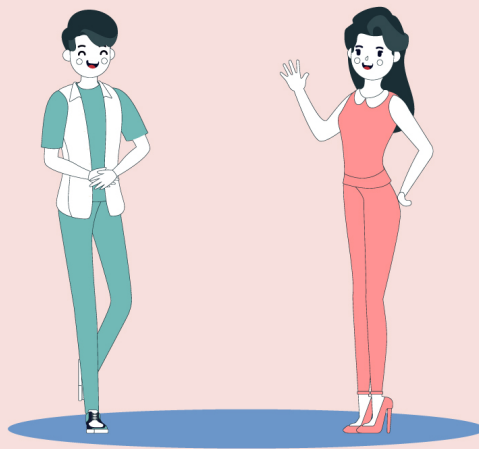


# Summary

# Tell Me More

Kelly Corrigan



# Summary of «Tell Me More» by Kelly Corrigan

Written by Lea Schullery

The perfect book for learning why saying phrases like *I don't know* and *tell me more* is important for turning the wheels of life and coping with the stresses of everyday life.



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# Introduction

In *Tell Me More*, Kelly Corrigan attempts to name the phrases that make love and connection possible. As a parent and wife, Kelly has learned some of the biggest lessons in life through mistakes. For instance, in the chapter titled *I was Wrong*, Kelly details the events leading up to her realizing that just apologizing is not enough when she makes a crucial mistake when arguing with her daughters. In *Tell Me More* she navigates suppressing the urge to advise her daughters, allowing them to tell her about their struggles and just being there to listen and validate their feelings. In *It's Like This*, she explains that life is hard. Life is not smooth and we have to accept our current situations and ride out the storms. Through personal memoir filled with candor and humor, Kelly discusses the hardest phrases she's learned to say to help bring comfort, hope, and growth to the lives of herself and those around her.

## It's Like This

It's no secret that life is hard. We're busy with family, parenting, jobs, whatever we fill our lives with. And more times than not, life isn't smooth, it's not perfect. We stress over the seemingly small things and worry about how we're going to get through another day. Days are messy, and Kelly Corrigan's days are no different. She recalls a time just 3 months after her father's death where not only was she in the midst of grief, but she was also struggling to keep the household afloat. With a loving husband and two teenage daughters, the house was filled with constant arguments and it was one particular morning that she realized that this is life. It's like this.

Upon waking up in the morning, Kelly's anxiety had peaked. She could smell her husband cooking himself breakfast and could hear her teenage daughters screaming at each other in the hallway. This is life. She had accepted that her husband would just let her daughters continue arguing, leaving Kelly to be the bad guy and deal with the aftermath. She didn't have time to fully wake up before diving headfirst into her duties as a parent and mediating the screaming match between 14-year-old Claire and 16-year-old Georgia.

By the time her husband, Edward, and the girls were ready to leave the house, Kelly surveyed the remnants of the tornado that blew through the house that morning. Eggshells on the counter, dishes in the sink, and clumps of fur under the table. She hadn't even enjoyed her first sip of coffee by the time her husband was showered, fed, and ready for work. A wave of resentment washed over her as she realized Edward was escaping and leaving her to handle the cleanup.

She loved her family, but when had loving her family become a chore? She took some time for herself to reflect on a chaotic morning. The idea of becoming a nagging wife and mother left her feeling a sense of hatred and resentment. That's when she had an epiphany. It's just like this.

Kelly remembered the motto of her meditation teacher: "it's just like this." She reflected on this motto and realized that life is hard. She was in the midst of grief after the loss of her father, but grief wasn't the only part of life that was tough. It's hard raising a family, it's hard being a perfect, loving wife, but this is life. We deal with grief and insecurity as we try to be the best version of ourselves which is both exhausting and near-impossible. But this is life. We accept our situation and weather the storm.

# Tell Me More

When Kelly's children came home from school and complained about a friend, teacher, anything, she would think of a million ways to help them out of a sticky situation. She prepared to give them all the advice in the world to help them. However, It took time for her to realize that sometimes advice isn't needed. Her girls were growing up, and sometimes it was more necessary for them to realize how to get out of these situations on their own, all she needed to be was someone to listen to them. Someone to lend an ear and say "tell me more."

Kelly learned this important lesson with the help of her friend Tracy. Tracy explained that parenting is like watching someone work tirelessly on a puzzle while the final piece was in your pocket. You may feel as if you have all the answers to help your children, but to ensure they develop independence and problem-solving skills, you need to let them struggle sometimes. It's hard to watch your kids suffer, as a parent you just want to give them that final puzzle piece.

