

Guidelines for grief companions/befrienders

Thank you for volunteering as a grief companion/grief companion through The Compassionate Friends (TCF).

What is your role?

You will be providing informal support and friendship to another more recently bereaved parent. It offers you and another parent an opportunity to share your grief and experiences together, to 'walk alongside' one another and in this way be a listening ear and an understanding 'friend'. The contact may be by phone, in person, email and/or Skype/Face Time etc.

What is the role of The Compassionate Friends?

Our charity will 'introduce' you to a more recently bereaved parent (usually under 2 years bereaved)- we would hope to match you up by some or all of these factors – age of child, your location in the country and cause of death.

After this introduction, it is up to you and the 'befriender' to continue the contact and relationship once you have both had an opportunity to assess whether contact is helpful. TCF cannot take any responsibility after the initial introduction, and it would be up to you and the befriender to decide when and how to end your relationship.

What else do you need to know?

The information below is designed to help you:

- **Understand your role as a grief companion/befriender and give you ideas about starting the befriending relationship.**
- **Help you to see the stages of the relationship.**
- **Have a clear understanding of the boundaries of the role.**

What is your role as a grief companion/befriender?

- Informal support.
- Could involve talking on the phone, Skype etc, or meeting for a coffee, emailing each other etc.
- You'll only be allocated one parent to befriend at a time.
- You'll support and offer friendship for as long the relationship is helpful – the length of time will vary, but will be up to a maximum of a year.
- Probably to start with, you might have weekly contact – though this might become fortnightly as the parent moves through their grief.

What befriending is:

- Spending time together or on phone/corresponding.
- Giving individual support and actively listening.
- Supporting people to help themselves and encouraging choice.
- Helping to reduce social isolation.

Befriending is not:

- Counselling or psychotherapy.
- Trying to solve the befriender's problems.
- Having to have all or any of the answers.
- Making judgements about lifestyle or behaviour.
- Doing practical tasks such as childminding or personal care.
- Feeling responsible for the befriender's decisions or actions.

- Giving lots and lots of advice.
- Creating a depending, unending relationship.

Befriending helps by:

These are just some of the positive changes that can happen when someone is befriended:

- Raising self confidence.
- Building trust in others.
- Reducing social isolation.
- Increasing independent thought and action.
- Signposting befriendeds to previously unknown support and resources.
- Improving relations with families/professionals.

Starting, and moving through, the grief/companion befriending relationship

- Introduce yourselves
- Get to know each other by encouraging the befriended to speak, listen and spend time with each other.
- Demonstrate empathy - listen to them attentively, try to see their viewpoint – try to go at their 'pace' rather than asking a lot of questions to obtain 'facts'.
- Help the other person to start to make sense of their story and help them to recognise and develop their strengths and coping strategies.
- Stand alongside them – encouraging and supporting, acknowledging and celebrating achievements and small steps forward.
- Ending the relationship – plan with them so that they have increased their own self-support and support from other sources (other areas of TCF e.g groups/online etc, family, professionals etc).
- It could be that after the first year of contact you and your befriended may, or may not, wish to continue your contact as friends – you can discuss this between yourselves.

Guidelines on boundaries

Clearly boundaries are essential in befriending for several reasons:

- They protect the volunteer and befriended by providing clarity about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.
- They help manage expectations on both sides.
- They help both parties feel safe in the relationship, with the knowledge that what they both reveal will be confidential and not shared with anyone else.
- They provide a clear framework for both participants.

Do:

- Try to recognise your own personal boundaries and decide and make clear from the outset how often you will be in contact and for how long.
- If you feel uncomfortable or stressed about any situation then discuss this openly with the befriended or end the relationship if you feel you need to.
- If you need some advice or help, please make contact with The Compassionate Friends at info@tcf.org.uk or 0345 120 3785 and we will try to help.

If you would like any further information or have any further questions please contact us. We hope you will find the befriending experience rewarding and helpful for you too. Thank you for volunteering in this way, and using the tragedy of your own child's loss to help support, offer comfort and understanding to another similarly bereaved parent.



Telephone: 0345 120 3785 (admin 9.30 am – 4.30 pm, Mon - Fri) info@tcf.org.uk
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