



Bereaved Parents of the USA

Anne Arundel County Chapter

March 2012

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March – The Month of In-Between

In between winter and in between spring, your death has left me feeling in between.
In between this world and in between the next since you died. Nothing's the same.
I no longer feel like I belong, yet I haven't wings for Heaven
And I have no heart for earth.
So, I'm somewhere with March – I'm somewhere in between.

— Naomi Holzman, TCF, Volusia/Flagler, FL



***Those we love remain with us,
For love itself lives on,
And cherished memories never fade
Because a loved one's gone.***

***Those we love can never be
More than a thought apart,
For as long as there is memory,
They'll live on in the heart.***

— In memory of Melvin Shannon, TCF Atlanta

Darlene Goatley, a licensed social worker for 30 years and author of "When a Loved One Dies – Bereavement Information and Resources," recently attended one of our Chapter meetings, and she has graciously volunteered to serve as a Mental Health Resource person to our Chapter and our members. She will make herself available by phone (410-980-3165) or email (dargoatley@verizon.net) to those who have questions about available community resources.

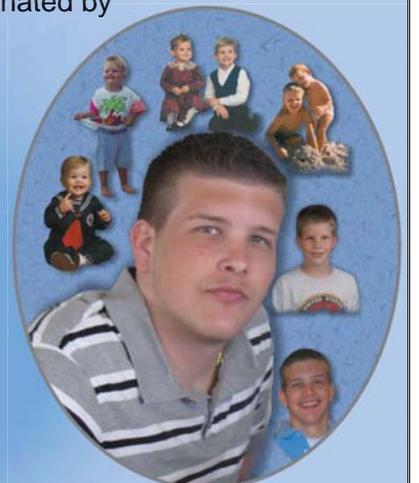
"I believe that having information and having support resources make a big difference in the coping process. Uncovering resources, however, is a challenge," Darlene explained.

Darlene will also write articles for the Chapter's newsletter and will present a program at one of the Chapter meetings this Spring. A BIG THANK YOU TO DARLENE.

The printing and mailing of this newsletter have been donated by

Cindy and Gary Dukes in memory of their son
Zachary Lee Dukes
February 12, 1989 – March 31, 2010

Son, Brother, Grandson, Godson, Nephew, Friend



Next Meeting: March 1, 2012

Healing through Helping -- A bereaved mother will share stories about her Project Grace trip to Nicaragua. Project Grace was created in 1997 with the purpose of bringing grieving parents together to honor their lost children through service to a community in need. One of our members will talk about her Project Grace experience.

Sharing groups – a key part of each Chapter meeting – will be held as usual for first-time attendees, and the newly and non-newly bereaved.

Calvary United Methodist Church
301 Rowe Boulevard
Annapolis, MD 21401

Meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month and are open to anyone grieving the death of a child. Come around to the back of the church—there is parking and an entrance directly into our meeting room.

We are a self-help support organization dedicated to assisting parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child. We provide information and education to extended family and friends. Our greatest strength as bereaved families is the unity we find in shared experiences which can lead us out of isolation, give us a place to “belong,” and offer us hope that together – we can make it.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT OUR CHAPTER MEETINGS

Our Chapter gathers one evening a month to address topics and offer support to those who are mourning the death of a child. Our meetings last for approximately 2 hours. Sometimes we schedule a 30-minute presentation at the beginning of our meeting. When the speaker or panel has concluded the presentation, we introduce ourselves and say our child’s name. We then take a short break before dividing into sharing groups.

Sharing groups are facilitated by fellow Chapter members and are completely confidential. During this time, the issues that are discussed—particularly for the newly bereaved—focus on the issues facing participants today.



Submissions for the April newsletter due to the Newsletter Team by March 1.
Send an email to: newsletter@aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org.

