



## Suggestions for preparing a one-day conference for mothers who have lost a child.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”*

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

If God has placed this on your heart to reach out to hurting moms, we want to encourage and help you as best we can. Please know you will be covered in prayer. The information that is provided in this handbook has been used many times over. In saying that, each area and group are different so know these are just suggestions and the Lord might have a different plan for your event.

- 1) Our first suggestion is that you bring together a group of mothers who have also experienced the loss of a child. As we each know it is hard to understand the emotions of this journey unless you have traveled it yourself. Share how the Lord has placed the desire in your heart to have a one-day conference reaching out to other hurting mothers. You can also share with them all the things that need to be done to make the conference possible and ask them if there is an area, they feel they would like to help with. It is such a blessing when God brings mothers together with different gifts that He can use to accomplish his work.

It is especially important to create a conference committee to help you with the planning as it is too difficult to plan a conference by yourself. (You may also use volunteers who have not lost a child. They are good support for financial issues, prayer, and helping behind the scenes to free up the moms at the conference to help those who are hurting).

- 2) Begin with a date and venue. When you look for a venue have a goal set for the number of attendees you anticipate.
- 3) What does the venue need? The venue needs to accommodate the number of ladies you anticipate will attend. You will need a main room where all the meals and main speakers will be. You will also need rooms or space for your breakout workshop sessions and a place for your Circle of Love groups to meet. (Circle of

Love is where moms come together to share their loss.) You might want to choose a hotel that could accommodate anyone that might need to stay if traveling more than two hours away.

- 4) Depending on the time you choose for a one day conference you will probably want to provide a breakfast (continental) and a lunch. A good time for a one-day conference is 8:am-4:pm
- 5) Decide on a bible verse and theme, and colors for your event.
- 6) Have someone MC the event – prayer, welcome, introductions.
- 7) Music is always healing although it can also bring tears. It is a good way to start the event and maybe to end the day before the balloon release. Pick your music carefully. If you end with music, make sure it is uplifting.
- 8) Have greeters to welcome the moms and people to escort them to the tables.
- 9) Have three tables set up when the moms first arrive.

Table 1- is for registration and to pick up their welcome bags and name tags. We suggest two moms depending on the size of your event. If they have not registered, we do not turn anyone away. Have extra bags and we suggest you have a printer and copier at the table so you can print them on the spot. This is important so that no one's name tag is different from another. As we know emotions are high and it does not take much to get emotions brought to the surface.

Table 2- Photo memory board. This is a place where moms can display pictures of their child. (In the registration form, send out a reminder for them to make copies of pictures, with their name and address on the back. This is in case pictures get left we can mail them back).

Table 3- Button making machine to make a button with their child's picture. They will also need a picture for the button making (about 4 by 4 inches) Button makers and supplies can be purchased. Have two ladies work the button table and practice before hand. Pictures are precious and these buttons become unbelievably valuable to these moms.

Table 4- You can also have a table set up with resources for the moms. Books that can be purchased are always helpful and any other resources that can be of help on this journey. (If you decide to have a book table for your speakers or workshop leaders, we suggest you have them run the table themselves).

- 10) Decide on how many workshops and what the workshop topics will be. The number of workshops depends on the number of attendees. More moms, more workshops. We suggest you keep the breakout sessions to an hour.

- 11) Select your main speaker (someone who has lost a child).
- 12) Divide Circle of Love Groups- Circle of Love groups are when moms sit with other moms and share their stories and struggles. You can divide them up either by age of the child or cause of death. We suggest you keep them to about 6-8 moms so all can share.

If time allows have two Circle of Love meetings one in the morning and one in the afternoon. This is such an important part of the conference. This is where the moms share their stories and get to know each other. It is a blessed time of bonding their hurting hearts.

When you have the moms register ask them the cause of death because they will be with other moms who have experienced loss in a similar way.

