



The  
Compassionate  
Friends

## When Our Child has been Murdered

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

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# When Our Child has been Murdered

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It is hard to imagine anything more devastating. Our child has died. What is worse, our child has died by the actions of another. Their life has been taken from them in an act of violence.

From the moment we discover what has happened to our child, everything changes. Our heart breaks for what our child has endured. We are likely to be in a state of shock and perhaps disbelief. If only this was a mistake; if only this had not happened – but it has.

Surviving the shocking and sudden death of our child in this way might feel impossible. In this leaflet, we look at some of what is likely to unfold in the coming months and years from both practical and emotional perspectives. We will include links to other organisations and resources for those whose loved one has died in this way. Our focus will be on our reactions and responses as parents.

This leaflet has been put together with the assistance of bereaved parents. We stand in compassion and solidarity alongside you in this most painful time in a parent's existence. We hope you will find it to be some help.

## Part 1 - The First Days

### Receiving the news

In many situations, the police are the bearers of the terrible news, and they usually arrive unannounced at the door. For most of us, those first moments are ones that we will never forget. We are likely to be extremely emotional – who wouldn't be under the circumstances? Finding a safe way to express our feelings is one of our challenges, including allowing ourselves to cry or shout if we feel the need. On the other hand, some of us feel numb; it might take some time for the reality to sink in.

There is no easy way to give or receive such news, but the manner in which it is delivered can make a difference. Police training does not always prepare officers adequately for the emotional issues specific to parents that arise when a child has been murdered. Many – although sadly not all of us – experience calm professionalism from police officers, who give us clear information, stated in a compassionate way and in everyday language. We will be in shock and may not take in what is being said to us, so repetition is important, as is the opportunity to ask questions.

It can be hard to take on board that the prime focus of police attention is catching the murderer, whereas ours is the death of our child. The police may not have all the information we need; they may not be able to tell us how, or even when, our child died; whether their death was quick; whether our child knew what was happening; whether they suffered. These are questions we desperately want answered, despite the pain that this knowledge will cause.

## **Finding out in other ways**

If our child was an adult, they may have a partner and/or family of their own, or be living in another part of the country or the world. In this situation, we may not be the primary contact for police officers. We may be informed by our child's partner or we might find out through other means, such as the media or online.

In these circumstances, the loss of control – including that of the flow of information – can add to our devastation.

## **Missing children**

If our child is missing and the police suspect they have been murdered, we will be in a very difficult place. There may be a prolonged period of uncertainty which could last for years, although as long as no body is found, there is still hope that they are alive and well. Our hopes may be abruptly shattered by the discovery of the body – or indeed, their body may never be found. Both uncertainty and knowledge are terrible in different ways.

## Part 2 - Getting Support

Few of us can cope alone with the devastation caused by the death of our child, and if we have a partner, family members and/or friends who will journey with us through the process, it can be a great help. However, some of us are lone parents and/or do not have close ties with our families. For us in particular, we may need to look outside of the usual 'social circle' in order to find the support we need.

The following help is available, whether or not we have other people alongside us:

### **POLICE FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER (FLO)**

Every bereaved parent should be assigned a Police Family Liaison Officer (FLO). The FLO is a police officer whose role is to support us and to obtain information from us to help with the investigation. See:

**[www.tiny.cc/supportflo](http://www.tiny.cc/supportflo)** . If there is a criminal investigation that results in a court prosecution, the FLO should provide a copy of the following booklet produced by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS):

**[www.tiny.cc/leaflet](http://www.tiny.cc/leaflet)**

### **NATIONAL HOMICIDE SERVICE (PART OF VICTIM SUPPORT)**

**0300 300 1984 | [www.tiny.cc/homicideservice](http://www.tiny.cc/homicideservice)**

The National Homicide Service (NHS) is part of Victim Support, an independent charity supporting those affected by crime. They can supply us with a caseworker who is independent. They may be able to help with practical advice such as assisting with the funeral, childcare and transportation, issues of state benefits and compensation claims, counselling services and more.

The FLO should offer us contact with the National Homicide Service although anyone bereaved (through homicide) can also contact the National Homicide Service directly.