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Treasurer:	Fran Palmer
Correspondence & Hospitality:	Rick & Carol Tomaszewski
Librarian:	Bob and Sandi Burash
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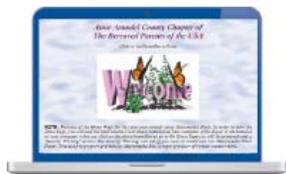
If so, AND you enter through our Chapter’s website (www.aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org), the Chapter will earn a commission of five percent on your purchases. Using the link does not increase your cost (and information about your purchase is not shared with the Chapter), but it does earn the Chapter a commission from Amazon. It’s an easy way for you to support our Chapter’s activities.

Go to the Chapter’s home page, click on the butterflies on the welcome page, and then scroll down the first page to the bottom, where there is an Amazon.com graphic that takes you to Amazon’s site. Entering Amazon’s site in this manner – through the Chapter’s website – ultimately credits the Chapter with the five percent commission on any purchases that follow. Thanks in advance for your help!

Inclement weather on a meeting night? Our meeting is cancelled if Phase 1 of the Snow Emergency Plan is in effect that same day at 5:00 p.m.

Would you like to sponsor the Chapter’s newsletter or website (www.aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org) for one month in memory of your child? It’s a wonderful way to honor your child’s memory – to say his or her name for all the world to hear -- while providing financial support to the Chapter and its many activities offered to all those mourning the loss of a child.

Newsletter sponsorship is \$75 and website sponsorship is \$25. Just send an email to Chapter Leader Terre Belt (tbelt@nahbrc.com), or call her at 410-721-1359, or sign up at a monthly meeting. Say Their Names!!! And help the Chapter, too!



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BPUSA/AA County Chapter
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Annapolis, MD 21401-0280

March Winds

As the winds blow, often violently, it is as if there is an attempt to wake us from our winter lethargy. The birds begin to sing, calling to us. The dormant trees begin to move in the breeze. We see the first buds. Witness a crocus peeping through the encrusted ground. Regardless of our griefs and regrets, life goes on, whether we participate or not. This can be a season of renewal. We can symbolically plant a flower, a tree, or a bush, and nurture it as we loved our child. As the plant flourishes and adds beauty to our lives, we can experience a sense of creation just as our child added meaning to our lives. It's time to sort out the good memories when we do our spring cleaning. Discard the anger, regret, disappointment and sorrow. Shake it out and throw it away. Hold on to all that is good. Cherish it forever. It's time to make a constructive effort to restore ourselves. We hope the gales of the March winds will awaken you to a new beginning. May the "winter of our discontent" disappear. We wish for you to live in the future with your happy memories.



— Betty Davis, Marion, OH



Spring is for the Birds

I sat at the kitchen table, looking out at the dazzling spring day. It was the kind of breathtakingly beautiful day that brings a lump to your throat and a song to your lips. Spring was my favorite time of the year, but I couldn't have been more miserable. Only five months before, the joy had fled from my life when my precious son Blake died.

All at once, a ridiculous verse from my childhood popped into my head: Spring is sprung, the grass is riz, I wonder where the flowers is.

Like the poet, I wondered where the flowers were. Oh, they were here alright, but not for me. It seemed that the whole world had burst into bloom around me, but grief-stricken as I was, the glory of the awakening earth only brought me pain. I studiously ignored the startling greenness of the trees. I averted my eyes from the bushes laden with bright azalea blooms. I considered each new bud, each tiny sprout a personal affront. Where was my renewal? Where was my hope? How could I celebrate spring while winter still raged in my heart?

I continued to gaze out the window, knowing that I had plenty to do but not having the energy to move. Suddenly, a saucy, fat robin hopped onto the deck. "Just what I need," I thought bitterly. "Another sign of spring." At last I was motivated to drag myself over to the sink and tackle the mountain of dirty dishes.

The bird was back the next day. "Shoo!" I growled through the glass. "Go back where you came from!" Ignoring me, he hopped cheerfully across the yard to peck the earth in search of an especially delectable bug. He was so perky, it made me sick.

That night heavy rains brought a cold front, and the temperature dipped into the 40's. The next morning he was there, chipper as ever. "Dumb bird," I hissed. "Don't you know how cold it is?" The realization that I was talking to a bird made me question my sanity – once again. The robin came back the next day and the next. The following day, however, he didn't return. I was torn between feeling sad that he was gone and being embarrassed that I had been looking for him. The next morning he reappeared, bringing with him two cousins, an uncle, a wife, and his wife's good-for-nothing brother Earl. "Now you're ganging up on me!" I shouted as memories of an old movie drifted through my addled brain.

