## **Children and Grief**



#### 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?



- 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



- 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











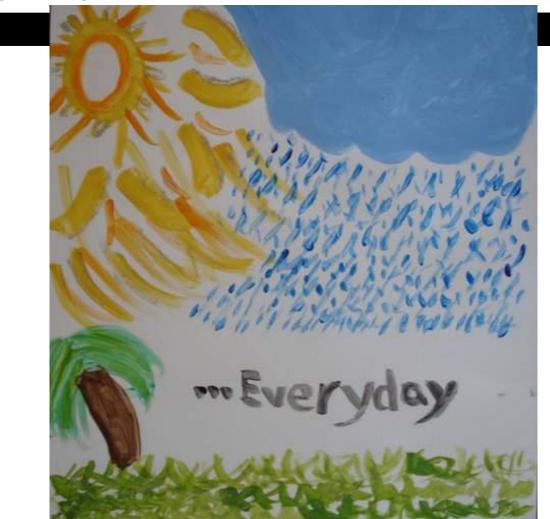


#### **Doubts During Grief**





#### Still Making House Calls in the 21st Century



#### Everyday

#### Adolescent Seeking Peace from Grief













### **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



- 21<sup>st</sup> 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



Still Making House Calls in the 21st Century

#### 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



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



#### **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."



#### How Can You Help?

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