



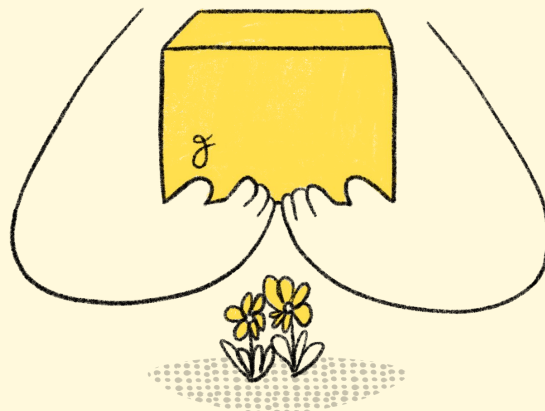
Death & Us

What we've learnt about attitudes towards dying, by asking two thousand people questions about life, death and everything in between.



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Welcome to Death & Us 2021

Welcome to Death & Us 2021, our annual report where we look at attitudes to death and how they've changed over the last year.

The last 18 months have made us think about dying more than ever before. We spoke to 2,000 people about how they feel about death and grief.

And 1 in 3 people said the pandemic made them talk more openly about death, while more than half of people said they did not want a 'traditional' funeral.

Each year we'll track trends around what people think and feel about life, death and everything in between. And we'll be using the data to help us at Farewill continue to break down the taboos around talking about death.

Our first Death & Us report has shown us that while the impact of the pandemic has made some people *want* to speak about death more openly, we're *still* not sure exactly how to do this.

Our mission at Farewill is changing the way the world deals with death. And we believe talking about death is a crucial part of this. When we *don't* talk about death, it can make grief a lot harder to deal with, family disputes are more likely to come up and we've even seen how people can end up paying more in funeral costs. Talking about death sensitively with your loved ones can provide families who are grieving with a huge sense of relief and lets families arrange a send off in a personal and affordable way.

In this report, we'll take you through some of the trends we've seen and what this suggests about attitudes to death. We're grateful to Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders, independent expert and Co-Founder of *Difficult Conversations*, for giving her reflections on our report findings. And we've put together a few ways to make it easier to start talking about death with loved ones. So read on to find out more.



Matt Morgan
Head of Funerals

Meet independent Grief Expert, Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders

We wanted an expert to review this report with an independent, fresh pair of eyes. Dr. Catherine has provided her comments on the findings throughout our report.

Catherine is a GP with a special interest in death, dying and grief. In Catherine's clinical work, she has first-hand experience seeing how talking about 'what matters most to you and your family' before someone dies, can help people make plans. She's also seen how it can help friends and families to come together to support their wishes.

Catherine is co-founder and national clinical lead of [Difficult Conversations](#). *Difficult Conversations* is a multi-award winning social enterprise providing training on how to have effective and compassionate conversations with people and their families through serious illness and at the end of life.

Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders
Co-Founder of Difficult Conversations



Taboos and talking about death

Discover how people really feel when it comes to talking about death with friends, family and children.



The pandemic has impacted the way we talk and feel about dying

What happened?

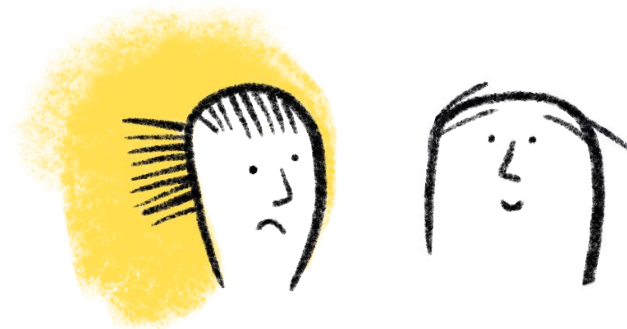
1 in 3 people said the pandemic made them talk more openly about death.¹ Among this group, 18 to 24 year olds were the most likely to speak about death because of the impact of the pandemic.²

Why?

More than half of respondents said that seeing the daily death tolls in the news made them talk more openly about death,³ while 1 in 2 people said the pandemic made them realise people can die suddenly.⁴

Nearly 1 in 2 people said the pandemic made death feel closer to home⁵ and 44% of people said it made them speak more openly about death because everyone seemed to be talking about it.⁶

¹ 688 out of 2,000, ²61% (131 out of 214) of 18-24 year olds compared to an average of 46% (818 out of 1,786) people aged 25 and older. ³ 373 out of 688, ⁴ 344 out of 688, ⁵ 333 out of 688, ⁶ 302 out of 688



Nearly 1 in 2 people said that the pandemic made them think about their mortality more than ever before

People are becoming more open to speaking about death, but it's still a taboo for many

What happened?