## THE CORONER COURTS SUPPORT SERVICE (CCSS)

0300 111 2141 | [www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk](http://www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk)

An independent charity with trained volunteers who can support close family members of the deceased when attending an inquest or via the Helpline at any time. However, they cannot offer legal or case specific advice.

## THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS (TCF)

Organises local meetings and larger gatherings, as well as a helpline, online forums and Facebook groups. TCF might be able to arrange for individual support through a 'grief companion'. Being amongst other parents who have lost a child can be very helpful. **Contact details can be found on the back page of this leaflet.**

## SUPPORT AFTER MURDER AND MANSLAUGHTER (SAMM)

0121 472 2912 | [www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk)

An independent charity that has a helpline.

## ESCAPING VICTIMHOOD

[www.escapingvictimhood.com](http://www.escapingvictimhood.com)

A charity that provides supportive residential workshops for people whose lives have been disrupted by the trauma of serious crime.

## NATIONAL INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

**Read more here:**

- England and Wales: [www.tiny.cc/codecrimevictims](http://www.tiny.cc/codecrimevictims)
- Northern Ireland: [www.tiny.cc/nisupportvictims](http://www.tiny.cc/nisupportvictims)
- Scotland: [www.tiny.cc/scotlandvictims](http://www.tiny.cc/scotlandvictims)

## Counselling

The shock and trauma of what has happened to our child is difficult to cope with. Many of us find it is essential to get some support through professional counselling and/or trauma-focused therapy. Our GP or the National Homicide Service might be able to help us with a referral.

### CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE

**0808 808 1677 | [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)**

Offers bereavement counselling.

### SAMARITANS

**FREE helpline 116 123 | [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

At any moment of the day or night, when we are desperate for someone to listen, trained volunteers from the Samaritans are available. The Samaritans have a free helpline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Part 3 - What Happens Next

Even though we are devastated and shocked by the news of our child's death and it is difficult to think clearly, we have some urgent tasks to take care of. Our personal circumstances, such as whether or not we have a partner and/or close family, might change some of what follows, but generally these are matters most of us will need to consider:

### Letting other people know

Our first priority might be informing other people what has happened, and it is preferable to convey the news in a personal way if possible. This may require making phone calls and writing emails. This is better than our family, friends and colleagues hearing about it through the media or via social media. The police will usually try to ensure that someone can be with us to begin the necessary calls and communications.

## **Our child's body and the post-mortem examination**

No parent imagines ever having to face this, but we will need to decide whether to visit our child in the mortuary, later on at the funeral home, or not at all. We have a personal choice about whether to do this or not, unless the police request that we come to identify our child's body. If we cannot face this awful task, we could ask the police if there is anyone else who could do it.

Nothing can prepare a parent for the sight of their child at the mortuary, and it is wise to speak with the staff beforehand to have an idea of what to expect. It is best to bring someone with us for support, if possible.

A forensic post-mortem examination (autopsy) follows most unexpected deaths. If our child has been the victim of violent crime, then there may be two pathology reports made: one on behalf of the police and one on behalf of the accused. Before these reports are completed, our child's body is considered evidence. This means we may not be allowed to touch their body and, in some cases, even see them. This is yet another example of why losing our child in this way is so particularly painful for parents.

The Coroner should release our child's body within 28 days. If this is not possible, the reasons should be explained to us.

## **Our child's affairs – dealing with probate, physical possessions and their digital legacy**

If our child was married or in a civil partnership, then the bereaved spouse will normally be next of kin, and they will be responsible for planning the funeral, taking care of their possessions, and all legal matters to do with the estate.

If our child was unmarried or a minor, then we will be responsible for all of the legal matters, as well as their 'digital legacy', such as websites and social media accounts. Securing access to their information, photographs, memories and messages can take some time.

## Our adult child's immediate family

If our adult child was a victim of domestic violence, the care of their children will be an immediate priority. If our child's partner has been taken into custody, they will have suddenly lost both parents in confusing and traumatic circumstances. It is possible they may need specialist support and/or may be taken into care by social services, at least temporarily.

## The press and social media

We will have no control over what information is released by the authorities, and in all likelihood, the media may take up the story. The police press officer may be able to help and advise us in our contacts with the media, as may the Homicide Service caseworker.