Such as:

- a) Infant loss, miscarriage, stillborn
- b) Sudden death (depending on how many moms attend you can get more specific)
- c) Suicide
- d) Murder
- e) Accident (separate from sudden death because there is often a trial or blame)
- f) Drug overdose
- g) Multiple losses (lost more than one child)
- h) Loss of all their children

A candlelight service is another way to have the moms remember their child. Each area has their own restrictions on fire codes. Check with the facility where you are holding your event to find out what their restrictions are. It is always nice to open and close this service with music. Try and end your candlelight service with an uplifting song as this can be a very emotional time. We have included the poem "Say the name of my child." This is a beautiful poem and a great way to have the moms come up and say the name of their child. Always have someone holding the microphone and another person standing by to hug each mom as they say their child's name. This can be an extremely hard thing for many moms especially those who are so new to their loss.

It is always a blessing to have a balloon release if there are no city restrictions. If you decide to do a release you will have to rent a helium tank. Most party suppliers have them. We suggest you have a couple of volunteers behind the scenes to blow them up and tie ribbons. You will need to have several felt tip markers for them to write a message to their child on their balloon.

Have someone who would be willing to take pictures throughout the day. You can make a slide show or book to present at the conference you do the following year. The balloon launch is always a great time to take a group picture before they release the balloons.

Try to end the day with an uplifting message and speaker. It is important to send them home with HOPE!

### **The costs ...**

You will have to decide what the day conference will cost. Some of the people on your committee might feel led to help donate either money or supplies. You will need to factor all the uncovered costs in what you decide to charge for the conference. Here is a list of items you will need to consider.

- 1) The cost of the venue
- 2) The cost of the meals you will be serving
- 3) If you choose to pay for a speaker and music
- 4) Cost for the items in the gift bag
- 5) If you want to do a craft, the cost of the supplies
- 6) Candle lighting service
- 7) Balloon release (helium)
- 8) Advertising
- 9) Button maker and supplies
- 10) Table gifts

### **Suggestions for gift bags ...**

- 1) Small Package of tissue with your bible verse on it
- 2) Bottle of water with cover label
- 3) 5x7 pad of paper with cover label to take notes
- 4) Pens
- 5) Herbal Tea bag- Chamomile tea or peppermint
- 6) Chocolates, Mints, Lifesavers
- 7) Book Marker designed with your theme

### **Comment Cards ...**

Asking participants to provide you with feedback is valuable for planning future conferences.

- 1) How did you hear about Umbrella Ministries?
- 2) What things ministered to your heart?
- 3) What are some of the things that impressed you during the conference?
- 4) What are you taking home from this conference that is going to make a difference?
- 5) In the workshops you attended, what were some of the things that were helpful to you?
- 6) Do you have any suggestions on how we can improve future conferences?

## Ice Breaker Game ...

It is always nice to start at lunch with an ice breaker. We have included this as an idea but let your imagination go to work. Place a gift in the middle of each table. You can ask each lady on your team to purchase a small gift and **wrap them**.

## PASS THE GIFT GAME

Take this gift and without a sigh look around

And give it to the person with eyes of brown

You are the lucky one for a moment but let us all share in the fun!

Let us see who can be the first to find a stick of gum.

Please look around with eyes discreet and give it to the one with the biggest feet

Your feet are tiny and very small, now hand it to someone very tall

Please take your time and do not be harried. Give it to the one who is longest married.

You must be proud of your life, now please pass this to the newest wife.

Of this parcel you are bereft, give it to the one on your left.

The largest earrings I am looking for now, if you are wearing them, step up and bow.

Now to the person with buttons... big or small,  
any kind, the most you can find gets the gift this time.

Now don't get cross and please don't fight but pass it to the person third on the right.

We should stop now, don't you agree? This gift is yours to keep with glee!!!

## **Ideas for Workshops ...**

Art Therapy

New in the journey of grief

Strengthen your marriage

Journaling

Helping siblings in their grief

Nutritional wholeness to feed the body and soul.