She recalls a time when she was on a long road trip with Tracey when Georgia, who was just 11-years-old at the time, called her to complain about her middle school drama. As soon as Kelly answered the phone, Georgia burst into tears, telling her that life was so incredibly unfair. Girls were mean and they were liars. Kelly's typical response would be to play devil's advocate and tell Georgia that, clearly, she had done something wrong to make these girls mean to her. Luckily, Tracy offered her own advice: just listen to her. At that moment, Kelly found herself telling her daughter, "tell me more."

And Georgia did. Georgia told her mother about this girl named Piper who had constantly been mean to her at school. But Piper is now blaming Georgia for telling everyone that Georgia started drama between the two. Kelly found herself becoming exasperated as middle-school drama can be, but Tracy urged her to let Georgia continue and urged Kelly to repeat what Georgia had said back to her. "So everyone is mad at you for being mean to Piper, but you weren't." Exactly! Georgia's voice became lighter as if she was finally being understood. Kelly realized that getting all the details of her daughter's drama was unnecessary, instead, her daughter simply needed validation. She needed affirmation that what she was feeling was unfair.

While Kelly was long removed from the middle school drama, she could still relate to her daughter's feelings. What Georgia was feeling was rejection. Kelly had no idea who Piper was, but she knew the sting of rejection all too well, and all Georgia was looking for was some empathy. By the end of their conversation, Georgia was calmed down and Kelly hadn't offered a single word of advice, she simply offered an ear to listen and validated her daughter's feelings. She learned a valuable lesson that day about simply saying "tell me more."

Kelly learned that the simple act of listening draws people out and clarifies their anxieties so that those stressors can be dealt with or dismissed. You don't need to have any special expertise for this listening and yet people often find it most consoling.

# I Don't Know

As humans, we crave answers. We feel the need to explain almost everything that surrounds our lives, we need to seek meaning. When amid grief, people often seek answers as to why someone close to them has died. When never hearing back after an interview for that dream job, people need to know why. We crave answers and become frustrated when we don't find them. However, Kelly learned an important lesson in saying "I don't know" when faced with both her own cancer diagnosis and her father's.

Kelly grew up in a devout Catholic family, her parents were incredibly religious and they never doubted their faith. They simply believed in God and that he was in control of their lives. Kelly, however, experienced church a bit differently. For her, faith and religion weren't a certainty in her life, instead, she enjoyed the tastes, smells, and sounds and used her experiences as a social gathering.

While her parents stayed strong in their faith, Kelly's faith had fallen to the wayside and their differences became even more apparent when both Kelly and her father, Greenie, were diagnosed with cancer around the same time. Kelly's parents turned to God, and Kelly and her husband turned to Google. And while Kelly's doctors were confident of her chances of beating her cancer, Greenie's doctors were telling him and his family to live life to the fullest during his final year on earth.

Miraculously, nine months later Greenie had a clean bill of health as was even going bodysurfing on the Jersey Shore. It was a miracle, the doctors couldn't explain it. But Kelly's mother and father could, it was God. It was the power of prayer from all their friends and family around the world. But Kelly hadn't prayed. She didn't feel right turning to God in this time of need when she had been distant from her faith for so long.

While Kelly's parents knew the answers were from God, Kelly's friend Tracy attributed Greenie's miraculous recovery to science. Humans have been improving their medical research for decades and Kelly's father was saved through scientific advancements that allowed surgeons to use a tiny scope and scissors to remove nine tumors from Greenie's bladder.

Even then Kelly wasn't so sure and realized that neither science nor religion could provide the answers she sought, the doctors didn't even know. Kelly recognizes that sometimes you simply don't know, and that's okay. When it comes to miraculous recoveries or unexplained infertility, you just don't know.

When it comes to parenting, accepting the "I don't know" of life is just as important. When trying to soothe the kids, you try to offer up immediate answers, but sometimes you don't have them. Instead, Kelly adopted an "I don't know" household, telling her children phrases like "I don't know, let me think about that" might help them introduce that critical pause between impulse and decision that could take them down different and better roads for the rest of their lives.

# Yes and No

As a parent, saying “no” is hard. Like many parents, Kelly found herself falling into the trap of wanting her children to desperately like her. She didn’t understand why she felt this way as her children were some of the most fickle critics, but she had this deep sense of needing to feel loved and wanted by them. “You would be surprised by the things I’ve said yes to,” Kelly says. Just one weekend, Kelly tried to jack up her popularity by taking her girls to the shopping mall. The Persian Princess working a hair-supply kiosk beckoned her daughter Georgia to come and sit on the throne of white leather.