At that moment, I experienced an unfamiliar contorting of my face. It was a smile. As a little of the heaviness lifted from my heart, I realized that though I couldn't delight in the season as I usually did, there would be other springs. Beauty and joy would someday return to my life, as surely as the first timid shoots emerge from the frozen earth. As for those pesky robins, there was just one thing left for me to do. I went to the pantry to get some bread to feed my friends.

— Patricia Dyson, Beaumont, TX



Choosing Life

“It will never be the same. Never.” As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief’s profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course and that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, “...never the same.”

This is the aspect of the grief that Simon Stephens calls the Valley of the Shadow. It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. Between. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the Valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose.

The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the Valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving into the hopelessness of the Valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt, and self-doubt. But it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the Valley.

Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the Valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed—even prayed—that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the Valley of the Shadow. There is more work to do, more struggles and choosing. The Valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever “the same.” Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the Valley of the Shadow. Change has the promise LIFE is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

— Marcia Alig

Remembering You

I can shed tears that he is gone,
Or I can smile because he has lived.



I can close my eyes and pray that he will come back,
Or I can open my eyes and see all that he left.

My heart can be empty because I can't see him,
Or I can be full of the love that we shared.

I can turn my back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
Or I can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

I can remember him and only that he is gone,
Or I can cherish his memory and let it live on.

I can cry and close my mind, be empty and turn my back,
Or I can do what he would want – smile, open my eyes, and go on.

— David Harkins

We quickly find there are no words to describe
the experience of losing a child.

For those who have not lost a child,

No explanation will do.

For those who have,

No explanation is necessary.

— Mary Lingle, TCF

SIBLING PAGE

The Loss of a Sibling Was...The Worst Day of My Life

January 24th, 1994 was the worst day of my life. I was sound asleep and at 10:30, the doorbell rang.

Two Missouri state troopers stood at the door. My parents had already left for work, so I was concerned that they were in an accident. The troopers came in, used the phone to call my parents' bosses, then they handed me a wallet. The wallet belonged to my brother, Sean Anderson.

I then asked the hardest question I have ever asked in my life, "Is Sean dead?"

At that point, I felt like I was standing outside of myself, almost dreamlike.

The older trooper then said, "Yes, he is."

I felt then like I do now, that the whole scene was in slow motion. The troopers quickly left. I can't remember much about the rest of that day or the days that followed. I only remember bits and pieces about the funeral. I just know that the day Sean died was the worst day of my life. The days that followed were full of activity and planning. My mom wanted the family to be involved, if we wanted to be.

We wanted Sean to be remembered for his music and his zest for life. His friends became involved and did Sean's music for the service and many were pallbearers. That's a lot for a group of 19-year-old young men to give. I wish there were some way that I could thank them for all that they did for us.

Almost immediately after the funeral, my sister returned to her home about 4 ½ hours away. One important lesson I have learned throughout this whole ordeal is that everyone grieves differently. My sister's way of dealing with Sean's death was to leave. I envied her in a way because she didn't have to deal with the sadness every day. Now I realize that she dealt with Sean's death, she just had to do it alone.

I am not near over this. I probably never will be. The only thing I can do is to not take life for granted and understand what a precious gift life is. Each day is a new adventure on this roller coaster of grief. The only thing that we can do is to continue to get up each day and maybe try to share a smile.

When people ask me how I am, I can honestly say I am okay. I don't feel that I will ever be able to say that I am great again, but who knows. I never thought I could say okay.

Sometimes the bad ones outnumber the good ones, but I just have to believe that there is a good day out there with my name on it.

We are surviving siblings and we must try to survive the best way we can. I wish for you a smile and a happy memory. Peace until next time.

— Traci Morlock, BP/USA, St. Louis



The Sibling Prayer

Beneath the amber glow
Of the newly rising sun,
Or standing on the hillside
When the day is nearly done,
Riding down the highway
When my work day is at end.
Or sitting on a park bench
Talking to a friend.

