



Press Release

Almost half of people struggle to talk about death with family

- More than 70% regret conversations they didn't have with a loved one
- 50% of people find it difficult to address someone's loss
- New photographic exhibition aims to broaden dialogue around grief and loss

Almost half of us would struggle to speak comfortably about the topic of death with our family, and 74% regret conversations we did not get a chance to have with loved ones before they passed. These are the findings of Royal London's "Let's Talk About Death" Survey Series, whereby 1000+ adults from throughout the country were asked questions on a variety of death related topics.

The survey was undertaken as part of a new campaign launched by leading protection specialist Royal London which aims to tackle the taboo surrounding death in order to encourage a vital dialogue on bereavement, to help people enjoy the time they have with those they love and to honour those lost.

Royal London has partnered with renowned portrait and fashion photographer Rankin to encourage the conversation around death, both in Ireland and the UK, with a free digital exhibition, "Lost for Words", launching 16th November 2020. The exhibition puts people who have experienced the loss of a loved one at its heart and will share the stories of a few familiar faces including Ireland's own Jarlath Regan, comedian and podcast host, as well a raft of UK celebrities including Gloria Hunniford, Konnie Huq, Divina De Campo, John Stapleton and Jeff Brazier, who have all joined the campaign to speak about their experiences of dealing with grief.

Let's Talk About Death: The Survey

The survey raised a series of questions relating to how people felt they communicated around the topic of mortality with their families and their response to loss.

Speaking on the findings, Noel Freeley, CEO of Royal London in Ireland, commented,

“It’s understandable why many people are reluctant to discuss the topic of death and dying, but it’s heartening to see that more than half (54%) of those who took part in the survey noted the tremendous support their family and friends gave them during their grieving process.

“While 46% say they would struggle to some degree to speak comfortably about the topic with family, 27% say they could raise the topic, but only in the context of illness.

“And yet, it seems that experience of this harsh reality of life brings with it a recognition of the importance of communication. Most people (74%) have regrets to one extent or another when it comes to what they did, or didn’t say, to a loved one before they passed away. For some people, they may simply have wanted to clarify some things around funeral or inheritance wishes (25%), however, for the vast majority (49%), they simply feel they have missed the chance to talk about a whole range of things with the person who is no longer here. This shows the importance of communication. At Royal London, we also see the enormously helpful impact making financial plans can have to support families for many years after losing a loved one.”

The Royal London survey revealed that many Irish people struggle with knowing what to say or how to act around someone who has suffered a bereavement.

Noel commented,

“Half of our survey respondents said they struggle with knowing what to say to someone who has suffered the loss of a loved one. It’s not surprising - we all have very different ways of coping with loss, and it’s a sensitive and difficult process but we know the huge support and comfort this can give.

“Our exhibition beautifully encourages discussion about dying, celebrates life and provides vital information to help people be better prepared.”

Other highlights from the Royal London survey included:

- 54% of respondents who have suffered a loss, reported conversations with friends as the primary way they coped with the grieving process.
- The help of religion and faith was highest for those aged 75-84 (26%), and lowest amongst the 25-34 age group (8%).
- Conversely, 35% of 25-34 year olds felt keeping busy with work and hobbies helped, while just 19% of older respondents (75-84 year olds) felt the same.

- 9% of respondents said they would struggle to speak comfortably about death because they considered it a taboo or morbid subject. 10% of people said they just did not want to discuss it.
- 64% of those in the 75-84 age bracket said they would struggle with discussing funerals or mortality, compared to just 43% of 18-24year olds.

The Exhibition: Lost for Words

This moving new digital exhibition, shot by renowned photographer, Rankin, is made up of a series of photographs of people superimposed next to images of loved ones they have lost, bringing together the departed and those left behind. It also includes an interview series and short film discussing the importance of talking about death and planning for the inevitable. Rankin will also be in conversation with people who are willing to discuss their experiences of grief and bereavement, some having faced loss through the global pandemic.

Those who take part discuss their feelings on loss, what they learnt and how to deal with the practical and financial side of bereavement. They share what they might do differently in the future as well as what they wouldn't change for the world.

Rankin commented:

“What if ‘the conversation’ wasn’t so difficult? What if it was easier, reassuring, funny, joyful? What if it conjured memories of a full and happy life, rather than existential panic? It’s time to change the narrative.”

The exhibition is free to view from November 16th at lostforwords.royallondon.com

ENDS

***Multi-select Option**

Respondents were asked the following:

1. Do you feel comfortable raising the topic of funerals or speaking about your mortality with members of your family?

Yes, I feel I can have an open discussion around the topic with family members	54%
Yes, topic could be raised but generally only in the context of illness, and not as something to take pro-active measures about	27%
No, it’s just not something I’d want to discuss, regardless of whether or not my family is comfortable with it or not	10%
No, death is a taboo subject in my family and/or it is just too morbid so it’s not something we talk about unless absolutely necessary	9%

2. Thinking about the last time you suffered the loss of a loved one, do you have any regrets around your communication with them before they passed – what is your greatest regret? (*multi- select option)

There are so many conversations I wished we had before they passed	49%
I have no regrets	32%
We should have discussed his/ her wishes in relation to family and possessions	13%
We should have discussed his/ her funeral wishes	12%

3. What helped you the most through the grieving process when you suffered the loss of a loved one? (*multi-select option)

Conversations with family and friends	54%
Keeping busy with work or hobbies	42%
Nothing in particular	17%
My religion/ faith helped me through	16%
I sought grief counselling	6%
Nothing helped	5%
Other – please state	4%

4. How would you describe how you behave around others who've suffered a loss? (*multi-select option)

I am comfortable with offering my condolences and addressing the passing	48%
I find it an awkward or difficult conversation to have	32%
I'm lost for words	18%
I have always been able to address someone's loss and empathise	13%

Notes to the Editor:

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Royal London's Irish office is based at 47-49 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.

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