The experience of parents bereaved by murder suggests that it is a good idea to give the media a brief statement, together with a photograph of our child, so that accurate information is used. We can then ask them to respect the need for privacy in our grief. There is good and bad in everyone, including journalists, so caution is advisable. If we have a friend who can answer the phone or the door at this time, that might be very helpful.

News about our child can circulate rapidly on social media. The great majority of comments are likely to be kind and respectful, but they may also contain falsehoods, guesswork and even deliberately cruel jibes. Not having control over the way our child's death is discussed may compound our grief. This could be particularly the case if the narrative starts to include some blame, suspicion or criticism towards our child, perhaps implying that our child lived a lifestyle which somehow 'invited' what happened to them.

If our child had their own social media accounts, we may want to keep an eye on what is posted there.

Some of us might choose to ignore social media altogether, whilst others may wish to put out statements to put the record straight. We may also find it helpful to learn about features such as privacy settings, blocking/

muting options, and who we can contact if we feel there is an issue that needs to be taken further.

Mainstream and social media attention often fluctuate as time passes. Immediate, concentrated focus might stop as quickly as it started. Reporting may be more measured once a suspect has been arrested and charged, but it is likely that our child's story will revive when the trial begins and/or if there are other similar deaths in the news. The media, as well as the public, have the right to attend both the inquest and the trial, and we will need to be prepared for that.

For more about coping with the press: [www.tiny.cc/highprofile](http://www.tiny.cc/highprofile)

## If Our Child was Murdered Abroad

If our child is murdered in another country, it will be necessary to deal with that country's legal system as well as with problems of language and communication. In some countries, burial or cremation must be completed with great swiftness.

Even though we may still be in shock, we may need to act very quickly if we wish to bring our child's body home, or if we want an independent post-mortem. The cost of travel, translating documents and obtaining local legal advice may prevent us from doing all that we would wish. Later, if a trial is held abroad, misunderstandings can easily arise; it can be very hard to follow the proceedings and to understand what is happening and why.

We can ask National Homicide Service for information, as well as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK, and the British Embassy in the country where our child was killed.

- **Murdered Abroad** is an organisation that provides support in these circumstances: [www.murdered-abroad.org.uk](http://www.murdered-abroad.org.uk)
- **UK government information:** [www.tiny.cc/deathabroadukgov](http://www.tiny.cc/deathabroadukgov)
- **Death Abroad Factsheet** by The Compassionate Friends (TCF): [www.tcf.org.uk/deathoverseas](http://www.tcf.org.uk/deathoverseas)

## Part 4 - The Legal Processes

Here is a brief overview of the legal and practical processes. This information is specifically for England and Wales; there are some variations elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

- For Northern Ireland: [www.tiny.cc/nicoroner](http://www.tiny.cc/nicoroner)
- For Scotland : [www.tiny.cc/scotlandadvice](http://www.tiny.cc/scotlandadvice)

### The post-mortem examination

The body of our child will be taken to the mortuary and a forensic pathologist will carry out a post-mortem examination. As explained above, there may be two pathology reports.

We can request a copy of the pathologists' reports, unless our child was married or in a civil partnership, in which case it is their partner who has this right.

The post-mortem examination report is likely to include very distressing details of our loved one's injuries. Some of us will choose not to read it, or at least, not to read it alone. We do not have to read it at all, although many of us will want to know every detail of what happened.

### The inquest

The Coroner will open the inquest as soon as possible after the post-mortem. The inquest is an inquiry to establish the facts of the identity of the person who has died and when, where and how the death occurred. The inquest is not concerned with who caused the death, or the motivation that might have prompted it. These issues will be investigated at the trial later.

If there will be a criminal trial, then the inquest will be adjourned until after the trial has concluded. In this situation, the final inquest will be more of a paperwork formality.

However, there is sometimes a need for a full inquest after the trial. This might be if the perpetrator pleaded guilty and/or there are other

circumstances in which not all four of the questions – who has died, plus when, where and how they died – have been answered.

If no one is charged, then an inquest hearing will take place.

Throughout these procedures, the family should be kept informed by a named Coroner's Officer or the police.

