



Trending Tributes

The evolution of funerals
and the dying traditions

Co-op Funeralcare Media Report 2024



Introduction

Charting our course

Is an understated funeral what most of us would prefer? Or are we becoming bolder with our arrangements?

In 2019, as part of the report 'Burying Traditions - The Changing Face of UK Funerals', Co-op Funeralcare revealed a marked shift in people's preferences when it came to funeral arrangements, with data and research showing a move towards a more secular celebration of life rather than a traditional religious service.

Whilst much has happened since then, and some funeral traditions continue to be honoured regardless of how times have changed, what about everything else?

Does tradition still hold for certain aspects, such as location, music and dress? Or are we now seeing a distinctly individual approach to one of life's certainties?

Based on insights from Co-op Funeralcare colleagues, who have carried out around almost 500,000 funerals over the past five years, alongside key business data and the views of 4,000 respondents across the UK, this report looks to revisit those questions, and provide an updated view of the current funeral landscape.



"At Co-op Funeralcare, every funeral we carry out - be it traditional or more contemporary - is bespoke and unique to the individual.

Incorporating a unique hearse, a themed coffin or a loved one's favourite colour into a service, not only helps to reflect the life of the individual, but it can also support family and friends through their grieving process, and in some cases add a sense of levity to an otherwise difficult time.

Since our previous report in 2019, many factors - including the pandemic - have made people think about the subject of death and funerals much more. However, despite this, our research reveals half of people have never discussed their funeral wishes with family or friends, while two thirds have made no plans at all for when the time comes.

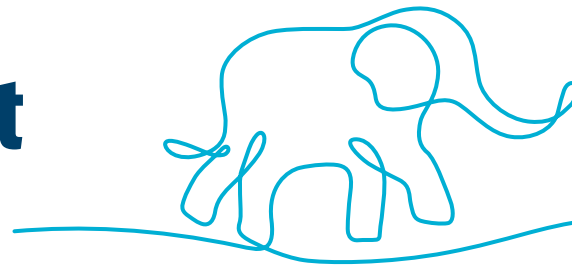
With this new report, we want to encourage the nation to talk to their loved ones about their funeral wishes, whether that be putting plans in place or even discussing a favourite song choice. Whilst it can feel daunting, it can help make an otherwise difficult time that little bit easier if plans are known or in place for when they're needed."