No matter where I am in life,
No matter what my task,
Please give me peace of mind,
Dear Lord,

That is all I ask.
And when those haunting memories,
Of the night he passed away
Come rushing in my broken heart,
Please do not delay.
Remind me that he is in
A far, far better place,
Grant me a glimpse of his hazel eyes
And sweet angelic face.
Please grant me reassurance
That we'll someday meet again
In heaven's bright tomorrow.
In your name I pray. Amen.

— Laura Carpenter, Onancock, VA

Double Standards as They Apply to Grief

I find it ironic that we recognize Presidents' Day, in honor of deceased presidents. When Elvis Presley's Heaven Date (or birthday) comes around, tons of people make a pilgrimage to his home and grave, to pay their respects and to grieve. Even the news media makes a big deal out of it. As they do with Martin Luther King and others.



How many who still grieve for these people actually knew or met them? How did they touch their lives, other than respect and admiration?

Are they faulted for grieving for these people? Are they told, "Hey, it's been 20 or 30 years, get over it?" Has it been said to them, "It's not healthy to grieve this long," or "You know, Elvis wouldn't want you to hurt."

Do they hear, "You need to get on with your life" or "At least you can have other presidents"? Have they heard, "Well, you know, Martin Luther King is in a better place now," or "You should turn to God, and let him help you"?

I think everyone reading this knows the answer to all of those questions is: "No, of course not."

Why not? Because these people made a difference in the lives of others? Because they are loved deeply and missed terribly? Because they were great, wonderful, caring, and loving people?

If so, then tell me this. How do they differ from our loved ones? Why are we bereaved "ordinary" people not allowed to grieve as long?

If we grieve openly, we're told to get over it, she/he wouldn't want you to hurt like this; it's not normal to hurt this long; you need help; you have to go on with your life, etc., etc., etc., until we are almost as hurt by the endless platitudes as we are from the death of our loved ones.

The platitudes we hear over and over tell us that we aren't allowed to grieve as we need, that our loved ones don't matter anymore, that our feelings don't matter anymore. Our grief, our pain, is frowned upon and dismissed as trivial, because the person we grieve for isn't one of greatness to the world.

My daughter may not have been known to the world, but she was the world to me. She was, and still is, loved, remembered, and missed deeply by so many. Did she achieve greatness as society would define the word? Probably not. But to her family and friends, to me, she achieved in her brief life more greatness than most people even think about in theirs. She wasn't a renowned performer. She wasn't president of the USA. Her dream wasn't known by the world. But she mattered. She still does. I, and many others, will love her until our own deaths.

What an irony, that I will continue to be frowned upon for grieving my beloved child who died a scant 16 months ago – when strangers are allowed to grieve for someone they never met, who died before my child was born.

— *Connie Small, Cassy's mom*



A Sabbatical from Grief

I am certain that each of you reading this would like to take a sabbatical from your grief.

How well I remember those first years of bereavement when our 16-year-old daughter, Rhonda, died. I would have given anything in this world, including my own life, to have had her alive, healthy, and happy, and not to be doing my grief work.

Grief work is the most difficult work that we will ever have to do in our lives. It is physically taxing to our bodies, it devastates us psychologically, and we are not ourselves socially.

We would like to take a sabbatical or “vacation” from our grief. We can take “mini-vacations” from our grief by allowing humor into our lives. A few brief moments of laughter give us some respite from the horrible feelings of grief. Attending a funny movie, reading a funny book, or listening to a joke are some simple means of giving yourself a “short sabbatical.”

Sometimes our work keeps our mind busy for a short time, and this is a form of a sabbatical.

A good walk or exercise in the sunshine, working on the lawn or in the garden are also means of a “mini-vacation” from our grief.

Plan an evening out with a friend or family members. It might be watching a softball game, attending a movie, taking a picnic, going swimming, a drive through the country, a shopping trip, a bicycle ride, a walk, or a weekend trip to another area. These are opportunities for each of us to take a short sabbatical from our grief. We take our sadness with us, but it helps to “lighten the load of grief” with diversions once in a while. Having something to look forward to is also very important during our grieving process.