After the initial inquest has been opened and established the cause of death, an interim death certificate can be given, although a formal death certificate will not be issued until the inquest is completed after the trial.

As explained above, the Coroner will release our child's body only when they are satisfied that no further post-mortem is necessary. This should be within a maximum of 28 days. We should be informed of the reasons if this is not possible.

The Coroner's Court Support Service can help us before and during the inquest: **0300 111 2141** | **[www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk](http://www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk)**

TCF factsheets with detailed advice about legal support, preparation for and coping with inquests in England and Wales, as well as the Investigation of Sudden Deaths in Scotland: **[www.tcf.org.uk/legalhelp](http://www.tcf.org.uk/legalhelp)**

## The funeral

Following our child's death, many things may be out of our control. This includes having to wait on the Coroner before being able to proceed with the funeral. If there is a long delay, the initial agony of our grief will be prolonged. If we can focus our thoughts, we can use the time to plan the funeral, to make it the tribute and farewell that our child deserves, although our emotions are likely still to be in a state of upheaval. However, we will not be able to finalise arrangements until the Coroner has released our child's body.

It is important to take control of the public aspects of the funeral. We may want a small private ceremony, or wish it to be an occasion where our local community can join family and friends in saying farewell. The media should respect our choice, but we may need to make this known to them, so that as far as possible, this important day is not marred by unwanted intrusions.

## What happens next?

After the funeral, there will probably still be some practical matters to attend to, but what will concern us most is the investigation into our child's death. Contact with the police may be infrequent at this time if they have nothing to report. Indeed, we may almost be made to feel that our legitimate enquiries are a nuisance ('We'll tell you when we have some news'). We could ask our Homicide Service caseworker to liaise with the police on our behalf and meet with us on a regular basis.

## The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and decisions made

Depending on the evidence that the police are able to gather and the likelihood of a successful prosecution, the CPS will decide whether or not to charge the alleged perpetrator(s). If charges are made, a date will be set for a trial.

When a suspect is arrested the police should inform us directly, and continue to give us updates on court hearings, changes of plea, etc. Sometimes there is more than one suspect.

If the suspect is an adult, they will be remanded in custody and it could take several years before the case comes to trial. If the suspect is under the age of 18, the whole process is sped up and a trial may begin within three months. Their case may begin in a Magistrates' Youth Court and then be passed to a Crown Court.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) should meet with us to explain the charges being brought, how the case is likely to progress, discuss our needs and answer our questions. The mental capacity of the defendant(s) may have a bearing on whether there will be a trial. The CPS should also meet with us if a decision has been made to reduce or drop a criminal charge, perhaps due to insufficient evidence to secure a conviction. Such a decision might be very difficult for us. There is a right to request a review.

For more on this: [www.tiny.cc/victimsreviewscheme](http://www.tiny.cc/victimsreviewscheme)

## The trial

Months and years may pass before the trial takes place. We might experience a sense of relief that it is 'finally happening'. On the other hand, it is likely to revive the intense agony of our earliest grief.

We should be offered a meeting with the prosecutor before the trial.

Learn more about what should happen at this meeting :

**[www.tiny.cc/cpshomicide](http://www.tiny.cc/cpshomicide)**

We will need to decide whether or not to attend court, which may also involve practical questions such as finances and taking time off work. Unless we are called as a witness, there is usually no obligation to attend, if we would prefer not to. However, we will want to think carefully about this decision, as we will not get another chance to do so.

When the case comes to court, the police step back, and it is the judge who is in control of the proceedings. The lawyers are there to prosecute or defend. As parents, we can feel that we are representing our child in court, that we must be strong for them. However, unless we are called as witnesses, we have no voice in the proceedings, nor will we be represented at the hearing.

We may become distressed by how little our child is spoken of as a person during the trial, by how technical the proceedings are, or by the intrusive presence of the media and general public in court. If the accused enters a guilty plea, the proceedings can be very short, and this can be unnerving if we were expecting a longer procedure.

