

June 2009



Dear Friend

Just a normal school day...

We're Mike and Kath and we work for Care for the Family co-ordinating the *Bereaved Parents' Network*. Our son Philip died suddenly just after his 7th birthday in 1994. It was towards the end of a normal day at school that he became ill whilst playing. We arrived to collect him just as he was losing consciousness for the last time. He died later that night. He had suffered a brain haemorrhage.

We had the dreadful task of telling his three year old brother, plus all our family and friends. We were shocked and numb. The house was so quiet, reinforcing the sense of his absence. Over time we felt a whole range of emotions, but with an intensity that we had never felt before. We felt so lonely, because we didn't know anyone else whose child had died.

And then there were the questions. Should we have spotted earlier that Philip was ill? Could we have got him to the hospital quicker? We felt we should have been able to prevent this and that we had failed in our job as parents. Personally, we wondered why God had allowed this to happen too.

Our first contact with Care for the Family's support for the bereaved was three years later. It was so good to meet with others who understood the pain of losing a child and how it changes your life forever. For once we didn't have to explain or make small talk – we could immediately talk at a very deep and real level with those who we met. Suddenly we didn't feel so alone – there were others on this painful and lifelong journey too. So we know first-hand how valuable this part of Care for the Family's work can be to those who have experienced a loss like ours. And that's why we wanted to write this letter – to ask if you would give towards Care for the Family's vital work.



Philip aged 6

Life will never be normal again

When Philip died, we lost our cheeky, lively, gorgeous seven-year-old little boy. But we also lost our whole future as we had

Your Family Charity

imagined it. He would be 22 now, perhaps graduating from university, out at work or even thinking about getting married. When Philip died, our hopes and dreams for him died too.

As parents, we expect that our children will grow to adulthood and hope they will make a positive impression on the world. We imagine they will have a family of their own, and maybe we'll be grandparents one day. We may think about them being there for us as we grow old. Suddenly we had to look at our future lives with new eyes. The *Bereaved Parents' Network* enabled us to do that and to find hope again. Now, as the co-ordinators of the Network, we try to bring hope to other parents who have been bereaved.

The loss of a partner is very different to the loss of a child, but can be equally devastating. Alison's husband Dave died very suddenly, within 24 hours of becoming ill. Overnight, at the age of 31, she became a widow and a single mum to two young boys. "My whole world was turned upside down and my hopes and dreams for the future were shattered," she said. "The pain, heartache and sense of loneliness was overwhelming – there were times when I felt I could not go on."

That was many years ago and Alison is now a befriender for *A Different Journey* – another part of Care for the Family's work that runs alongside the *Bereaved Parents' Network*. *A Different Journey* reaches out to those whose husband or wife has died early in life. As well as a network of befrienders there are also events and a regular email newsletter. It has become a lifeline for many young widows and widowers. After coming to an *A Different Journey Weekend*, one lady, Lynne, told us, "I'd like to say a huge thank you to Care for the Family for the weekend. It was life changing for me."

Supporting families through the 'normal' times too

Care for the Family's bereavement support is there for people after the worst has happened. But we also believe in strengthening families *before* the difficulties – and sometimes tragedies – strike.



Sometimes we find ourselves in the terrible position of trying to comfort someone who is totally devastated because their child has died from a drugs overdose. It's reassuring to know that through the *How to Drug Proof Your Kids* course other members of the team are working hard to prevent more families experiencing this trauma.

When Care for the Family strengthens marriages and encourages parents, we're building the defences to get families through the tough times

that may lie ahead. But we can only make that difference because you choose to help us through your gifts and encouragement.

As a charity, Care for the Family is almost entirely dependent on the generosity of individuals. Some people give because they have been helped by a particular initiative. The *Bereaved Parents' Network* volunteer befrienders regularly raise funds to meet some of the costs of running the Network and hosting events.

It costs about £4,000 to run a day event for bereaved parents. If we charged the actual cost of a place, the price would be about £125. However, we don't want cost to be a barrier to anyone who is desperately hurting following the death of a child. Fortunately the generosity of ordinary people, who give faithfully to the charity, has enabled us to offer places to parents for just £16 each. But that £109 has to come from somewhere. Could it come from you?

And that's just one example of the work that you make possible. Whether it's building a marriage, strengthening a single parent, or helping a dad build a stronger relationship with his children through a *1-2-1 Challenge* activity break – we need your support to make it happen.

Please help us to change lives

If you already support our work – for example as a Partner giving regularly every month – we want to say thank you. Your gifts matter so much. For the bereaved parents and young widows and widowers we work with, your gifts help them find ways to live with their grief and start to rebuild their lives. Your help is life-changing. You bring comfort to those who mourn and help us bind up broken hearts.

You are the reason we can do what we do.

These are difficult times for our economy and society at the moment. But if you can afford to send a gift, no matter how small, it will make a real difference. There is still so much need. Our aim is to run eight bereavement days in the next twelve months – but we need to raise £32,000 to make that happen. Your gifts will enable us to do that and so much more.

Often people we help write to us and thank us for what we have done. They thank us for giving them hope that they can survive after bereavement. For marriages

Every 'normal' day...

18 parents suffer the agony of their child's death

395 couples get divorced

34,286 children take illegal drugs

161 people contact Care for the Family, of whom at least five need counselling support

84 resources are sent out to families and individuals

It costs £9,588 to provide Care for the Family's support

restored and saved. For nurturing stronger families. For equipping parents, carers and grandparents trying to raise children in today's complicated world. For guiding engaged couples through marriage preparation. For providing a little wisdom to parents who love their children, but are finding the task of parenting so very difficult at the moment.

On their behalf thank you – thank you for all the support you've given in the past, and for all your support in the future.



Mike and Kath Coulson
Bereaved Parents' Network Co-ordinators

PS We realise this may be a tough time for you and your family with regard to finance. But any gift you can send today will transform lives and bring hope in life's darkest situations. We so want to be able to stand alongside all those who need us in the future – just as we were privileged to have people who stood beside us. Thank you so much.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if the Bereaved Parents' Network or A Different Journey can be of help to you or anyone you know. Both networks offer a telephone befriender service, day and weekend events and a regular email newsletter.