Coping with the aftermath of suicide

Creative memories, scrapbooking

The different stages of grief

Tools to help on your journey of grief

Forgiveness

Boundaries

Grief vs Depression

Tear Soup (video) and discussion

Reaching out to others

Living my child's legacy

## Circle of Love ...

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR CIRCLE OF LOVE FACILITATORS

- 1 Let your prayer open the session. This is just a sample of a prayer but let the Lord lead you.

Start with Prayer. Emphasize the focus of each group meeting so that the mothers will be preparing their hearts and minds for what will follow.

*Dear Lord, Quiet my heart and soul. Give me the courage to share the death and life of my child. If tears should fall, let me welcome them as a sign of the love I have for my child. Give me ears to hear what others are sharing and identify the elements we have in common. As we open our hearts to each other Lord, please bless the bonds that are created.*

- 2 Be sure everyone has a chance to talk. Establish ground rules early. Everyone needs the opportunity to share. If you have a "real" talker in your group, without being too obvious, instruct the group as a whole that everyone has a story to tell. If that person continues to monopolize the conversation, try calling on someone in the group you know to respond to a special question you have posed. Then return to the topic you were discussing before without calling on the "talker."

- 3 Always use open-ended questions, especially as you are asking your mothers to clarify something they have said. Examples are:

- a. Does anyone else have any thoughts on that? What do the rest of you think?
- b. What feelings did that statement stir in you?
- c. Has anyone else had a similar experience?
- d. What questions does that raise for you?

- 4 Always remember, as a facilitator, you are encouraging the discussion. This is not the time for you to share unless you feel that your input would encourage them to talk more.

**God bless you for leading these groups.**

Following are three different suggestions to help get the conversation started for the Circle of Love groups. If you only use one, we suggest you use the Introduction as the beginning of each Circle of Love.

# Circle of Love Session #1

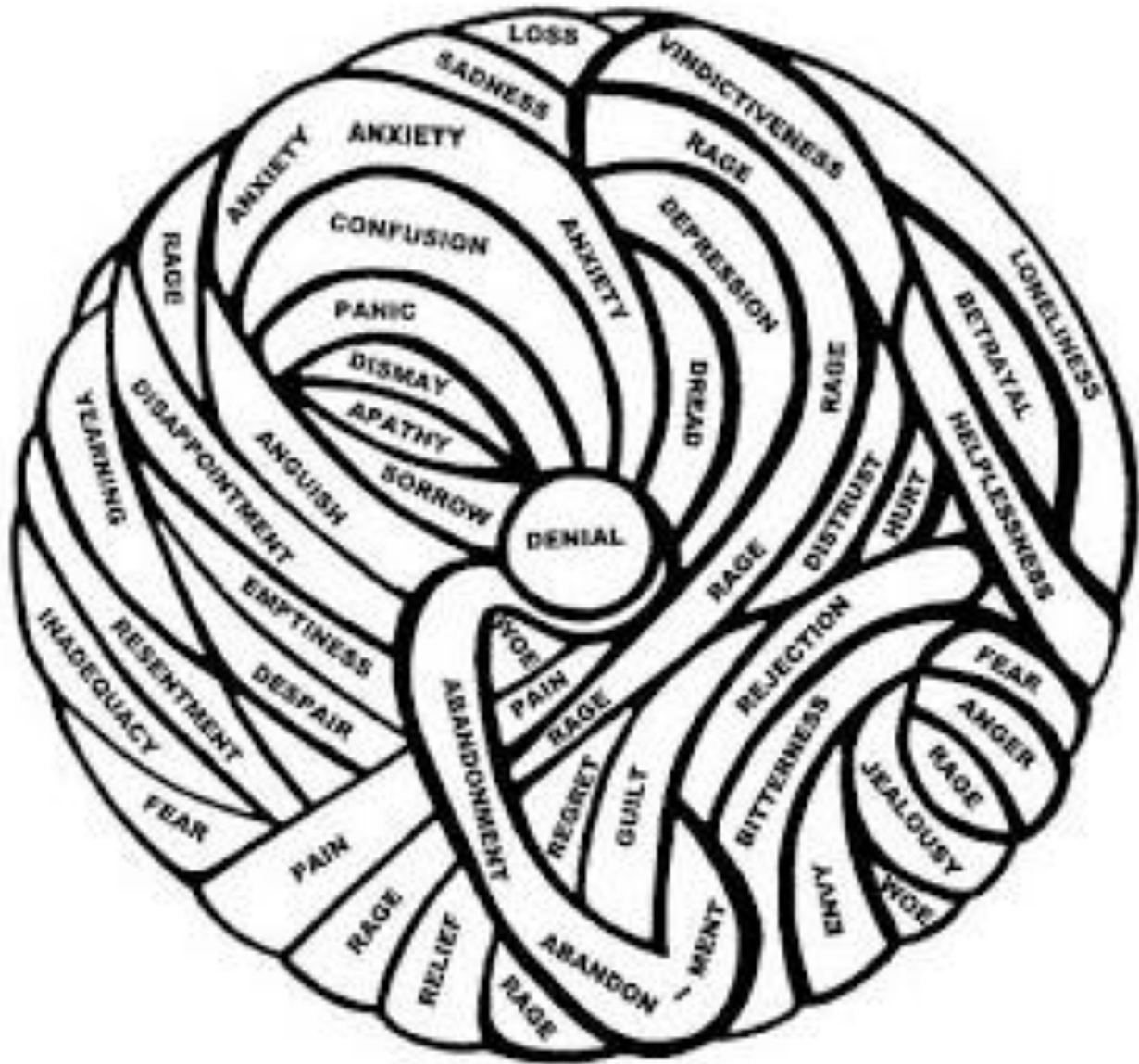
## Getting to know you – Walking in our shoes

