HOW DO I DEAL WITH THE HOLIDAYS?
Submitted by Alissa K. Sandler, MSW, LCSW

I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history… C.S. Lewis

Holiday grief presents unique challenges. Those who experience the death of a loved one “feel” the loss every day. Holidays, however, may exacerbate the death of a loved one because of the expectations that accompany holidays. Spending time with family, maintaining traditions and recognizing milestones are common holiday expectations.

There are many holidays or special days, such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and weddings, to name a few, that are difficult to manage when a loved one has died. But for many, as the days grow “shorter and darker” anxiety and sadness begin to build knowing the traditional Fall & Winter holidays are fast approaching. Significant for family gatherings and long held traditions it’s suddenly a season that may be bleak and overwhelming. It is a time when a grieving person becomes acutely aware of the void in his/her life. Listed below are some ideas and suggestions that others have found helpful in coping with the Holiday Season.

Mourner’s Suggestions for Things to Try

1. Take control. Focus on what you can control and less on what is “out of your hands.”
2. Plan Ahead. Don’t allow the holidays to just happen. Also, try to use a Plan A/Plan B approach to the holidays. Plan A might involve spending Christmas or Hanukkah with relatives; Plan B might mean having a simple dinner and watching a movie at home. Having a Plan B can be comforting even if you don’t use it.
3. Consider Changing Your Routine. If you always prepared the family meal, you may want to consider having dinner with relatives or friends. Or you may want to leave town altogether, heading for a cabin in the woods or an excursion to the mountains or the shore.
4. Take Charge of Your Social Life. Although you may not feel like getting together with anyone, consider accepting a few invitations to be with close family or friends.
5. Scale Back. Because grief robs us of our emotional and physical energy, consider cutting back on such holiday tasks as sending cards, baking, decorating, or putting up a tree. Some of these activities may be painful to execute in light of the loss.
6. Be Gentle With Yourself. Accept that feelings of anguish are difficult to avoid during the holiday season. Do not expect too much of yourself, and recognize that you are doing the best you can.
7. Have an Exit Strategy. In many cases, it is difficult for mourners to be around a lot of people. If they do go to a social gathering, they may not want to stay very long.
8. Honor Your Loved One’s Memory. Some people have maintained that coming up with ways to do these can bring a positive focus to our grief. There are many ways to remember the person who died: share your favorite stories about him; light a candle in remembrance; make a donation in her name.

9. Find People Who Will Provide Support. When people are already experiencing the great stress of grief, the additional strains of the holiday season can create distress that is almost unbearable. Thus it is important to identify those relatives and friends whom you feel are good listeners, and share your feelings with them. It may also help to recruit support for specific tasks that are particularly difficult.

10. Consider Attending a Support Group. At this time of year, it can be particularly useful to interact with people who have experienced a loss that is similar to yours.

(Adapted from article by Camille Wortman, PhD)

There are many memorials, programs and events that may be comforting especially when it’s the first “holiday” without a loved one. An example of a universal memorial is “The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting.

**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING**

**DECEMBER 14, 2014 AT 7:00 PM**

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide candle lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the 18th annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. TCF's WWCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance, but has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

The Compassionate Friends and allied organizations are joined by local bereavement groups, churches, funeral homes, hospitals, hospices, children's gardens, schools, cemeteries, and community centers. Services have ranged in size from just a few people to nearly a thousand.

Every year you are invited to post a message in the Remembrance Book which will be available, during the event, at TCF's national website, [http://www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
GRIEF
By Gwen Flowers

I had my own notion of grief.
I thought it was the sad time
That followed the death of someone you love,
And you had to push through it
To get to the other side,
But I’m learning that there is no other side.
There is no pushing through.
But rather,
There is absorption,
Adjustment,
Acceptance,
And grief is not something you complete,
But rather, you endure.
Grief is not a task to finish
And move on,
But an element of yourself-
An alteration of your being,
A new way of seeing,
A new definition of self.

TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH GRIEF

1. Whatever you are feeling, it is normal. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
2. Your body requires food and fluid even if you do not want it. It is important to eat small nutritious snacks and meals at regular times and drink plenty of fluids.
3. Sleeping is often difficult. If you cannot sleep, it is important to rest throughout the day. However, try to maintain normal sleep patterns by sleeping longest at night.
4. Your energy level will probably be low. Give yourself permission to rest when you need it.
5. Seek out supportive family and friends who will listen to you talk about your loved one.
6. Be patient with yourself. It is o.k. to say no to things that are overwhelming. When you are stronger, then you can say yes.
7. You will not forget your loved one. He/she will always be part of your life. Choose personal ways to memorialize him/her.
8. Keep a journal. Write as often needed.
9. If you feel that you cannot cope on your own, consider a professional counselor who can give you support and insight.
10. Get support from other bereaved parents through local or online support groups.

(Adapted from SCNJ Parent Handbook, 2014)
ACTIVE COPING: HELPFUL ACTIVITIES

- Journaling
- Scrapbooking
- Exercise
- Make a book about your loved one
- Go back to work
- Create a memorial website
- Speak to others about your loved one
- Start new rituals in your loved ones honor
- Write yourself a letter and open it a year later
- Give a gift in memory of your loved one each year on a special day or holiday
- Write a blog
- Create a photo collage
- Spend time with friends
- Gardening
- Read
- Attend grief support groups
- See a counselor
- Listen to songs/music that your loved one liked
- Plant a tree or donate a bench at a park
- Have a favorite photo of your child made into a painting

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

No words can describe the grief that accompanies the loss of one’s infant or child. The feelings are perhaps best understood by those who have felt them too. Because such understanding comes from personal experience, one of the major missions of the SIDS Center of New Jersey is to bring families together, in peer support groups, in on-line conversations, in memorial services, in one-to-one calls, in family social events, and in memorial services. How can I survive? How can I go on? These are questions asked by every parent and grandparent. Every person finds answers, but the road to reach them is not an empty one. It is filled with families who are finding their way and who want to help those just starting out.

This issue of the newsletter describes some of the supportive services and resources available through the SIDS Center of New Jersey. We also mention two recent Runs that were conducted by or on behalf of families whose own journey has taken them to the point of wanting to increase resources for research and education. Everyone’s ultimate goal is to see an end to infants and children dying suddenly and unexpectedly. Until that goal is reached, we must be sure that families are not isolated from each other and the support that sharing brings.

Respectfully,

Barbara M. Ostfeld, PhD

MATTHEW ANGELO SCARPA REMEMBERED THROUGH A WALK

On September 27th, the MAS Foundation, in memory of Matthew Angelo Scarpa, conducted a 3rd Birthday Walk Fundraiser in Lincoln Park in Jersey City, NJ. The event supports and promotes risk reduction education. It was attended by many community families and students.

https://www.themasfoundation.org

SID S Center of New Jersey Toll Free Hotline 800-545-7437
IN OUR HEARTS

SIDS Family Services is updating the “in our hearts” remembrance wall to a digital picture frame. The digital picture frame will be taken to events such as memorials, conferences and health & safety fairs in an effort to educate the community about SIDS. Mail photos to The SIDC Center of NJ The Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital, Hackensack University Medical Center, WFAN – 3, 30 Prospect Avenue, Hackensack, New Jersey 07601, or email your picture to lmarain@hackensackumc.org. Please include with your photograph the name of your baby, date of birth and death, and if you give us permission to use the picture at the Annual Memorial, and educational events.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS! If you or your family is interested in volunteering for any SIDS Family Services Upcoming Event or would like to be involved in the planning or organizing process, please contact the SIDS Center at 1-800-545-7437 for more details or at lmarain@hackensackumc.org.

PARENT ADVISORY EMAIL GROUP –If you are interested in becoming more involved in the SCNJ please email Lisa Capizzi Marain, MSW, LCSW at lmarain@hackensackumc.org. SCNJ is very involved in education, training and support throughout our state. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to become involved in volunteering, event planning, program planning, and training development within the SCNJ. We would love your input, support and for you to share your expertise and talents. Discussions take place over email, which is very convenient. Please join us at SCNJ, and let’s make a difference together…one baby at a time!