Gill Stewart, managing director at Co-op Funeralcare



Tackling the elephant in the room

We need to talk more about death and dying



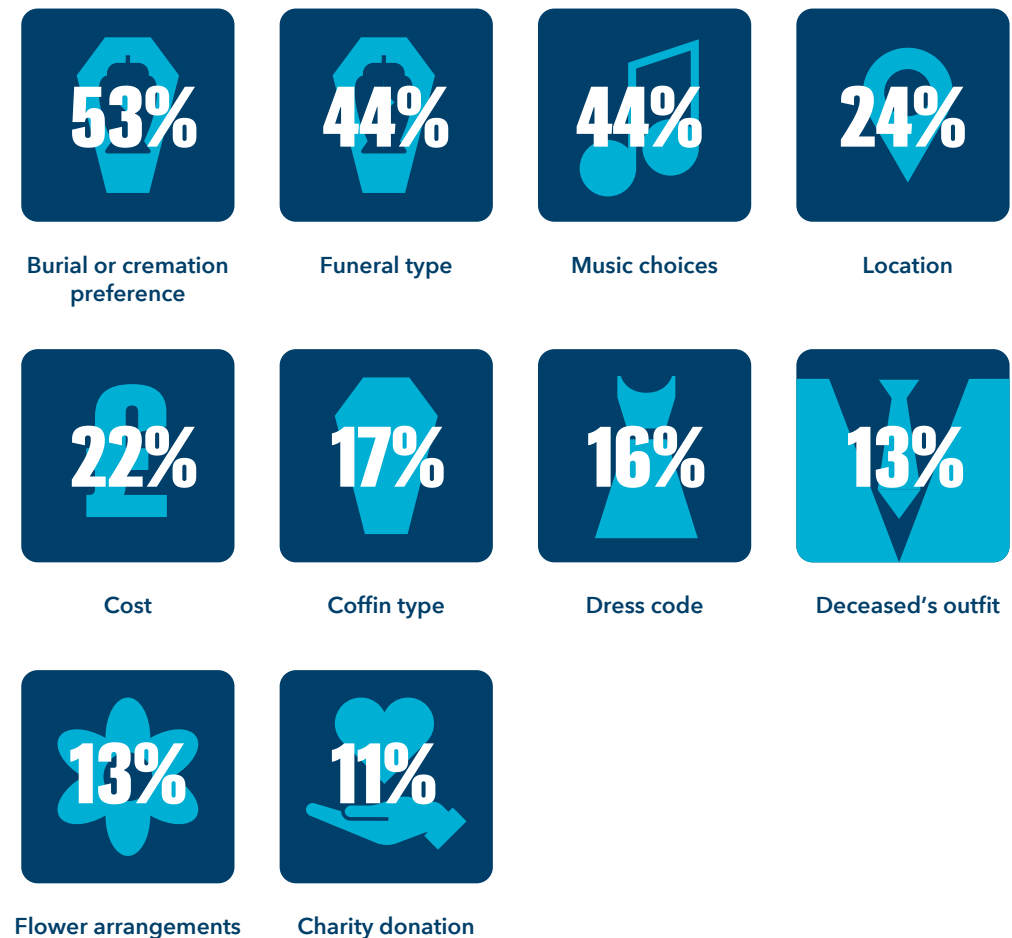
In 2023, Co-op Funeralcare launched their biggest survey into death, dying and bereavement, which found that almost **58% of people surveyed consider the topic of death to be an 'elephant in the room'**. However, almost the same number (56%) also said that open conversations would allow them to discuss the issue more freely.

Despite this sentiment, it appears there is still some way to go and conversations are proving difficult. In Co-op Funeralcare's latest research, **half (50%) of those surveyed said they hadn't discussed their funeral wishes with friends or family in any form**, while, of those that had, just under one fifth (17%) had broached the subject in any detail.

And whilst this could be attributed to a fear of upsetting loved ones, the research also reveals a gap in those that have made those decisions themselves, with more than two thirds of respondents (68%) having not made any plans for their own funeral - **alarmingly, only 9% had planned any arrangements fully**.

These findings are significant because most people had a clear preference when choosing a committal method, with half (50%) of people asked saying they would prefer to be cremated, while **27% said they would like to be buried**. It's clear that more open conversations are needed, not only to make planning easier but also to ensure people's wishes are respected once they die.

Top 10 funeral details most discussed...



Go your own way

The UK's increasingly individual funerals

In 2019, Co-op Funeralcare's funeral trends report highlighted a distinctive shift in people choosing less traditional funerals, with over three quarters of our funeral directors having seen an increase in requests for services to take place outside of traditional religious settings. If we compare that to today, whilst this number has decreased, over half (57%) of colleagues said they were still seeing this trend.

Most unique funeral requests



Only Fools and Horses themed



Cardboard cut-out of Cliff Richard in attendance



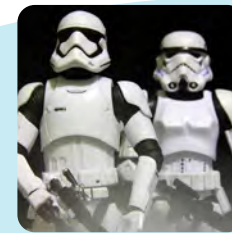
Fish tank coffin



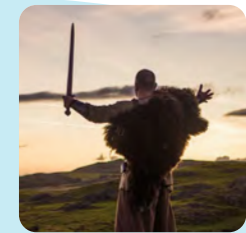
Hawaiian shirts only



Mourners dressed as Santa and his reindeer



Star Wars themed



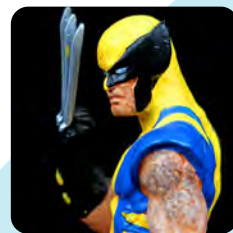
Viking themed, with swords, shields and helmets



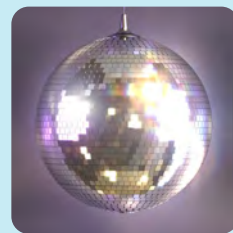
Lego themed



Motorcycle hearse



Mourners dressed as marvel characters



Disco themed with live DJ



Cardboard coffins for people to write on



18-piece swing band at the crematorium



Cinderella themed

Location, location, location

When asked to compare the last five years, just over half (53%) of Co-op Funeralcare colleagues said they have seen an increase in people requesting more unique funerals.

