

People assume *Speaking Grief* was inspired by my own life-altering story of loss. This is not the case. While I have suffered the death of loved ones, I have not experienced one of those losses that—to steal a phrase from psychotherapist and author Megan Devine—"reorders the world." However, I understand the assumption. In fact, this assumption illustrates the real impetus for *Speaking Grief*—that although grief is an inevitable, universal human experience, it's one we tend to ignore until it confronts us head-on. And, because we ignore it, we aren't very good at it.

No one teaches us how to handle grief. Despite our best intentions, we bungle attempts to be supportive. We offer words of "comfort" that do more harm than good. We subconsciously measure someone else's behavior against our own beliefs about the "right" way to grieve. Or, we feel so uncomfortable with their suffering that we end up abandoning them altogether.

Grief is an experience for which there is no cheat sheet—no one-size fits all approach. How do you help people become more comfortable with this experience without being able to tell them exactly what to do when they encounter it? While there is no clear-cut answer, it starts with acknowledging that grief exists. And, it's hard. It's hard to go through. It's hard to respond to.

Another challenge this project presented was how to create content on a raw topic that was authentic but watchable. We wanted to make something that a person with little direct grief experience could connect with and learn from. At the same time, we wanted to do justice to the lived experience of grieving people that was free from the "Hollywood ending" where griever are ultimately rewarded for their struggles with some sort of uplifting outcome. While grief can lead to growth and positive things can come from loss, the *Speaking Grief* team was intentional about sharing stories where this wasn't always the case. Sometimes, a person's grief journey is just flat. And it stays flat. And, that's OK.

Throughout this project, I spoke with dozens of people about their experiences with grief and loss. These conversations were intense. But, when I would apologize for stirring up painful memories and emotions, the response was almost always an expression of gratitude; something along the lines of, "You don't understand—I NEVER get to talk about this." This was further confirmation of the fact that we have a lot of work to do when it comes to holding space for grief in our society.

I am deeply grateful to every person who trusted me with their story. These conversations helped shape *Speaking Grief*. I also want to thank the many grief organizations and professionals who shared their expertise and connected us with families willing to talk about their experiences. And finally, I want to acknowledge the New York Life Foundation whose philanthropic support made this project possible.

The documentary is only one aspect of a larger project aimed at creating a more grief-aware society. I encourage you to explore the additional stories and resources on our website: speakinggrief.org. I hope *Speaking Grief* becomes a movement that helps all of us get better at grief.