



The
Compassionate
Friends

My child has died. How do I cope?



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This leaflet is written by The Compassionate Friends. The members of our charity have all lost a child, or a brother or sister. We know how sad it is.

The death of a child is probably the worst thing that can happen to a parent. You may be feeling deep sadness and shock. We hope this leaflet will help you find ways to cope.

Getting help

Call our National Helpline

0345 123 2304

The helpline is open from 10am - 4pm and 7pm - 11pm every day.

Calls are always answered by a parent whose child has died.

Email our National Helpline

helpline@tcf.org.uk

For more information and support visit

tcf.org.uk

Find us on social media

 **@tcf.org.uk**

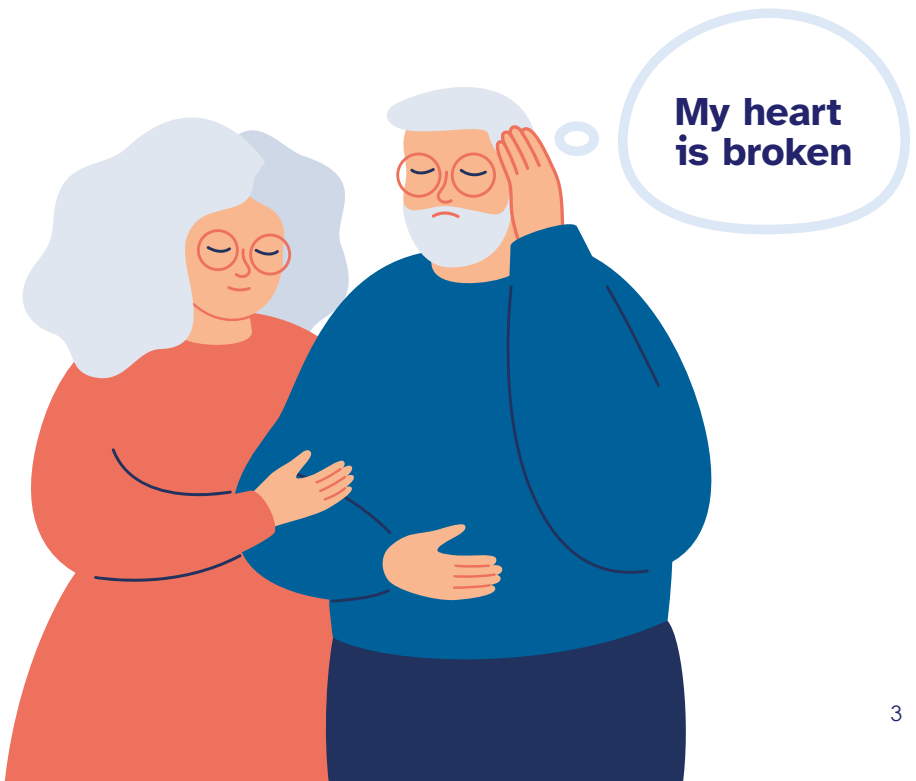
 **@TCFcharityUK**

 **@thecompassionatefriendsuk**

The first days and weeks

Straight after your child has died you will probably feel shocked and numb. What has happened might not seem real. You might not be able to concentrate. You may cry a lot. You will probably spend lots of time thinking about what happened when your child died. Nothing else seems important now. You may feel angry or confused. It can feel as if you are going mad, but it is very normal to feel like this.

Meeting people for the first time after the death of your child can be very hard. You might have to tell them what has happened. They often do not know how to react. This can make you feel very lonely in your grief.



**I can't
concentrate.
I keep forgetting
things.**

**I don't feel like
eating. I can't be
bothered.**

**I'm quite
moody.**

**I feel very sad.
My stomach hurts.**

**I cry a lot. It is
difficult to sleep and
sometimes I have
bad dreams.**

**I am
very
angry!**



I'm awake a lot of the night. I can't stop thinking about what happened.



I can't believe he has really died!

I have no feelings. It just does not seem real. I feel like I am acting in a film.

I feel like it's my fault she died.

**I can't cry
I feel numb.**

I'm just so tired. I have no energy at all.

