

Children and Grief



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*Still Making House Calls
in the 21st Century*



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The Invisible Mourners

- 4.8 million children under the age of 18 are grieving the loss of a parent
- Another 1.5 million have lost other significant loved ones or have a parent in prison
- Many children have parents serving in our Armed Forces

How do they grieve differently?



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- Children move in and out of intense feelings vs. 24 hour backpack of pain
- Process through play, especially the younger children
- Different ages=different responses

Signs of Grieving in Children and Adolescents



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- Sadness
- Feelings of anger, denial, shock
- Fear
- Boisterous play
- Difficulty sleeping
- Change in school performance
- Repeated questions about the death
- Regression
- Physical complaints

Expressions of Grief: Exploding Volcano



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Love is Jammed



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Doubts During Grief



Everyday



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Adolescent Seeking Peace from Grief



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Send My Love



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Helping Them Grieve

- Answer questions honestly
- Use age-appropriate and clear language
- Give them choices
- Allow them to see your grief
- Maintain routines and schedules
- Respect different grieving styles
- Listen without judgment
- Give them a break
- Love and comfort them

Good Grief: Bereavement Program for Children



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- 21st year of serving children
 - Group-based model, not therapy
 - Facilitated by trained volunteers
 - Children grouped by age
 - 8 weeks with concluding ceremony with families in the fall and spring
 - Next session begins April, 2010

Good Grief: Bereavement Program for Children



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- Good Grief allows
 - Children to know they are not alone
 - Safe place to process their feelings
 - Ways to remember loved ones
 - Connections with other grieving children and caring adults

Good Grief: Bereavement Program for Children



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- Child-centered activities
 - Art
 - Stories
 - Puppets
 - Journaling
 - Poetry
 - Pet pals
 - Memory projects



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Parents Speak

“It gave me comfort knowing that my son liked and looked forward to coming each week.”

“...age appropriate, fun activities are conducted in a safe space with qualified teachers...this is a very positive step in the journey through grief...and ultimately the rest of their life.”

“It was a relief knowing my daughter was participating and seeing she’s not alone in her grief.”



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How Can You Help?

- Recognize their loss
- Listen to them
- Tell family about Good Grief or other support
- Consider being a volunteer