Speaking about death is still a taboo. The data shows that the pandemic has made us more open to speaking about death, but we're still avoiding talking about it.

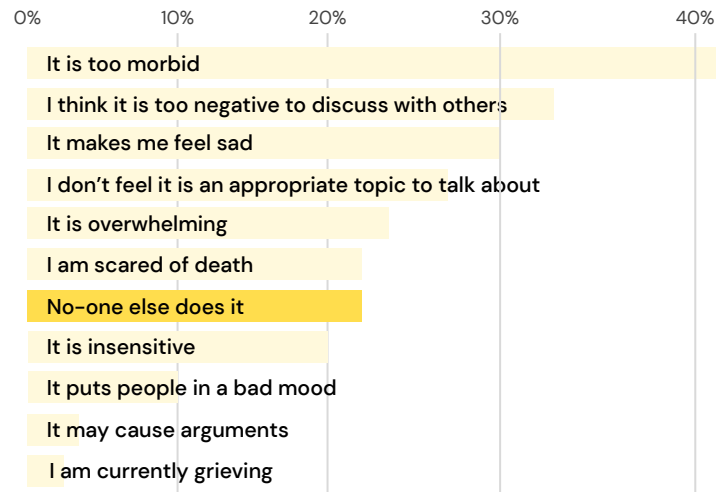
1 in 4 people who say they do not speak about death and dying with their family and friends say it's because 'no one else does it'.¹ 1 in 4 people also said they have not discussed specific end-of-life wishes with a partner or close relative.²

Why?

Nearly half of those who said they do not speak about death said they thought it was morbid,³ while a third said it was too negative to discuss with others.⁴ More than 1 in 4 people said that death and dying was not an appropriate topic to talk about.⁵

¹ 77 out of 366, ² 526 out of 2,000, ³ 155 out of 336, ⁴ 119 out of 336, ⁵ 95 out of 336

Reasons for not speaking openly about death



London and Yorkshire are the places people speak most openly about death

What happened?

People living in London are more likely than people from any other region to speak openly with their friends and family about death and dying, followed by people living in Yorkshire and the Humber. People living in Northern Ireland were found to be the least likely.

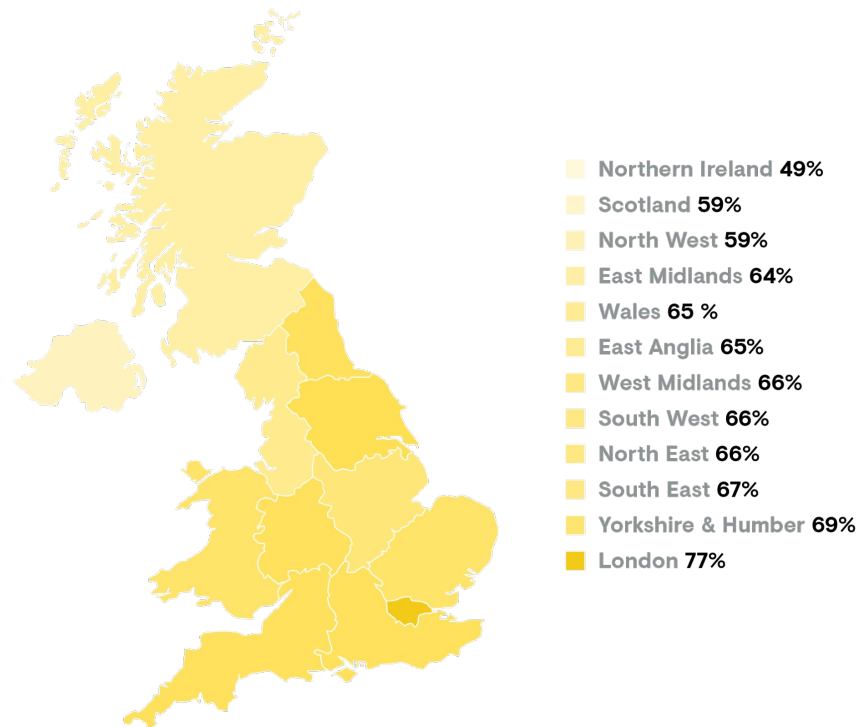
Why?