GOING GREEN

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, please send your email address to SCNJ@rwjms.rutgers.edu. In addition to receiving the newsletter, email notifications will be mailed announcing events and memorial celebrations or other SIDS Center activities.

GRIEF RESOURCES

Good Grief is a program helping children and teens cope with loss. http://www.good-grief.org


National Grandparent Support Resource Originally started as AGAST.org, a SIDS grandparent support group, this non-profit organization is now dedicated to assisting all grandparents when a grandchild dies. Now AGAST has merged with MISS Foundation. Support is offered by an informational packet that helps grandparents through their grieving and gives information on how to help their children (the parents). Peer contacts are available, as well as support groups. Http://grandbrigade.org/
The first peer contact training using Skype was conducted on September 9, 2014. It was a success according to the feedback provided by the four parents who were trained. Lisa Demarco participated in the training and stated that “the training was great…so informative and loved doing it with other SIDS parents. Using Skype was a perfect way to do this.” Never used Skype? No problem, SIDS Center Clinicians will help you set up your Skype.

At the SCNJ we understand that you may be grieving in isolation. Sometimes family, friends, and the community do not truly understand the grief journey. Our peer support program is a way to connect with a person who has shared in similar experiences, and understands how it feels to lose a child. Family members who have experienced and coped with their own grief can be a vital source of support while you are grieving. Sometimes, they are even more meaningful than those around you. Please consider volunteering for this program if your child has died over a year ago. We need family members to continue the tradition in this program. If you are interested in volunteering to be a peer contact or would like more information please contact Lisa Capizzi Marain, MSW, LCSW at 551-996-5226 or lmarain@hackensackumc.org.

TOGETHER WE’LL WALK THE STEPPING STONES

Come, take my hand, the road is long.
We must travel by stepping stones.
NO, you’re not alone, I’ll go with you,
I know the road well, I’ve been there.
Don’t fear the darkness, I’ll be there with you.
We must take one step at a time.
But remember we may have to stop awhile.
It is a long way to the other side
And there may be obstacles.

We have many stones to cross, some are bigger than others.
Shocks, denial and anger to start.
Then comes guilt, despair and loneliness.
It’s a hard road to travel, but it must be done.
It’s the only way to reach the other side.

Come, slip your hand in mine.
What? Oh, yes, it’s strong. I’ve held so many hands like yours,
Yes, mine was once time small and weak like yours.
Once, you see, I had to take someone’s hand in order to take
the first step.
Oops! You’ve stumbled; go ahead and cry.
Don’t be ashamed; I understand.
Let’s wait here awhile and get your breath.
When you’re stronger we’ll go on, one step at a time

There’s no need to hurry.
Say, it’s nice to hear you laugh. Yes, I agree,
The memories you share are good.
Look, we’re halfway there now; I can see the other side.
It looks so warm and sunny.
Oh, have you noticed, we’re nearing the last stone and
you’re standing
Alone?
We’ve reached the other side.

But wait, look back, someone is standing there.
They are alone and want to cross the stepping stones.
I’d better go, they need my help.
What? Are you sure?
Why, yes, go ahead, I’ll wait, you know the way,
you’ve been there.
Yes, I agree, it’s your turn, my friend-
To help someone else cross the stepping stones.

Barb Williams, The Compassionate Friends, Ft. Wayne
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SAVE THE DATE
WINTER WISHES, THE WINTER MEMORIAL
DECEMBER 7, 2014

SCNJ’s annual memorial will be held at Rutgers University, Busch Campus in Piscataway, NJ. Our custom includes a short nondenominational service with music, reading of poems and candle lighting followed by a luncheon. We invite you to bring expressions of love (poems, songs, and readings) that you might want to share with others.

For more information contact the SIDS Center at 1-551-996-3219 or Email Lisa Capizzi Marain at lmarain@hackensackumc.org.