- 1) Start with prayer: Emphasize focus of each session so that the mothers can prepare their hearts and minds for what will follow ...
- 2) Introduction: Pass out 3x5 index cards and pens. Ask the moms to group together in two's ... preferable with someone they don't know. Allow 5 minutes to interview each other to write the other mom's name, child's name and date of birth, age at loss, cause of death, how long has it been, and any basic information they wish to share.
- 3) They will now introduce each other. "This is my new friend \_\_\_\_\_ who is \_\_\_\_\_'s mother" and then the details. This saves the emotional toil of introducing themselves.
- 4) In your introduction explain that unless others have experienced the loss of a child, it is hard to understand the depth of the ongoing pain. They may try to rush our grief or discourage talking about our child.
- 5) Hand out colored paper and have the women trace the form of their shoe on the sheet of paper. Allow a few minutes for them to write inside the shoe words that reflect their responses to "If you were to walk in my shoes." (Ball of emotion graph is included to help them pinpoint their feelings). Take turns sharing.
- 6) If there is extra time, you can also use:
  - What has been the most difficult block in your healing journey?
  - How have others helped you?
  - Do you have a sweet story about your child to share?



# GRIEF

## A TANGLED BALL OF EMOTIONS



# Circle of Love Session #2

## Getting to know each other's Child/Children

- 1) Start with prayer.
- 2) Introduction: Go around the group ... Leader start to give an example: I'm \_\_\_\_\_'s mother and my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Thank them for their continuing courage in sharing.
- 3) Psalm 139:13 tells us "You knit me together in my mother's womb" ... We know our child ... they are a part of us, who we are. There is a huge depth in being a part of us ... You knew your child from the beginning, in the womb, in the nurturing and growing, in adoption, in teaching, loving, growing. They were your very special child. With their loss, we also grieve an immense part of who we are and the future hope of their life.
- 4) Pass out the list of adjectives to each one.
- 5) Allow a few minutes for them to circle 3-4 adjectives that fit their child. They can also add their own adjectives.
- 6) Each can share how the ones they circled fit their child's personality. As each shares, have them pass around their child's picture (on their button) for us to see while they tell about their child. Returning it to the mom when done passing. The leader can begin, if needed to set the pattern.
- 7) Extra time you can also use:
  - Describe the progress you are making in your healing journey.
  - Describe changes in your relationship with God.
  - Close in prayer, emphasizing healing.