100% of the people living in Northern Ireland¹ who said they do not speak to friends and family about death said it was too morbid, compared to only 30% of people living in London.²

Additionally, 43% percent of people living in Northern Ireland who do not speak about death openly said it was too negative a topic to discuss with others,³ compared to 23% of people living in London.⁴

¹ 7 out of 7, ² 8 out of 26, ³ 3 out of 7, ⁴ 6 out of 26

Percentage of people who agree with the statement:
"I speak openly to my friends and/or family about death and dying."



We do not know the best way to speak to children about death

The most common age range people think that children should learn about death is between 7 and 12.¹

What happened?

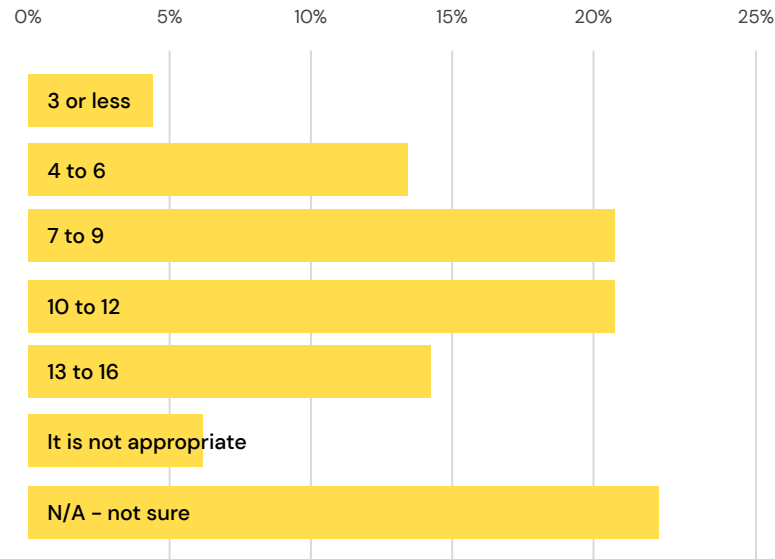
Attitudes varied around telling children about death. 1 in 5 people said they're not sure what the best way to approach it would be.²

Why?

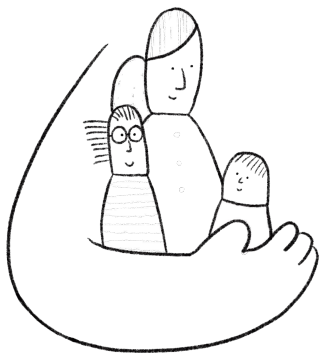
Only 6% of people think that it's inappropriate to speak to children about death at any age.³ However, when asked how they would handle telling a child that someone close to them has died, 8% of people would avoid telling them.⁴

¹ 42% (838 out of 2,000) ² 314 out of 2,000, ³ 116 out of 2,000, ⁴ 153 out of 2,000

The ages people think children should learn about death



But some people find it helpful to speak to their children about death by reassuring them and encouraging questions



There was no majority opinion when people were asked how they would handle telling their child about death

What happened?

43% of people said they would explain death to a child using plain language,¹ while 18% said they would use euphemisms like 'they have gone to sleep'² and 14% percent would use cultural references like books or films.³

If someone in their family died, 46% of people said they would handle telling their child by reassuring them,⁴ while 45% said they would encourage them to ask questions.⁵

Why?

People say they're not sure about the best way to handle speaking about death with children. Words can be powerful and speaking to children about death can be important in breaking taboos around sensitive subjects.

¹ 866 out of 2,000, ² 362 out of 2,000, ³ 280 out of 2,000, ⁴ 924 out of 2,000, ⁵ 899 out of 2,000

Gen Z speak more openly about death than any other age group

Younger people are more likely to say that grief has impacted them

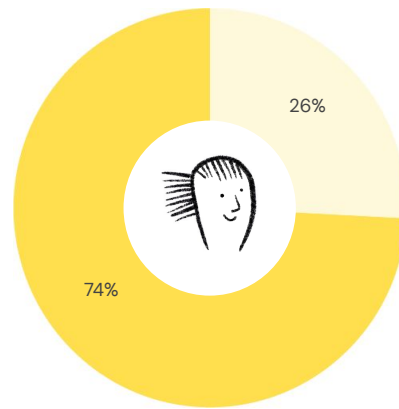
What happened?

