

**Hope In Grief by Rylie Kearns**  
**End Well Symposium, December 5, 2019**

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[Applause]

Grief is a 'rollercoaster of emotions.' On top of being a teenager and trying to navigate those emotions grief made my emotions feel uncontrollable. My name is Riley Kearns and my life was forever changed on May 12, 2018. I was walking out of a Starbucks with the drinks for my mom and I when her phone rang. It was the police and they told my mom to call the hospital she called, and the nurse said your spouse Robert Kearns has died. It happened that fast, coffee at Starbucks, a parking lot phone call and then my dad was gone. That began the worst time in my life all I wanted was someone to talk to, but no one knew how to talk to me. Adults would try to say something, but they didn't want to make me upset or say anything wrong to me and when I went back to school kids were mean or weird [01:00] or didn't what to do or say.

What I want to share today is what I've learned about how to help the grieving child. A lot of what I learned is with the help of a peer support group I go to at a place called Good Grief, but some of it I have learned myself. The group taught me that it is okay to cry but it also okay to have fun and be silly sometimes. Even on the hardest days, there can be moments when I just need to laugh and to cry it's normal to feel both ways. It's also normal to not feel like yourself. It takes time and maybe something in you has changed forever. But you're still you and you're not alone; none of us are.

There are a lot of other kids out there who are going through grief and loss and you can find them. I know it's hard to help someone who is grieving and even for adults it's especially hard to know how to [02:00] help children, but there are things that adults can do. Don't, ask "are you okay?" That just makes a child feel like they are supposed to be okay. Ask, "how are you doing?" And then just listen and even if they don't say anything because sometimes there are no words for at all just sit there with them.

Adults are important, but peers really matter. So if you're a child and you know someone whose parent who has died, you could help by just showing up for them. Every kid I played soccer and softball with came to my father's memorial service. That was huge for me. Going through all this, I know that no matter how old you are or how old the person who is grieving has, we all need the same things: love, support, acceptance and the space to be ourselves at a time when everything we know has changed. It feels like an act of bravery to give someone you don't know a hug [03:00] or sit by them in silence when they cry, but it's not. We will need all the help some day and these small acts are what help us imagine what we too will get through the worst days of our lives.

I have one other piece of advice for kids and adults. Be there for the people you love because you don't know the future. I wish I had given my dad more hugs or called him more often. It's important to tell people that you love them and reach out to people when they're having a tough time by doing that your life will be better too. Standing here today, I know that my dad is up there looking down and thinking how proud he is of me for doing this in honor of him and four other children, thank you.

[Applause]