The trial is going to be difficult, no matter how much we prepare. We will hear and perhaps see the details of what happened to our child. We will likely be brought face to face with the person responsible for our child's death, often along with their family and friends. Hopefully, we will have been told if new information is to be disclosed or if the defendant has changed his or her plea. The pathologist's report on the post-mortem will include a detailed description of the injuries to our child, for which we should try to prepare ourselves.

We might want to quietly step out of court during particularly harrowing moments. This might be necessary if we find ourselves too upset. Those attending a trial are not expected to show emotion or draw attention to themselves in a way that could be perceived to influence the jury. It might help if we have already prepared a victim personal statement.

See [www.tiny.cc/victimstatement](http://www.tiny.cc/victimstatement)

### **Other parents who have been through this suggest that it may help to:**

- Ask someone else (such as your GP) to go through the post-mortem report in advance so you do not have to cope with new details in court.
- Visit the relevant court beforehand to have an idea of the set-up and what will happen during the proceedings.
- Get as much support as you can; take family or close friends if possible.
- Consider arriving a little early to the vicinity of the court building, and then take a short walk or visit a café nearby, to give yourself a chance to feel a bit more settled.
- Expect that the trial or inquest is going to be very emotional for you. It might be better for someone else to drive to the court and back, for instance.
- Take notes during the trial or inquest, if you wish.
- Inform anyone who has been supporting you, such as a counsellor, about what is taking place and when.

The **Victim Support Homicide Service** may be able to signpost us to other support.

## **The outcome of the trial**

The verdict and the sentence may bring yet more pain. A jury has to find the person guilty 'beyond all reasonable doubt'. A 'not guilty' verdict leaves the whole question unresolved: is the jury mistaken, or did someone else kill our child? Has justice been done?

Even a guilty verdict carries its own pain; a sentence may feel inadequate. Currently, if the defendant is convicted of murder and they are aged 21 or over, the sentence could range from 15 years to a 'whole life order'. Those aged 18 – 20 years could have a sentence ranging from 15 to 30 years. For youths, the sentence would be a minimum of 12 years. If they are convicted of manslaughter rather than murder, this is reflected in their sentence. However, the defendant does not always serve their full term in custody. The length of sentence to be served (or tariff) is not usually announced at the trial.

Laws, sentencing guidelines and decision-making processes change from time to time. Our Homicide Service caseworker should be able to give us up-to-date information on who is making the decisions and according to what guidelines.

It is not unusual to be dissatisfied with the sentence given. Our child's priceless life was so cruelly cut short and we wish for this to be reflected in the verdict. Hopefully the judge will take all of this into account.

The attention of the media will immediately focus on our reaction to the verdict and sentence. It can be a good idea to have a statement prepared, perhaps read out by a lawyer, and given to media representatives.

For more on sentences and time to be served:

- [www.tiny.cc/sentencingmurder](http://www.tiny.cc/sentencingmurder)
- [www.tiny.cc/sentencingmanslaughter](http://www.tiny.cc/sentencingmanslaughter)
- [www.tiny.cc/sentencingdriving](http://www.tiny.cc/sentencingdriving)

## The aftermath

In the short term, some of us will feel relieved when the trial is completed, but many parents suffer great emotional stress immediately after the ending of the trial and have much need of support. Many emotions may have been suppressed during the trial and these can resurface in an overwhelming torrent.

As bereaved parents, we now have to adjust to life without our child. We also need to live with the outcome of the trial, the length of sentence, parole, remission, and possibly the continued presence of the murderer's family within our community. How will we feel when our child's killer is released, perhaps to return to their nearby home? How will we feel when the press, local or national, report the release of the murderer from prison?

- The TCF Leaflet: *Coping with Legal Procedures after the Death of Our Child* provides more information on this topic.
- There is a possibility of applying for compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.  
See: [www.tiny.cc/victimcompensation](http://www.tiny.cc/victimcompensation)

## Part 5 - The Life We Are Now Living

### Our responses to the tragedy of our child's death

In the long term, we each need to find our own methods of adapting to what has happened, living with what cannot be changed, and working through the pain and grief so that life can continue - albeit in a different way from how we would have wished. We can only make this 'journey' at our own pace.