74% people aged 18–24 said they speak openly about death with their friends and family,¹ compared to 64% of people aged 25 and older.²

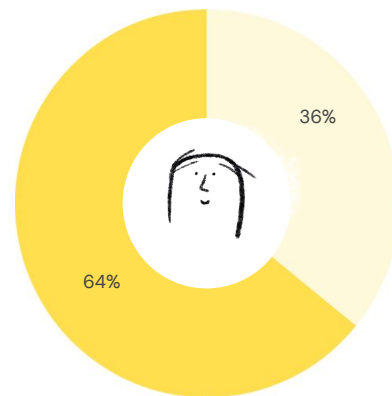
Why?

People aged 18–24 are less likely to say that speaking about death is morbid³ or that it makes them feel sad.⁴ Gen Z are also more likely to say that the people close to them are comfortable with talking about death openly.⁵

¹ 159 out of 214, ² 1,144 out of 1,786, ³ 15% (2 out of 13) compared to an average of 47% (153 out of 323), ⁴ 8% (1 out of 13) compared to an average of 35% (108 out of 323), ⁵ 43% (69 out of 159) compared to an average of 35% (392 out of 1,144)



74% of Gen Z (aged 18–24) speak openly about death



64% of people 25 and older speak openly about death

“

Talking about death and dying is never easy

For many, talking about death feels uncomfortable, upsetting and ‘too morbid’. Thinking about starting a conversation can feel overwhelming, but once you begin, it’s often much simpler than you first thought. In my experience, **connecting and sharing what matters with loved ones can be a very positive and empowering experience.**

Talking can help people come together, with the common purpose to protect and champion their loved one’s last wishes. **Sensitive conversations can help people feel less afraid, distressed and alone.**

In fact, many people say they feel relieved and ‘liberated’ after talking things through and putting plans in place. It can allow people the peace of mind to just enjoy life’s moments, in the knowledge that when the time comes, you and your loved ones knows what matters most.

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Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders
Co-Founder of Difficult Conversations

The gender gap and dealing with grief

Discover the gender gap that even exists when it comes to talking about the impact grief has on us.



There's a gender gap when it comes to how grief impacts our lives

What happened?

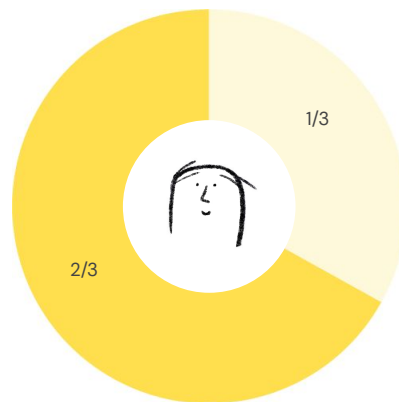
The data showed that women are more likely than men to say that grief has affected them. 2 in 3 men said they were impacted by grief, whilst 3 in 4 women said they'd been affected by grief and losing a loved one.

Why?

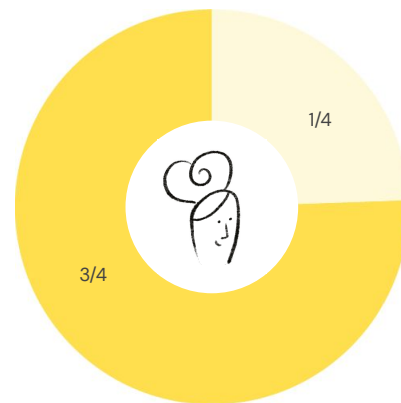
Men are less likely to say they have experienced grief than women, with 86% of women saying they have experienced grief ¹ compared to 79% of men.²

There's still a gender gap when it comes to how grief impacts our lives. Men are also less likely to say that grief has impacted them than women, with 2 in 3 men saying grief has impacted their mental health, physical health, ability to socialise or work, or their relationships with the family, friends, partners, or children,³ compared to 3 in 4 women.⁴

¹ 879 out of 1,022, ² 775 out of 978, ³ 34% of men (266 out of 775) said they were not impacted by grief, ⁴ 27% of women (241 out of 879) said they were not impacted by grief



2 in 3 men have been impacted by grief



3 in 4 women have been impacted by grief

“

Grief is an emotional response to loss and a journey over time

It can affect how we feel physically, mentally and socially and it's normal for our feelings to vary as time goes on.

