

## **Assistance for Bereaved Parents Whose Only Child/All Children are Deceased**

Kay Bevington, Van Wert, OH

**National Compassionate Friends requested that I write an article for their holiday periodical. I wrote the following and decided to share it with you as it MAY be beneficial to share this with your local bereavement support group facilitator and newsletter editor.**

“My only child died and I am finding I do not ‘fit in’ as others in our support group often talk about their surviving children and/or grandchildren.” “All of our children died and there is just no one who can relate to our loss and grief.” “Other bereaved parents try to ‘fix me’ by saying I am young and can have other children since our only child died.” “I feel I am the only person who has no surviving children, my parents are deceased and I have no siblings.” “I am truly alone as my spouse is deceased, my only two children are deceased, and I was an only child.” “Who is going to be there for me when I age and have no surviving children?” “How do I plan and what do I do with all my child’s possessions and mine since there are no surviving children to care about these items?” These are comments we often hear from many bereaved parents who now have no surviving children. Parents generally feel and think they are unique in their grief as there **are** more bereaved parents who have endured the death of a child and have surviving children than those whose only child/all children have died. There is also more support available for those parents who have surviving children.

Unfortunately there are a few chapter leaders and support group members who feel/think and will say that ALL bereaved parents are alike. This only alienates, those bereaved parents with no surviving children, as it does not validate their uniqueness. When there are NO surviving children in the family it forces the bereaved parent to find a new and completely different focus, purpose and identity. There is absolutely **no one** in whom the bereaved parents can invest their time, energy, resources and love. One child does not take the place of another BUT a bereaved parent still has the identity of a parent when there are surviving children. Bereaved parents with no surviving children have no one with whom to celebrate the holidays or special events. There is no one who will call to wish you a Happy Father’s or Mother’s Day, there is no one who will be there to assist when there is surgery, an illness or a major decision to make. There is nothing current that is occurring in a child’s life that you can relate to others with or about your child/children. People become very uncomfortable when you share about something that occurred when your child was alive. Everyone becomes silent and “The Elephant is in the Room.”

The grandchildren issue is also another major issue as the now childless bereaved parents reach middle age or older. Everyone, including those who have had a child die and have surviving children, begin to share the photos and wonderful events that are occurring in the lives of their grandchildren. For most now childless parents there were

no grandchildren when our only child/all children died and never will be. Grandparents beam and are so proud, and rightly so, of those wonderful grandchildren. People often fail to realize that this fantastic experience will NEVER be one for the now childless bereaved parent to experience.

It is important at bereavement support group meetings and conferences to address the unique needs of bereaved parents as well as discuss the likenesses on grief journeys. Parents who experienced the death of an infant have different needs than those who had a teen ager or adult child. Suicide, murder and addiction related deaths need to be addressed as these are different experiences than those who had a child die of a disease or accident. Those bereaved parents with no surviving children also have unique needs. Special programs at support group meetings and conferences need to be presented so that these parents ALL realize that even though their differences are unique, once addressed, they can THEN relate to others with the similarities in grief.

There are additional online support for now childless parents and two organizations that minister primarily to the needs of now childless parents. Compassionate Friends has a Facebook closed group that is monitored by Joannie Kemling, Pam Rayner and Lisa Ridge. Various topics relating to only child/all children deaths are discussed.

Alive Alone, Inc. is an international support organization that publishes a periodical and networks bereaved parents who have no surviving children by the age of the deceased child and/or cause of death. Alive Alone also has a Facebook page where thoughts, quotes, poems and ideas that benefit now childless parents are posted on a daily basis. There is also discussion that occurs amongst the Alive Alone parents. Alive Alone has a database of 'veteran' bereaved parents who are qualified to present a program about being now childless at support group chapter meetings and conferences. More information can be obtained about Alive Alone on their website [www.alivealone.org](http://www.alivealone.org) If you do not use the internet Alive Alone can also be reached by writing to Alive Alone PO Box 182, Van Wert, OH 45891.

In Loving Memory is an organization that plans conferences for now childless parents. The website [www.InLovingMemoryConference.org](http://www.InLovingMemoryConference.org) You may also write to In Loving Memory P.O. Box 2163 Reston, VA 20195.

Compassionate Friends has committed to making certain there are more workshops for now childless parents at national conferences.