Rodney and I took a “sabbatical” from Alive Alone this past winter. We left the frigid, snowy, and blowing winds of northern Ohio for the sunny, warm, tropical climate of Hawaii. We vacationed three weeks, and split our time between Waikiki Beach in Honolulu and Malaea Bay, Maui. This is not only close to paradise, but it such an awesome, God-created, blissful, and restful place to replenish our body, mind, and soul. Basking in the warm sunshine, walking the sandy beach, and feeling the sand ooze between our toes, stepping into the azure warm waters of the Pacific, eating the cuisine of the islands, shopping in boutiques, visiting with dear friends, sightseeing, and just getting some much needed rest and relaxation was truly a sabbatical.

Even though we thoroughly enjoyed the vacation from grief work and working with those of you who have endured the ultimate loss of our only child/all children, we wish Rhonda could have been with us. Rhonda would now be the age we were when she died. As time marches on and we are nearing our golden years, we are even sadder at times to realize what Rhonda missed in life on this earth. Oh, yes, we know her heavenly home is far greater than anything we experience on this earth, but that does not lessen our loneliness for her. We often wonder what career she would have chosen for her life. Would she be married? Where would she be living? How many children would she have had, and who would they have been?

Yes, taking a “sabbatical” from grief work is replenishing to each of us, and we need to take the time to do so. Our wish and suggestion is that each of you find “your sabbatical,” no matter how big or small, that will assist you on your grief journey. Take time for yourself, and try to find some small measure of enjoyment that will replenish your mind, body, and soul.

Our Children Remembered

James William Aikin
Grandson of Elizabeth and Barry Aikin
June 5, 1982 - March 18, 2008

Richard Allen Bessling
Son of Robert and Barbara Bessling
March 18, 1982 - March 15, 1995

Michael J. Dickens Jr.
Son of Marla and Michael Dickens Sr.
July 7, 1968 - March 29, 1996

Zachary Lee Dukes
2/12/89 - 3/31/10
Son of Cindy Dukes

Cynthia Lynn Ferguson
Daughter of Doris and Charles Clair
September 4, 1952 - March 28, 2010

Brian Jeffrey Haley
Son of Jerry and Pam Haley
October 26, 1973 - March 4, 1990

Traci Jeanne Heincelman
Niece of Terre and John Belt
Cousin of Eryn Belt Lowe
October 6, 1980 - March 10, 2002

Charles "Chip" Marshall Hodges
Son of Betty and John Hodges
October 24, 1954 - March 14, 2005

Kole William Hoffman
Son of Erin and Jim McKinney McDonald
December 23, 2007 - March 7, 2010

Matthew James Katz
Son of Bob and Sue Katz
March 13, 1982 - September 7, 2003

Bryan Adam Krouse
Son of James and Judy Krouse
March 11, 1965 - June 29, 2007

Kevin Michael Morris
Son of Gayle and David Morris
October 7, 1982 - March 30, 2007

David M Murnane
son of Jennifer Murnane
March 7, 1987 - December 9, 2008

Michael Dwayne Nokes
Son of Ellen Foxwell
November 9, 1963 - March 15, 1988

Brian James Para
Son of Joan Para
February 19, 1970 - March 19, 1991

Sydney Elaine Patronik
Daughter of Holly and Michael Patronik
March 26, 2002 - May 11, 2002

Thomas H Redmiles
Son of Mary and Joe Redmiles
February 22, 1985 - March 14, 2011

Zachary Daniel Robertson
Son of Mary Ellen and Jim Young
March 3, 1978 - October 26, 2006

Mark Edward Smeltzer
Son of Peggy Smeltzer
December 11, 1969 - March 15, 1997

Joseph Claude Smith
son of Gary and Desirae Smith
March 14, 2005 - July 11, 2006

Christopher John Smith
Son of Debi Wilson-Smith
March 27, 1981 - June 30, 2000

Tenoch Bennett Sweeney
Son of Richard Sweeney
March 30, 2011 - May 21, 2011

*This is for all the caterpillars that never became butterflies.
All the butterflies that never caught the wind in their wings.
And all the hearts that had hopes and dreams of a
wondrous flight together.*