Looking after yourself

Coping with grief is not easy.

Here are some things we have found helpful.



Be kind to yourself! This means doing the things that make your life a bit easier and that you enjoy.

Small meals or healthy snacks are a good idea if you don't have much appetite.

Ask friends or family for help if it is difficult to take care of other children or pets.



You might find it helps to keep busy. Some parents go back to work soon, but some take a longer break away. It is important to do what feels right to you. Give yourself the time you need.



Get some rest when you can, especially if you don't sleep well at night.

Avoid too much drink. Alcohol or drugs might feel like they are helping, but usually they make you feel worse in the end.

Going outside every day usually helps. Even a short walk or a few minutes in nature can help you feel better.



Some grieving parents want to be alone. Some like to be with friends. Remember, there is no rulebook for grieving. Do what feels right to you. You don't have to accept invitations to go out if you don't want to.

Coping with your grief

There is no wrong or right way to grieve. Here are some suggestions from bereaved parents. These ideas have helped them.

Talking

It is important to talk when you need to. Find ways to let out your feelings.

- Many bereaved parents find it helps to talk to other parents who have lost a child. They know how it feels. Everyone at The Compassionate Friends has lost a child or a sibling. We are here to listen to you. You can find our contact details on the back page.
- You could talk to friends or family, but be aware that some people might find it too difficult to support you at this time.
- You can talk to a counsellor. You can arrange this privately, through your doctor or through a charity.

In addition to The Compassionate Friends, here are some other charities that can help:

Cruse Bereavement Support

cruse.org.uk

Sue Ryder

sueryder.org

Sands

sands.org.uk

The Lullaby Trust

lullabytrust.org.uk

Bereaved parents tell us,

“This is what helped me cope with my grief.”

Perhaps there is something here that you would like to try.

Being creative

- painting and crafting
- writing poetry
- keeping a journal
- playing a musical instrument

Getting out and about

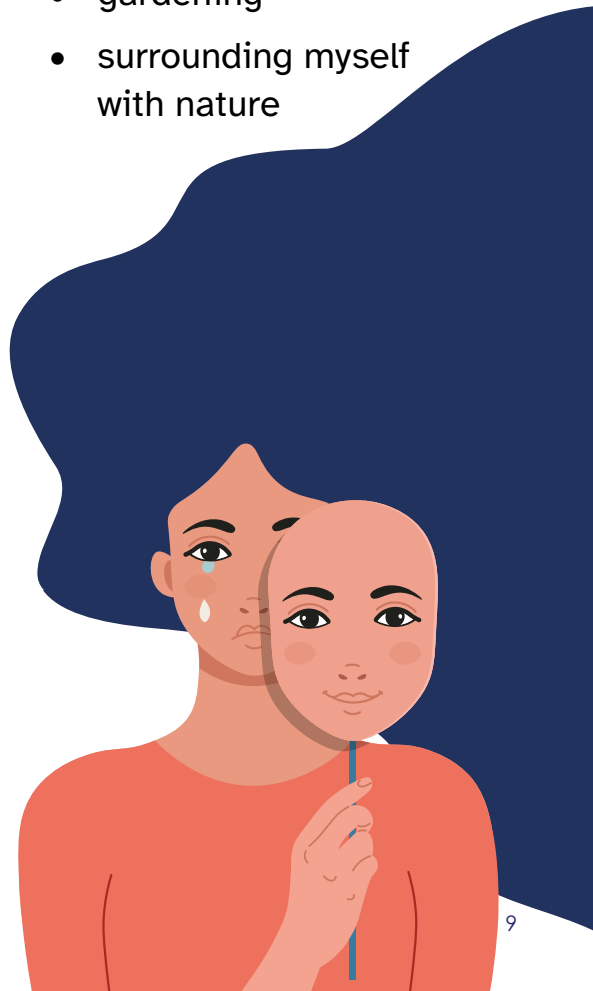
- joining a community group
- learning something new
- gardening
- surrounding myself with nature

Getting some exercise

- yoga
- walking
- vigorous exercise
- running
- weight lifting or boxing

Relaxing

- listening to music
- cooking
- meditating or praying
- watching television



Coping at home

Home can be a place of comfort and safety, but sometimes there are problems at home when people are grieving.