Whatever our gender, we grieve in our own unique way and there's no right or wrong response. Our beliefs, culture and how other people react around us can also influence how we respond in our grief.

Grief can follow different forms of loss, whether expected or sudden. It can be extremely difficult experiencing a death, for example, a child, parent, grandparent, sibling or friend as well as miscarriage and pet loss – all can be significant.

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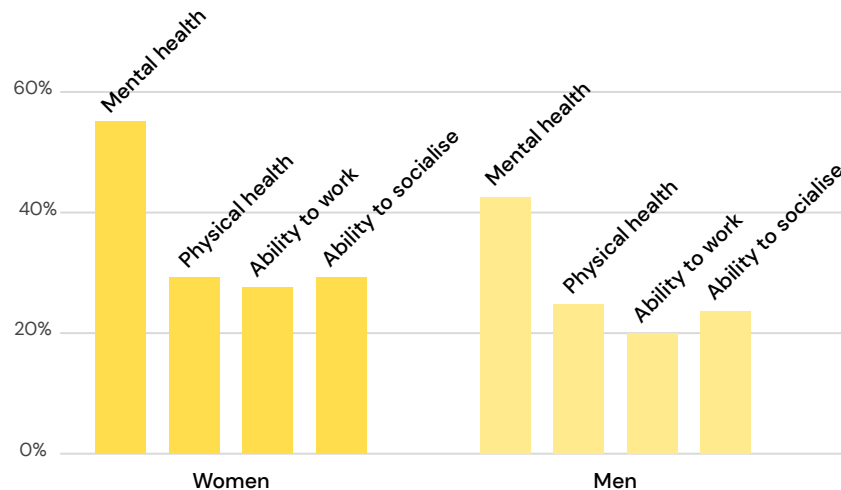
Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders
Co-Founder of Difficult Conversations

Men are less likely to say grief has impacted them than women

- 55% of women¹ compared to 41% of men² say that grief has impacted their mental health.
- 31% of women³ compared to 24% of men⁴ say that grief has impacted their physical health.
- 27% of women⁵ say that grief has impacted their ability to work compared to 20% of men.⁶
- 30% of women⁷ say that grief has impacted their ability to socialise compared to 24% of men.⁸

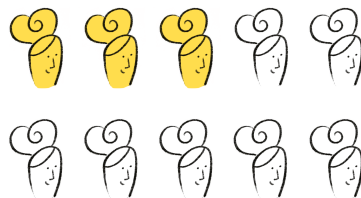
¹ 482 out of 879, ² 321 out of 775, ³ 275 out of 879, ⁴ 183 out of 775, ⁵ 241 out of 879, ⁶ 155 out of 775, ⁷ 260 out of 879, ⁸ 185 out of 775

Impacts of grief

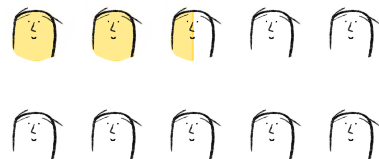


Women are more likely to speak to their friends and family about grief

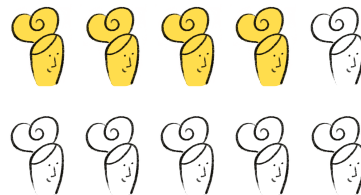
- 30% of women¹ spoke to their friends while grieving, compared to 24% of men.²
- 40% of women³ spoke to their family while grieving, compared to 28% of men.⁴
- Men are more likely to talk to their partners (51%)⁵ compared to women (46%).⁶



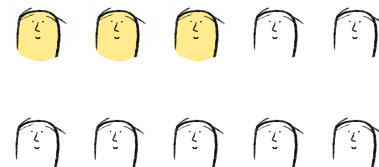
30% of women talk to their friends when grieving



24% of men talk to their friends when grieving



40% of women talk to their family when grieving



28% of men talk to their family when grieving

¹ 265 out of 879, ² 183 out of 775, ³ 351 out of 879, ⁴ 220 out of 775, ⁵ 399 out of 775, ⁶ 408 out of 879

“

We can all recognise different styles of grief – some people express their emotions such as crying, feeling sad or angry

Others may not find it easy to show emotions or to talk with their family or friends. Some people retreat and pull back from relationships, work and normal activities for a period of time. **It can be difficult in relationships when one person reacts differently to another.** Communication is essential; telling each other how you feel, acknowledging and respecting each other's feelings, can be a good starting point.