Many people bereaved by murder experience great difficulties when they try to resume their normal activities. Life can seem meaningless and empty, things that brought pleasure before are now without attraction and even laughter may bring feelings of guilt. Friends may find it hard to accept the fact that we have changed and that these changes might persist for years after our child's death. They wonder if we will ever be 'normal' again.

The traumatic circumstances of our child's death will inevitably create unbearable waves of emotion. As shock and numbness wear off, we may wonder how it is possible to survive such extremes of anger, grief, rage, depression, guilt and sorrow. Some of us find an outlet through talking

with those around us or to professionals such as counsellors. Others might prefer to keep our thoughts to ourselves.

We may suffer from frightening physical symptoms such as palpitations, nausea, insomnia, and very specific physical pain. We may need our doctor to reassure us that these are symptoms of grief or to check for other causes. Panic attacks are not uncommon in the families of murder victims, stemming from the understandable idea that the world is suddenly a crazy, hostile place where unthinkable things occur without warning or reason. Depression is also common, resulting in feelings of isolation and despair.

Although we were not responsible, we may still struggle with feelings of guilt. Unfounded feelings of guilt or regret are common in any bereavement, and parents in particular often struggle in this way. We wish to protect our child from harm, and the fact that they have died, even though we did not cause their death, can lead us to feel like we have failed. We may suspect that if only our child had not visited the park, gone out that evening, worked in that particular place, or been so 'free' in their use of the internet, they would still be alive. A good counsellor might help us find some resolution in this area.

## **Taking care of ourselves**

The trauma of our child's death could affect our health. We will need to make a special effort to have a good diet, some exercise, sufficient rest, and relaxation too. It is a good idea to try to get out in the fresh air; even a short walk can be helpful. We will probably want to use discretion with our social life, and not feel obliged to attend social events or entertain people if we are not comfortable around them at that time. Many of us have jobs and ongoing family responsibilities, which can be difficult, particularly if we are overwhelmed even by basic daily tasks. We might just need to take it all a day at a time and/or ask for help.

We all grieve differently, and our needs will also differ at various junctures in this difficult journey. Still, most of us will benefit from the help of others to make it through. (See earlier in this leaflet for ideas of where to obtain support.)

## Dealing with our feelings towards the person(s) responsible for our child's death

The investigation will run its course, outside of our control. If the police have sufficient evidence, they will arrest someone. That person will be brought to trial and may be found guilty. There is also the chance that the police may never obtain sufficient evidence to bring a conviction.

At first, the murderer's identity may be unknown, and we may react to this uncertainty in different ways. Some of us might be almost consumed by a desire to know, as if our rage and grief will possibly be eased when there is someone to blame and that person has been 'caught'. If we have a partner or close family members, they may react differently to ourselves. Not everyone wants to know 'who did it' or the details.

It is quite natural to feel hostility, anger, and even hatred for the person who killed our child. These feelings could also be directed at the police, the law, the justice system, other family members, or even against ourselves. If we are not able to find a way to deal with these intense negative or vengeful emotions, they can become damaging and may lead to psychological or physical problems. Any existing mental health problems that we have might intensify. Professional help and/or the support of others who have been through a similar tragedy might help us.

Some bereaved parents have described how actively working towards forgiveness has helped them move forward, whereas others feel that what has been done can never be forgiven. We can let our own personal moral or religious beliefs guide us in this. It is a difficult and complex path upon which we will travel in our own time and way.

## Unresolved murders

Some of us have to find a way of adapting to long-term uncertainty, perhaps never knowing what happened to our child, who killed them, or even whether they are alive or dead.

For the police, an unsolved murder file is never closed, and developments in forensic science hold out promises of charges being brought when old

cases are reviewed. However, we need to find a way of grieving which will make it possible to continue with the rest of our lives. Decisions will need to be made about the possibility of holding a memorial or thanksgiving service, even if our child's body has not been found. For some of us, this might feel like the abandonment of hope, but for others it is the right decision.

## Surviving children

When a murder occurs, normality ceases. If we have other children, it is not possible to protect them from this; they will be affected. The aim should be to tell younger children enough to satisfy their questions at the time, to reassure them of our love for them, to tell them that we understand their feelings of fear and that the police are trying hard to catch the person or people responsible.

