelmed by sadness or other difficult emotions. On the other hand, remembrance activities can help us put their lives into a better perspective.

If we had a difficult relationship with our child, we too may need to make a conscious effort to remember good and happier times, and the actions we take to maintain our 'continuing bonds' can help. We might also want to express our feelings by writing a letter or poem.

There are several TCF leaflets that look at these topics in more detail, such as: **After Suicide**, **Bereaved through Drug or Alcohol Use**, and **When our Child has Died from Long Term Illness**.

Differences within the household

Within the circle of our family or friends, shared memories can be a great source of comfort to all of us. Yet everyone grieves in their own way. If we have a partner, it can be difficult if their reactions and needs are not in step with our own. This is not uncommon. (See the TCF Leaflet **Grieving Couples**.)

We need to consider all members of our family, particularly if we have other children. There is a risk that they may feel that their sibling is being put on a pedestal or their memory is being idealised. Giving them the opportunity to participate in remembering their sibling with us can therefore be worthwhile as we strengthen all of our bonds of love. (See the TCF Leaflet **Our Surviving Children** for more on this.)

As we undertake various activities to remember our child, we should bear in mind that not everyone will understand or even approve of these efforts. Some family members and friends may be of the opinion that it is unhealthy and we need to 'move on'. The reality is that we do not stop being a parent to our child, nor does our child cease to be an important part of our lives, even though they have died, and our 'continued bonds' are a necessary means for finding some small comfort.

Going forward in love and memory

Continuing bonds enables us to build bridges between the past, the present and the future, and we can discover new layers of our relationship with our child. There is no right or wrong way to remember our child and continue our bond with them. We are all different, and what matters is finding what works for us. This may change as time passes, and that is okay.

Ultimately, continuing bonds with our child can give us much hope and comfort for the future; their death does not have to mean the end of their existence. We can keep discovering new opportunities to express and embrace who our child was and what they meant to us. Whether we choose to keep this to ourselves or share it with others is our own personal decision.

The activities we choose to remember our child by can help give us new life and new hope after their death. Our child is not only still giving to us, but is also continuing to contribute to the world in some way through what we are doing in their memory.

We have a chance to grow and develop as individuals in our grief, and learn new things about ourselves that we didn't know before, plus learn about our child. Our child is still a part of our life's journey, and will continue to be.

*Those we love don't go away
They walk beside us every day
Unseen, unheard, but always near
Still loved, still missed, and very dear*

(Author unknown)

This printed leaflet is a brief introduction to the topic of memorialising and remembering our child. Please go online to download the **Handbook of Ideas for Remembering Our Child** which contains dozens of practical ideas. (If you are unable to download the Handbook, please contact the TCF office using the contact information on the back page of this leaflet).

www.tcf.org.uk/rememperinghandbook

Who are the Compassionate Friends?

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) was founded in 1969 by a hospital chaplain and a group of bereaved parents who recognised the lack of support and understanding they were receiving from those who had not suffered in this way. This leaflet aims to share the experiences of all of us bereaved parents and most especially those aspects which came upon us so suddenly and, sometimes, with no warning.

The reading of this leaflet may be your first real contact with TCF. We hope it has given you a little comfort, perhaps showing you that your pain and worries are shared by others. TCF publishes over 30 leaflets, on different aspects of grief which follow the death of a child. All of them are available at no charge to bereaved parents and siblings (but a small donation is, of course, always welcome).

If you would like to hear more about our work and access further support, you could ring our Helpline number on the back page of this leaflet, and you will be able to talk to one of our volunteers, all of them bereaved parents. He or she could give you the number of a Local Contact and details of any Local Group which may meet regularly in your area. You could also find out from them details of our occasional retreats, when a small number of bereaved parents meet and talk in peaceful surroundings. Most years there is a weekend gathering, to which all members are invited.

Our website at www.tcf.org.uk has more information about our services, how to join TCF as a donating member, private Facebook groups, and support forum where bereaved parents can 'talk' online . We also publish a quarterly journal, *Compassion*, containing articles and poems written by our members about their own experiences. And, if you would also like further reading, please contact our Library for details and recommendations of books on all aspects of bereavement.



The Compassionate Friends

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To find out more about TCF visit

www.tcf.org.uk |  [@tcf.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/tcf.org.uk)  [@TCFCharityUK](https://twitter.com/TCFCharityUK)

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Founder: The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE

President: The Countess Mountbatten of Burma