Instead of saying no, Kelly surprised herself by saying “sure, I guess she can sit” and “you know, we did buy a cheap drugstore flatiron and we were disappointed.” With each stroke of the magic wand, her girls’ hair became stunning locks only seen on Pantene commercials. Her girls were in love and after some fierce negotiations, the girls walked back to the car giddy about their new gorgeous hair, and Kelly was now out \$200. She was the chump.

Saying yes makes people like you. However, if you’re constantly telling people yes then you begin to drain yourself. Trying to please everyone else is impossible. If you say yes too many times then people begin to lose their trust in you. Can they trust your yes? Or are you just saying yes to appease them? When wanting to say yes, Kelly found herself admiring her mother, who she considers a “no pro” and could easily tell her ‘no’ even when Kelly was especially stubborn.

She recalled a time when her mother, Mary, refused to buy hoagies for Kelly’s birthday party and instead provided pizza. Kelly was so angry she even tried to convince her mother to change her mind by declaring that she hated cheese. This, of course, wasn’t true since cheese was Kelly’s favorite, but she was willing to try anything to get her precious hoagies. But her mother never backed down, she went through with ordering the pizza, and Kelly didn’t eat a single piece of cheese for the next decade.

It wasn’t until Kelly’s cancer diagnosis that she really learned the importance of No. She had plans to have four kids by forty, and by age 36, she was halfway there. However, chemotherapy derailed her plans affecting her fertility. And just two years later, doctors found suspicious growths on her ovaries causing her to undergo a procedure that completely removed them. Her plans for four children were suspended, but she was hopeful that adoption or egg donors could help grow her family.

She confronted her husband about her plans and was crushed when he told her that he wasn’t on board. What do you mean, no? This was her dream and her husband was only squashing it. But Kelly realized just how much her cancer diagnosis had not only affected her but her husband as well. With her cancer in remission, her husband had finally gotten his wife back. He had two loving daughters and was successful in his career, he was fulfilled. He was happy. Battling cancer was hard, he wasn’t ready for another battle. Saying no to children was an act of self-preservation and Kelly finally came to that realization and learned to accept her husband’s decision and be grateful for the family he had already given her.



Kelly explains that saying no takes guts whether it's sexually, professionally, or personally. A friend told Kelly her one big take away from three years and \$11,000 of therapy was "Learn to say no and when you do, don't complain and don't explain. Every excuse you make is like an invitation to ask you again in a different way."

# I Was Wrong

Apologizing is important, but so is admitting fault. Kelly learned this hard lesson through an argument with her daughters where she found herself doing all the things she promised herself she wouldn't. She was overreacting, spazzing, and accusing, and worst of all, she let down her co-parent and teammate over something seemingly small.

The story begins with her dog Hershey, who she adopted after thinking it would be a good idea to teach her girls responsibility. But of course, the discipline fell on her, and she was not good at discipline, she married discipline. So when Hershey misbehaved, it was just another reminder of Kelly's insecurities. With minimal training, Hershey's biggest fault was drinking out of the toilet which always left the bathroom a mess and caused her anxiety to spike.

One morning while Kelly was completing her usual sweep of the upstairs floor, she walked into the bathroom to find a sight that no one should ever stumble upon. On the floor was solid human waste. After the shock of what she was seeing, she quickly cleaned up the mess and wondered what led her to this point in life. Once the girls got home from school, she sat them down to discuss the importance of flushing the toilet and avoiding another crappy situation. Georgia admitted that she maybe hadn't held the handle down long enough, but both girls agreed and apologized.

Just two weeks later, the family was casually eating breakfast when Kelly heard the unmistakable sound of dog tags hitting porcelain and a splash of water. It was happening. Kelly rushed to the bathroom to find another horrible sight. "It's not mine!" Georgia screamed. Meanwhile, Claire was crying and telling her mother that she would clean it up. But after much cursing and blaming, Kelly forced Georgia to clean up the mess while Kelly left the house to take a walk, leaving Claire in tears.

Upon her return, she realized she had reacted horribly. She yelled and blamed and hadn't even tried listening to her daughters. She suddenly realized she was angry over a trivial mistake of not jiggling the handle on a toilet. She then learned that Georgia had been telling the truth and that Claire was the one to blame. Of course, Kelly apologized, but she also learned the importance of saying "I was wrong."