Being kind to yourself is important as well as reaching out to family, friends and support networks, if you can. It's normal to want additional, professional support outside of family and friends. For some people, seeking this can help prevent longer-lasting mental health and wellbeing issues.

”



Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders
Co-Founder of Difficult Conversations

The future of funerals

Discover what people think about the type of funeral they want and why.



Most people feel that a funeral is too sombre an event

What happened?

1 in 3 people said that they want their funeral to feel like a celebration of life.¹ A celebration of life is an end-of-life event held to honour someone's life, rather than remember their death. And 32% of people said they did not feel like a traditional funeral would be a reflection of their life as a whole.²

Why?

1 in 4 people who said they do not want a traditional funeral said that they think it would be too sombre an occasion for them³ and 1 in 3 people said they want a cremation without a service.⁴

41% of people who did not want a traditional funeral said it was because they were not religious,⁵ whereas 38% people said it was too expensive.⁶

¹ 37% (407 out of 1,102), ² 352 out of 1,102, ³ 277 out of 1,102, ⁴ 25% (332 out of 1,102), ⁵ 30% (451 out of 1,102), ⁶ 418 out of 1,102



Only 14% of people said they wanted a 'traditional' funeral that included a service, black clothing, hymns, prayers, a eulogy and a black hearse

People from London, Wales and Yorkshire were least likely to want a 'traditional' funeral

What happened?

People living in London were found to be less likely than people from other regions to want a traditional funeral service (this usually means a service at a crematorium, where attendees wear black, there's a eulogy, hymns and prayers, and a black hearse transports the body). Followed very closely by people living in Wales, and then by people living in Yorkshire and the Humber.

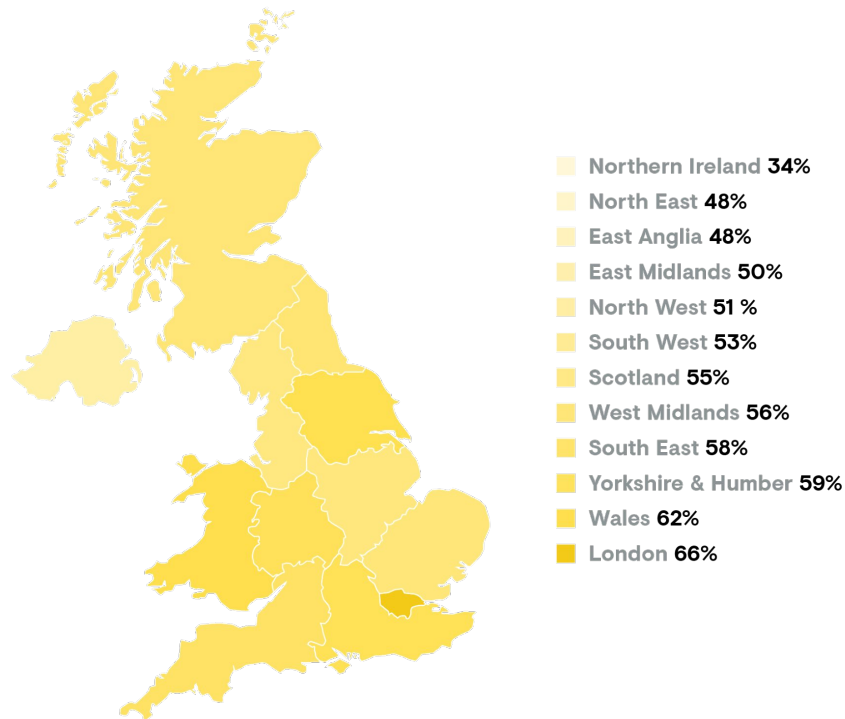
People living in Northern Ireland were the most likely to want a traditional funeral, followed by people living in the North East and East Anglia.

Why?

43% of people living in London¹ and 33% of people living in Wales² who do not want a traditional funeral said they want their funeral to feel more like a celebration of life, compared to 21% of people living in Northern Ireland.³

¹ 74 out of 174, ² 20 out of 60, ³ 4 out of 19

Percentage of people who "Strongly agree" or "Somewhat agree" with the statement: "I do not want a traditional funeral service"



Younger people are more concerned about the environmental impact of death

What happened?