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN ONE OF OUR BEREAVEMENT GROUP MEETINGS

The purpose of a parent support group is to offer understanding, suggestions for coping, support, decrease in isolation, friendship, and most of all hope. It’s a chance to talk about the events of your child’s life and death, feelings related to the grieving process, reactions of others and concerns about subsequent or surviving siblings. Please consider attending one of the following or joining one on-line.

“Sorrow shared is halved and Joy shared is doubled” Native American Proverb

First Thursday of the Month:
Pregnancy and Newborn Loss Support Group,
Facilitator: Alissa Sandler, MSW, LCSW For information call: (551) 996-5131
The Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital; Hackensack University Medical Center,
30 Prospect Avenue, Hackensack, NJ. Meditation Room, 1st Floor, 7- 8:30 P.M.

Third Tuesday of the Month:
SIDS/Infant Loss Support Group, (English)
Facilitator: Anna Irizarry-Wood, MSW, LCSW, for more information call (551) 996-3219

Fourth Tuesday of the Month:
SIDS/Infant Loss Support Group, (Spanish)
Facilitator: Anna Irizarry-Wood, MSW, LCSW, for more information call (551) 996-3219

SIDS/Infant Loss Support Group
Facilitator: Linda Esposito, Ph.D., MPH, APRN-BC, Newark, NJ for more information call (800) 545-7437

OTHER SUPPORT GROUPS IN THE STATE

Third Thursday of the Month:
The SUDC Program’s Monthly Support Group (for families of children who were older than one year of age). Held in North Jersey. For Information Call: 800-620-SUDC or go online at to www.sudc.org

SIDS Center of New Jersey Toll Free Hotline 800-545-7437
SUMMERTIME SHARING EVENT

The SIDS Center of New Jersey and SIDS Family Services held a Summertime Sharing event on July 28, 2014 at Jenkinson’s Boardwalk, Point Pleasant NJ. The focus of the day was to support and connect families to each other and provide a program to learn relaxation techniques through gentle stretching, sitting or standing.

Families enjoyed the day of yoga on the beach, complementary lunch, ride tickets and mini golf passes.

COMMENTS FROM FAMILIES

Families were asked to complete an evaluation for the Summertime Sharing event and this is what they told us:

What I appreciated most was:

“Listening to other families’ stories and spending time with my family.”

“All the amenities, thanks for providing them.”

“The opportunity to come together with other families that have experienced SIDS”

“Staff and social workers very loving, caring and compassionate.”

“Warmth” “The beach and how everyone is polite.” “NJ SIDS staff was helpful and amazing.”

“That there was so many activities packed into one day. Great family day.” “Other families and rides.”

“Luncheon together and hospitality of all.” “Meeting staff members and other family members dealing with SIDS.”

QUILTING

Recently, several families have asked how they can contribute to the creation of another quilt, commemorating their infant or child’s memory. Please email or call lmarain@hackensackumc.org and request a quilt square to be mailed to you. Decorate the quilt square and return it to:

The SIDS Center of New Jersey

c/o Lisa Capizzi Marain, MSW, LCSW
The SIDS Center of New Jersey
Hackensack University Medical Center
WFAN- 3
30 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601

Phone: 551-996-5226 or 551-996-3219.
The SIDS Center of New Jersey is a program of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, a part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ and the Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center, Hackensack, NJ. The program is funded in part by a grant from the New Jersey State Department of Health to Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, a part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and a grant from the CJ Foundation for SIDS to the Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center.
STRIDES FOR BABIES NJ 5K RUN & FAMILY FUN WALK:

An enthusiastic and inspired group of more than two-hundred families, friends and community members joined together on October 12, 2014 for Strides for Babies NJ 5K Run/Walk at Thompson Park in Lincroft, NJ to celebrate the lives of babies and young children who tragically died suddenly and unexpectedly. The event, organized by Sheryl Blank and assisted by SIDS/SUID parents, is supported by the SIDS Center of New Jersey through education and volunteerism. Thank you Sheryl! Proceeds benefit the CJ Foundation for SIDS (www.cjsids.org).

SIDS Center of New Jersey Toll Free Hotline 800-545-7437