Our Story

How one student's kindness started a movement

Rachel Joy Scott was 17 when she was killed at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. She was the first person to die that day.

Rachel made a habit of reaching out to people other students overlooked: the new kid, the student eating alone, the one getting picked on. She didn't treat it as a big deal. After she died, her family started hearing from those students. Many of them said Rachel's friendship had changed how they saw themselves. One young man told them she was the reason he was still alive.

Her family also found her journals. In them, Rachel wrote about her hopes, the people she cared about, and her belief that small acts of kindness could spread. A few weeks before she died, she wrote an essay for school called "My Ethics, My Codes of Life." It included the line that now sits at the center of everything we do:

> I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go.
>
> Rachel Joy Scott, from her essay "My Ethics, My Codes of Life"

How Rachel's Challenge Began

In May 1999, about a month after the shooting, Rachel's father, Darrell Scott, testified before a U.S. House Judiciary subcommittee on school violence. He told lawmakers that schools had stopped teaching the things that matter most, like character, respect and kindness, and that focusing only on test scores left kids without what they needed. The speech spread quickly, and requests started coming in from schools across the country asking him to share Rachel's story.

Darrell and his wife, Sandy, said yes. As they traveled, they saw how students responded. Kids who heard about Rachel wanted to do something, right away, for the people around them. In 2001, the Scotts formally founded Rachel's Challenge to honor Rachel and to help keep other families from going through what theirs had.

Rachel's Challenge Today

Rachel's Challenge works with K-12 schools to build cultures where students look out for each other. A school day with us usually starts with an assembly where a certified presenter shares Rachel's story. It continues with

student leadership training and sessions for staff and families, so the message doesn't end when the assembly does. Our programs are designed to help schools:

- Become safer and more connected places to learn
- Involve students, staff, families and the wider community in lasting change
- Give students practical ways to look out for one another and themselves
- Turn inspiration into action, through the head, the heart and the hands

Rachel's Five Challenges

Every student who hears Rachel's story is invited to accept five challenges drawn from her life and writings:

1. **Look for the best in others**
2. **Dream big**
3. **Choose positive influences**
4. **Speak with kindness**
5. **Start your own chain reaction**

More than 35 million people have now heard Rachel's story in all 50 states, Canada and several other countries. Schools tell us that bullying goes down, disciplinary referrals drop, and students feel more connected to each other and to their teachers. Nine school shootings have been averted, as corroborated by law enforcement, and students, parents and staff report more than 150 suicides prevented each year.

It all comes back to Rachel's theory: one person showing compassion can start a chain reaction.

About Rachel's Challenge: Rachel's Challenge is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2001 by Darrell and Sandy Scott in honor of Rachel Joy Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999. Using Rachel's life and writings, Rachel's Challenge helps K-12 schools build safer, more connected cultures through kindness and positive action. Its programs have reached more than 35 million people worldwide.