21% of people said they did not want a traditional funeral because of concerns around the impact of the environment.¹

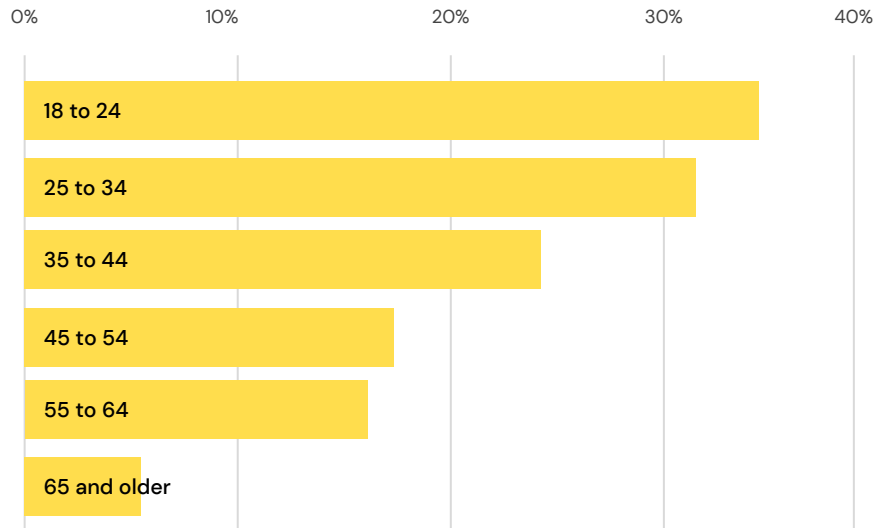
18–34 year olds were more likely to express concerns about the impact on the environment as a reason for not wanting a traditional funeral compared to respondents aged 35 and over.²

Why?

Over the last few years we've seen an increase in Gen Z protesting governmental action against climate change, such as environmental activist Greta Thunberg and School Strike for Climate. The data shows that that this activism is reflected in their attitude towards death too. It also supports a changing attitude towards funeral choices amongst Gen Z.

¹ 233 out of 1,102, ² 35% (52 out of 148) compared to an average of 19% (181 out of 954)

People who said "I am concerned about the impact on the environment" by age group



“

Arranging a funeral that reflects how you want to remember a person, can be healing and uplifting

Funeral preferences are deeply personal. For some, they provide an opportunity to pay tribute to a person's death and for others, an opportunity to celebrate someone's life. In my experience as a GP in supporting people and their loved ones to plan what matters most at the end of their life, funerals are an important consideration.

Whether you're planning your own farewell or for a loved one, it's helpful to be well-informed about all the options and to understand the choices available.

Ideally, talking early with our loved ones about what we'd like to happen when we die, can support the planning of and participation in the funeral. It also gives those who are bereaved, comfort and solace in being able to honour the wishes of the person who has died.

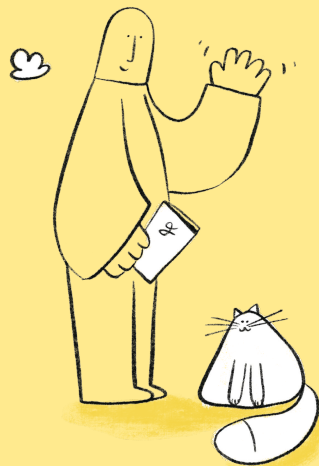
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Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders
Co-Founder of Difficult Conversations

How to talk about death

We spoke with Dr. Catherine about how you can open up conversations about death with your friends and family and how important that can be to someone who is experience grief



1 Getting started

Make sure the person who you're starting to talk about death with has got enough time set aside to have a conversation where there won't be any interruptions (if that's possible).

Keep calm, be yourself and talk openly and honestly.

If it helps, you could start by talking about how something you've seen on TV or read has made you think about end of life planning.

Here's what that could look like:

'I watched a TV show the other day and there was a funeral. It made me wonder about...'



2 Be prepared to ask questions

The first question to ask when opening up conversations around death, is whether you have their permission to talk about death. This gives the person you're speaking to time to consider if they're ready to talk.

It's okay if they don't want to talk yet. Be respectful if they're not ready and ask for an opportunity to come back to the conversation another time.

Here are a few questions that may be helpful to start you off:

Have you already written any formal plans, like a will?



Have you arranged a lasting power of attorney?'

3 Let the person you're speaking to go at their own pace

It may be helpful to break down the conversation into smaller bits. We suggest focussing first on what's most important to the person in terms of planning first, and then move on to other aspects.

Be curious about what matters most to the person and loved ones and actively listen.