## PERSONALITY TRAITS

|               |              |               |                  |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Adaptable     | diligent     | impartial     | quiet            |
| adventurous   | diplomatic   | independent   | rational         |
| affable       | discreet     | intellectual  | reliable         |
| affectionate  | dynamic      | intelligent   | reserved         |
| agreeable     | easygoing    | intuitive     | resourceful      |
| ambitious     | emotional    | inventive     | romantic         |
| amiable       | energetic    | kind          | self-confident   |
| amicable      | enthusiastic | loving        | self-disciplined |
| amusing       | exuberant    | loyal         | sensible         |
| brave         | fair-minded  | modest        | sensitive        |
| bright        | faithful     | neat          | shy              |
| broad-minded  | fearless     | nice          | sincere          |
| calm          | forceful     | optimistic    | sociable         |
| careful       | frank        | passionate    | straightforward  |
| charming      | friendly     | patient       | sympathetic      |
| communicative | funny        | persistent    | thoughtful       |
| compassionate | generous     | pioneering    | tidy             |
| conscientious | gentle       | philosophical | tough            |
| considerate   | good         | placid        | unassuming       |
| convivial     | gregarious   | plucky        | understanding    |
| courageous    | hard-working | polite        | versatile        |
| courteous     | helpful      | powerful      | warmhearted      |
| creative      | honest       | practical     | willing          |
| decisive      | humorous     | pro-active    | witty            |
| determined    | imaginative  | quick-witted  |                  |

# Circle of Love Session #3

## Honoring your Child's life

- 1) Start with prayer
- 2) Introduction: Leader starts by example ... "I'm \_\_\_\_\_'s mother and my name is \_\_\_\_\_". Thank them for the encouragement they have been for each other. 1 John 4:19 tells us "We love because He first loved us". Love is learned ... we as mothers taught love and also learned an exceptionally deep love because of our child's existence. Their life, however brief or long, did make a difference and impact.
- 3) Read the poem "The Dash" by Linda Ellis
- 4) Use any or all of these in group discussion:
  - Did you hear any stories or thoughts from others after your child's death that you did not know?
  - How was your life impacted because of your child?
  - What good things would your child want you to remember about them?
  - In what ways do you wish to honor or remember your child?
- 5) Close in prayer, emphasizing hope: How our child would want to be remembered.

# The Dash

I read of a man who stood to speak  
At the funeral of a friend

He referred to the dates on her tombstone  
From the beginning to the end

He noted that first came her date of her birth  
And spoke the following date with tears,

But he said what mattered most of all  
Was the dash between those years

For that dash represents all the time  
That she spent alive on earth.

And now only those who loved her  
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not how much we own;  
The cars, the house, the cash,

What matters is how we live and love  
And how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard.  
Are there things you'd like to change?

For you never know how much time is left,  
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough  
To consider what's true and real

And always try to understand  
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,  
And show appreciation more

And love the people in our lives  
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,  
And more often wear a smile

Remembering that this special dash  
Might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read  
With your life's actions to rehash

Would you be proud of the things they say  
About how you spent your dash?

by Linda Ellis

## **Just For Today**

Just for today I will try to live through the next 24 hours and not expect to get over my child's death, but instead learn to live with it, just one day at a time.

Just for today I will remember my child's life, not just the death, and bask in the comfort of all those treasured days and moments we shared.

Just for today I will forgive all the family and friends who didn't help or comfort me the way I needed them to. They truly did not know how.

Just for today I will smile no matter how much I hurt on the inside, for maybe if I smile a little, my heart will soften, and I will begin to heal.

Just for today I will reach out to comfort a relative or friend of my child, for they are hurting too, and perhaps we can help each other.