Donations may be made to offset the costs of our local Chapter's events and communications. We gratefully acknowledge the following donations made in the last month:

DONATIONS:

George and Cathy Schindler in memory of Emily Schindler

Kenneth Smith in memory of Tracy Fotino



Shared Thoughts

One thing that is frequently discussed at our meetings is the despair of thinking you are on the road to “recovery,” when all of a sudden you seem to be back at square one. But, are you really?

Let’s keep in mind that most of us have had no previous experience in “recovering” from the loss of a child. Therefore, we have no point of reference – it’s all new to us. Actually, the “roller coaster” of emotions is perfectly normal. In the beginning most of us seem to vacillate between dead numbness and excruciating pain. Constant crying to not a tear left – just dried up and limp. We are actually living from minute to minute.

After a couple of months we might actually have a few hours that we have not cried, or felt that deep overwhelming despair. Then – wham – back to where we started. We tend to panic and think something is wrong with us. Let’s be realistic. There is something wrong – terribly wrong – we have lost our child/children.

Let’s be fair to ourselves. We started to play a role to the outside world. Like the old song says “laughing on the outside – crying on the inside.” If they only knew. We may feel we have to fool others, but let us be really honest with ourselves, our feelings. To deny our own feelings, particularly to ourselves, is to “block” the road to “recovery.” Remember that recovery in this case does not mean “get over it”; it means to gain control of our lives again.

So, let’s not worry what other people think, say or expect. Our friends, well meaning as they are, sometimes members of our own family, even someone who has lost a child, should not sit in judgment. Each person grieves differently, due to a person’s general make-up and the relationship with the dead child. Unless someone has totally withdrawn from everything and everybody over a lengthy period of time, the chances are that all is in the realm of normalcy. Only after we have walked down the long road of grief and can look back remembering those early days and weeks, can we see we really are not on square one, again. We have just slipped backwards for a time. That is all. Allow yourself that, and then stride forward again. It takes time, a lot of time! We tend to expect too much from others – others expect too much from us, and therefore we tend to expect too much from ourselves.

— *Mary Ehmman, Valley Forge*

People who have not lost a loved one often see grief as a very temporary and a fairly rational process that stops soon after the funeral. They don’t understand grief’s scope or depth.

— *Carol Staudacher*

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NEXT MEETING: March 1, 2012



Time sensitive
Must be delivered by FEBRUARY 24, 2012

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS:

Healing through Helping

Thursday, March 1, 2012

A bereaved parent will share stories about her Project Grace trip with other bereaved parents to Nicaragua.

Alive Alone

Thursday, April 5, 2012

Kathy Grapski, from the support group Alive Alone, will talk with the group about the special challenges facing parents who have lost their only child or all of their children.

Sixth Annual Emily Schindler Memorial Triathlon

Saturday, April 14, 2012
Severna Park, MD

For more information, go to www.spyaquatics.org/emily-schindler-memorial-triathlon or www.active.com.

RESOURCES:

Bereaved Parents of the USA

www.bereavedparentsusa.org or 708-748-7866

Hospice of the Chesapeake

www.hospicechesapeake.org or 410-987-2003

Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center

www.mdcrimevictims.org or 410-234-9885

Suicide Support Group

410-647-2550; meets the first Tuesday of each month in Severna Park, MD

MIS Support Group (miscarriage, infant death or stillbirth)

443-481-6114; meets the first Monday of each month in Edgewater, MD

Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing (GRASP)

www.grasphelp.com or 843-705-2217

The Compassionate Friends of Prince George's County

Meetings are on the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m., United Parish of Bowie, 2515 Mitchellville Road, Bowie, MD

We appreciate feedback on our Chapter meetings. If you have suggestions for future topics of discussion, please contact our Program coordinator: Paul Balasic at pjbspmd@gmail.com or **443.566.0193**.