Encourage them to say what they want and feel. Avoid judging, what's important to one person may be different for another!

Here's what that could look like:

'What feels like the most important thing you want to plan for? If you need more time to think about it, let me know'



It could be helpful to take notes if you both would find it helpful and think it'll help remembering.

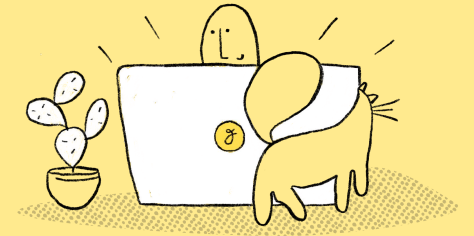
4 Get them to chat to a professional if you're not sure what to cover

If you're not sure exactly what to cover in end of life planning, encourage the person you're speaking with to chat with a health professional about their wishes.

This could be their GP, who can arrange a copy of preferences to be recorded and written down in medical records.

This could also be one of our experts at Farewill. They're here 7 days a week to help people do things like write a will from the comfort of their own home. [We're always only a message or phone call away.](#)

How we worked this out



Methodology

In July 2021, OnePoll conducted a nationally representative survey of 2,000 adults across the UK about their attitudes towards death, dying, and grief, on behalf of us at Farewill.

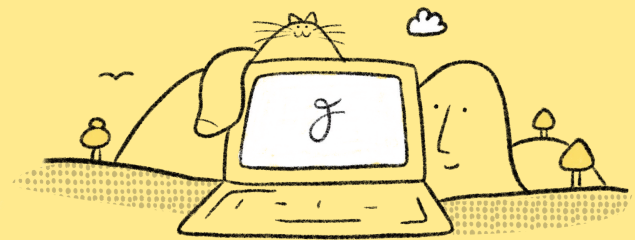
The data was broken down into gender, age and regional categories. The gender category was divided between male and female, and the age groups were 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 and over. The regional groups were East Anglia, East Midlands, London, North East, North West, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South East, South West, Wales, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber.

We've analysed the data (as well as, but not including the full set of responses) to understand more about the trends identified. All data is fully anonymised when we analyse it.

We're grateful to Dr. Catherine Millington-Sanders, independent Grief Expert and Co-Founder of *Difficult Conversations*, to give her reflections on our report findings.



About Farewill

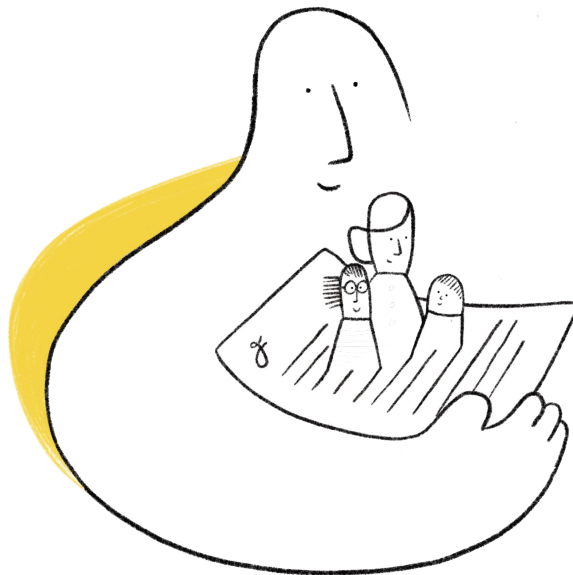


Farewill, the UK's leading death specialists

Talking about death is hard. Opening up conversations with your loved ones about your end of life plans can be daunting. That's why so many people die without talking about what happens once they're gone. And others get lost in the complex, expensive admin after somebody dies. But it doesn't have to be like this.

We created Farewill with a clear mission: to change the way the world deals with death. By blending smart technology with outstanding customer service, we're making everything to do with death easier, faster and fairer for people all over the UK. We've become the UK's largest will writer and its fastest-growing funeral provider.

We've been voted the UK's best-rated death experts on Trustpilot (rated 4.9/5 by 9,700 people), and we've won National Will Writing Firm of the Year and Probate Provider of the Year at the British Wills and Probate awards.



Thank you!

If you've got any questions about the **Death & Us 2021**, please feel free to get in touch. You can reach us at:

press@farewill.com

We've helped thousands of families deal with life's toughest moments. We're here to support you whenever you need, from [writing a will](#) to [arranging a funeral](#).