While we will not want to burden them with terrible details, it is better that they hear the facts from us rather than in the playground or on social media. Parents do need to be honest, not to have secrets or pretend. Even very young children know when the adults they love are distraught and it is usually better to be open about our feelings. It is hard enough to be a child at such a time, without the added worry of thinking, 'What are they not telling me?' Hugs and tears, and being physically close, will allow a child to grieve and feel a part of the family, sharing in joint grief. Be aware that some children may try to 'protect' and 'parent' you and not share their grief.

Older siblings may find it almost impossible to share their thoughts and emotions with their parents. Keeping communications open is vital. It is important to help children find their own way of dealing both with their grief and also their concerns about us. Professional support may be helpful.

## Coping with other people's reactions

Our child's lifestyle, choices and the circumstances of their death can complicate our feelings. We may not have known about aspects of their lifestyle while they were alive, therefore discovering issues such as

substance abuse or other behaviour may come as a shock. Whether we were aware earlier or not, we may feel deep sadness or even anger at our child for their choices.

In addition to this, we may face stigma from others. It may appear that our child's death is not 'worthy' in the eyes of society, and our grief is not entitled to the same amount of respect or sympathy that is shown to others.

It is central in all of this to remember that our grief is valid, and that our child was the victim. Their death was caused by the action of another. No matter what went before, that is the central fact.

## Looking to the future

Any parent whose child has died struggles in some way to find a way forward. However, this struggle may be even harder for those bereaved in such a violent way. In addition, we may find that, even years later, the media refer back to our child's murder in other contexts. This can be very difficult to bear as it is likely to revive the devastating raw pain of our initial grief. Our thoughts and feelings about the person responsible for our child's death can also extend our trauma.

For many of us, finding our way forward involves **creating a focus for good memories dedicated to our child**. Directing our thoughts towards who they were and their life story can help ease the pain of how they died.

Some bereaved parents also get involved with **appropriate campaigns**, such as knife amnesties. These might give us a way of finding meaning in our life again and honouring our child's memory. On the other hand, the efforts we put into such projects can drain us of our energy and keep us in a place where we are still focusing on our child's death, rather than on the bigger picture of their life. If we do feel inclined to get involved in a campaign of some sort – and this might actually be suggested to us by the police or others – we should carefully weigh up the impact it could have on us. We should also take independent advice about doing anything publicly before the trial.

For quite some time, it may seem impossible to even imagine finding peace of mind again. We will struggle with questions of why our child died the way they did and be frustrated by the lack of answers. Yet the acute agony of our initial grief and the turmoil of the legal proceedings will eventually be in the past. The pain of grief will evolve, and over time we will find ourselves beginning to make adjustments and re-build our lives. There is no set timescale for how long this will take, and we each have to find our own survival strategies. We never stop loving our child, and very slowly our good memories will hopefully become a source of comfort and strength.

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## Suggestions for Further Reading

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) have published a range of leaflets to support parents in the aftermath of a child's death. The following titles could be relevant at this time:

- *The Grief of the Newly Bereaved*
- *The Sudden Death of our Child*
- *Preparing our Child's Funeral*
- *Coping with Judgemental Attitudes*
- *Remembering Our Child (Leaflet and Handbook)*
- *Our Adult Child's Friends and Partner*
- *Our Child's Digital Legacy*
- *Our Surviving Children*
- *Helping our Grandchildren When our Child has Died*

You can obtain any of our leaflets by calling the TCF Helpline or writing to the TCF office for printed copies (details are on the back page), or you may download them from this link: [www.tcf.org.uk/leaflets](http://www.tcf.org.uk/leaflets)

# 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](http://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**

UK Helpline:

**0345 123 2304**

Northern Ireland Helpline:

0288 77 88 016

**General Enquiries**

0345 120 3785

E: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

**TCF Library**

0345 120 3785

E: [library@tcf.org.uk](mailto:library@tcf.org.uk)

To find out more about TCF visit

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

Sponsored with love from 'Our Grieving Hearts'  
a Compassionate Friends Support Group  
in Brentwood, Essex in memory of all our children.

**Founder: The Revd Canon Dr Simon Stephens OBE**

**President: The Countess Mountbatten of Burma**