# Good Enough

Throughout your life, you might find yourself craving the newest and latest gadgets. Your neighbor just bought that new car and another has all the latest technology in her kitchen, making driving and cooking a modern experience. But sometimes it's okay to have something just good enough. Kelly learned this lesson when her friend Ariel invited Kelly to her daughter Ruby's bat mitzvah.

At just age 13, Ruby calmly recited Hebrew texts and told stories of the Old Testament. Hebrew School and the one-on-one tutorials with her rabbi had paid off. She was well prepared and Kelly was impressed by her ability to deliver the difficult material flawlessly. After the ceremony, Kelly found herself asking the rabbi why bat mitzvahs were performed at age 13, as it seemed far too young to be crossing into adulthood.

The rabbi, Michael, delivered an answer that helped Kelly develop a new perspective. Michael told Kelly that 13 was a pivotal age in a young person's life, it was a time of momentous physical and intellectual development. It's the point where we find ourselves leaving childhood and entering a vast ocean of adult life. The bat mitzvah is a way of telling the young people of the world that they are good enough to get by and to become a force of good.

Kelly realized that it took her a long time to realize that she was good enough. She had always wanted to become the person that her father, Greenie, wanted her to be. While all of her friends were settling down with marriage and kids and pursuing success in their careers, Kelly still had little direction. When she felt down about life, she would seek advice from her father who would tell her that it would all work out eventually, you just have to be patient. He was right. She eventually found that direction in her 30s. She met and married Edward and ended up having two beautiful girls. She felt that she was finally living the life that Greenie always wanted for her.

When she asked her father how he knew that everything would come together, he simply said: "you don't need to get it right every time, a couple of wins here and there is plenty." Kelly realizes that support is important in knowing that you are good enough. "That's how it works: someone important believes in us, loudly and with conviction and against all validation, and over time, we begin to believe it too. Not in our shot at perfection, mind you, but in the good-enough version of us that they have reflected."

# I Love You

Those three little words contain so much meaning, Kelly recalls. She remembers learning how the french say I love you as *Je t'adore*. She was in high school when she first heard the french pronunciation and began thinking of kitten heels, martinis, and open-mouth kissing. But as she grew older, Kelly realized that love is more than just the perfumy phrase of *Je t'adore*.

I love you is not “I love your giggles and mysterious expressions or I love the way your bra matches your panties.” Love is “Even though your neck dropped into a wattle last year and you burp a lot after you eat Thai food and have not conquered your social insecurities and I heard you yell sharply at our kids again and you still can’t seem to bring yourself to be nicer to my mom or ask for that raise, I love you.” Even after years of marriage, we still find ourselves telling one another “I love you,” and mean it. However, many times when we find ourselves saying it, it turns into unsolicited forgiveness, and when said in that context, that turns the wheel of family life.

For instance, we forgive everyone around us. Our parents, for being wrong about us, for missing the point. Our siblings, for being smarter, more athletic, or happier than we are. Our children, for diverging from our expectations, for scaring us with their dreadful risk-taking, and for growing up and leaving and forgetting to call. Ourselves, for being less than we planned when we were young and dreamed of outer space and Olympic medals. Despite all the ways we become disappointed, we forgive and love. We love and are loved anyway. It's different, though, from what we might have thought.

Saying I love you to our family isn't about loving them for what they have accomplished or for the good they have done. Instead, saying I love you is about loving the people around despite sharing differences and having disagreements. It's telling your children that you love them despite “delivering you at the permanent expense of my genitals and you rolled your eyes at me when I tried to hit the dab, and you trapped me in that modern-day torture chamber of club music,” I love you. It's knowing that you will love them through the good times and the bad. You will love them when they make mistakes and when they succeed. You'll love them fiercely now and long after they're gone.

“I love you. The first time the words pass between two people: electrifying. Ten thousand times later: cause for marvel. The last time: the dream you revisit over and over and over again.”

## Final Summary

From learning how to say *No* to *I don't know*, Kelly Corrigan details the hardest things that she's learned to say throughout her life. In her final chapter, she details how to move onward after grief. With the loss of her father and her best friend, Liz, she mentions that life goes on. We move onwards not away from the people we grieve, but with them. They are with her every day, in all aspects of life. While her thoughts are circled around grief, Kelly also details the difficulties of being a wife and a parent. The hardest things she has learned to say have also helped her the most. During times of anxiety, grief, or becoming overwhelmed, Kelly wants you to remember those small phrases to bring comfort and ease. Life is hard. But these small phrases make life easier.



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