Just for today I will free myself from my self-inflicted burden of guilt, for deep in my heart I know if there was anything in this world, I could have done to save my child from death, I would of done it.

Just for today I will honor my child's memory by doing something with another child because I know that would make my own child proud.

Just for today I will offer my hand in friendship to another bereaved parent for I do know how they feel.

Just for today when my heart feels like breaking, I will stop and remember that grief is the price we pay for loving and the only reason I hurt is because I had the privilege of loving so much.

Just for today I will not compare myself with others. I am fortunate to be who I am and have had my child for as long as I did.

Just for today I will allow myself to be happy, for I know that I am not deserting my child by living on.

Just for today I will accept that I did not die when my child did, my life did go on, and I am the only one who can make that life worthwhile once more.

*by Vicki Tushingham*

## Please Say Our Children's Names

*The mention of my child's name may bring tears to my eyes, but it never fails to bring music to my ears. If you are really my friend, let me hear the music of my child's name! It soothes my broken heart and sings to my soul!*



Never are the names of our children mentioned. A curtain descends. The moment has passed. A life slips from frequent recall. There are exceptions: close and compassionate friends, sensitive and loving family. For most, the drama is over. The spotlight is off. Applause is silent. But for me the play will never end. The effects on me are timeless. Say the name of my child to me. On the stage of my life my child has been both lead and supporting actor. Do not tiptoe around the greatest event of my life. Love does not die. My child's name is written on my life. The sound of the voice replays within my mind. You say he was my child. I say "is". Say the name to me and say it again. It hurts to bury the memory in silence. What is in spirit stirs within me always? My child is of my past but is part of my now. My hope for the future. You say not to remind me. How little you understand I cannot forget. I would not if I could. I understand you, but feel pain in being forced to do so. I forgive you, because you cannot know. And I would forgive you anyway. I accept how you see me, but understand that you see me not at all. I strive not to judge you, for yesterday I was like you. I love you; will make no expectations toward you. But I wish you could understand that I dwell both in flesh and spirit. The mystery is that you do too, but know it not. I do not ask you to walk this road. The ascent is steep and the burden heavy. I walk it not by choice. I am what I have to be. What I have lost you cannot feel. What I have gained you cannot see. And I would not have you. Say my child's name for my child is alive in me. We will meet again, though in many ways we have never parted. Say the name to me and say it again. My child is my child and I love as I always did. Say my child's name.

*by Donald Hackett*

# TOIL

In our journey through grief, there is work to be done, and although we recognize that, sometimes the task seems monumental. The enormity is lessened best by the smaller steps, the moment by moment, and the day by day. Although the acrostic below doesn't speak to every aspect of our journey of grief, it can help us take those smaller steps that in time will move us forward in our journey.

**T**hank God each day for *something*, whether it is very ordinary, or a warm memory, a hug from someone who cared, the light of sunshine in a new day, or the courage He gives us to face that day.

**O**ut, or going *outside*, can sometimes seem excruciatingly difficult when we would rather crawl under the covers and hide from the world that takes no notice of our pain, but choosing to go out for just 30 minutes each day – a quick trip to the store, a cup of coffee shared with a friend, walking briefly in the park, the mall, or at the beach – allows me to be touched by the world that is still around me.

**I**n, or being *inside*, but giving myself *intentionally* for a short while each day to something I need to do or want to do – running the vacuum cleaner, doing the dishes, sorting through pictures, a quick clean up in the bathroom, journaling, beginning a memory book.

**L**et God speak to you daily through His Word. The Psalms reflect the heart of the psalmist, a heart that is often very reflective of your own. The gospels speak of the heart of Jesus, a heart that beats for you amidst the sorrow of a very broken world. To read either is to be encouraged and strengthened and to be reminded of the incredible presence and care of *God*.

May your journey of grief move you moment by moment and day by day, from  
mourning to joy, enabled by the God who understands your sorrow.

*by Bev Leckie*