Tension and conflict

Your partner or other family members may be grieving in different ways. Sometimes this leads to hurt feelings. It is important to be patient and understanding with each other. Everyone needs space and time to grieve in their own way.



Loneliness

If your partner, family or friends do not understand how the death of your child is affecting you, you could feel very lonely. If you live alone, you may feel very isolated. You might feel even more alone if you have no other children. It can help to talk with other parents in similar situations. (See TCF contact details on the back page.)



Weight of responsibilities

You might struggle to take care of things at home, like housework, or you might want to spend time at home but have to go out to work.

If you have other children, they will be suffering too. It is important that they can cry and be sad when they need to. Caring for your children while you are grieving will not be easy.



These charities can offer help for children who are grieving

Child Bereavement UK
childbereavementuk.org

Winston's Wish - giving hope to grieving children
winstonswish.org

The Compassionate Friends runs support groups to help young adult siblings
tcf.org.uk/siblingonlinegroups

If your grief becomes unbearable

Some parents feel that they do not want to live any more when their child has died. If these feelings become very strong it is important to talk to someone right away.

Talk to your doctor if you cannot cope with your feelings. You can also contact the Samaritans at any time of the day or night.

Samaritans

Call free: **116 123**

Email: **jo@samaritans.org**



Remembering

Many parents find it comforting to find special ways to remember their child, although sometimes this is very painful. You will have to face anniversaries, birthdays and other important dates. It can help to plan how to spend your time.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to do with your children's belongings — their clothes and books, phone and devices, hobbies and toiletries, and all the things they valued in their lifetime. Try not to rush into making decisions. Later, you may have more ideas about what you would like to do with these things.



Bereaved parents tell us,

“This is how I like to remember my child”

**I listen to
his favourite
music.**

**I light
candles.**

**I've been
organising the
photos and made
a big collage.**

**I used some of
her clothes to make
a teddy bear.**

**I boxed up some of
my child's clothes
and gave them to a
homeless shelter.**

**I have a memory
box with special
items.**

**I visit
the
grave.**

**I've been making
a scrapbook of
memories.**

**I write letters
to my child.**

**I built a special
corner in my
garden.**

**I enjoy cooking
my child's
favourite meal.**

**I planted
a tree in
memory.**

**I scattered my son's
ashes on the beach.
Now I go for walks
there.**



As time goes on

Grief does not go in a straight line. There will be good days and bad days. Sometimes you will feel like your grief is getting worse. Other times you will cope okay. The sadness and pain never go away completely. Still, eventually the pain softens and is not so raw. This does not mean you are forgetting your child. You are learning to live your life with your precious memories safely in your heart.

It is possible to live a life with meaning after your child dies. Sometimes helping other people is a way of finding meaning.

**I've been
volunteering
at a foodbank.**

**I took
part in a
memorial
sports
event.**

**I visit elderly
people in my
neighbourhood
who live alone.**

**I took a
collection at work
for a charity.**

**I went on a charity
walk to raise money
for the hospice that
cared for my child.**

**I walk a
dog from
the local
shelter.**

You are not alone

Please do not feel like you are alone. We here at The Compassionate Friends have also suffered the death of a child or children. We know how difficult life can be now.

We all have different memories. We have happy memories, but some of us also have sad memories of our child's illness or how they died. What we have in common is that we all love our children, no matter what happened.

We will never forget our children. We carry them with us in our hearts for the rest of our lives. We love them forever.



Other leaflets

The Compassionate Friends has a website where you can find dozens of leaflets on different topics. Find them here: **tcf.org.uk/leaflets**

You can also call our office. We send out printed copies of the leaflets free of charge to bereaved parents.

Here are a few of the titles. There are many more.

- *Living with Grief*
- *A Mother's Grief*
- *A Father's Grief*
- *Remembering our Child Handbook*



Notes



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t @TCFcharityUK

ig @thecompassionatefriendsuk

**In memory of Emma Bender,
whose smile will live for ever.**