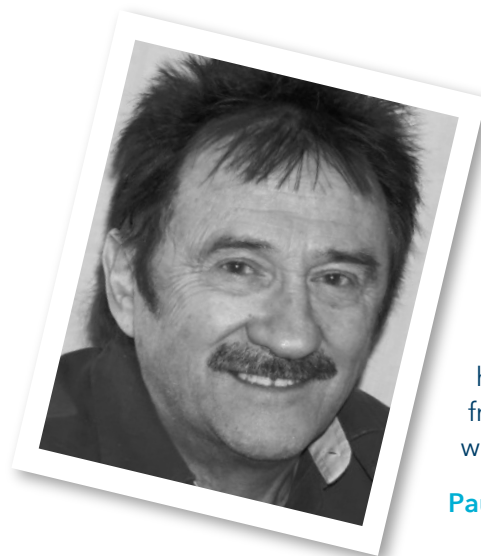
And this is certainly supported by the research, which shows a trend in more personalised locations being chosen, as almost half of people asked (48%) said they have attended a funeral in a non-traditional setting over the last 12 months, with the 'countryside', 'in a house' and even 'in a street' rounding out the top 3.

Whilst over one quarter (27%) of those surveyed said they would not consider a funeral in a non-traditional location, the research revealed many people would be open to considering other locations, such as the countryside, the beach or a favourite beauty spot.



Top 10 non-traditional locations people would consider

1. In the countryside
2. On a beach
3. At a favourite beauty spot
4. By a lake
5. By a river
6. Out at sea
7. On a mountain
8. In my garden
9. At my house
10. Football ground



Co-op Funeralcare 10 most unique location requests

- 1 Hampton Court Palace
- 2 Betting shop
- 3 Castle
- 4 Farm
- 5 Woods
- 6 London bus
- 7 Town hall
- 8 Sports centre
- 9 Angling club
- 10 Cricket pavilion



"It's always very sad when you lose someone but, as Co-op Funeralcare's report shows, a funeral doesn't have to be a sad day.

When my brother Barry died, the venue for his funeral was the home of Rotherham United FC, at New York Stadium, and while the day was obviously an upsetting time, being able to incorporate a location that meant so much to him during his life was really special.

Having a funeral for a loved one that truly reflects their personality and how they lived can be so important. We were of course all really heartbroken but having his send-off, followed by drinks and sharing stories with family and friends made the day that little bit easier - you really can make a funeral whatever you want!"

Paul Elliot, Actor, Entertainer, Musician, Presenter & Author

Personal every step of the way

When it comes to arranging a funeral that is unique, Co-op Funeralcare colleagues said that certain themes are often adopted to bring in elements that are individual to a loved one.



Almost three quarters (72%) of colleagues highlighted 'colour' as a popular theme for funerals, with 58% naming 'sports' as second and 42% highlighting a deceased's 'hobby/interest' as rounding out the top three.

90%

Traditional coffins remain most popular,

with the latest Co-op Funeralcare business data revealing wooden coffins account for over 90% this year.

5 most unique Coffin requests

1. Glitter coffin
2. Fish tank coffin
3. Lego coffin
4. Boat coffin
5. Tardis coffin

An art-felt tribute

The increasingly personal nature of UK funerals is best seen at the service for Huddersfield local Ian Fellows.

Ian loved arts and crafts and enjoyed making gifts for loved ones. As he got older and developed Alzheimer's, he fell in love with colouring-in - going through hundreds of books and thousands of felt tip pens.

As his daughter Alison points out, with Co-op Funeralcare's support they were able to honour Ian's lifelong passion and make a difficult day that bit easier.



"No family looks forward to the funeral of a loved one, but having Dad's coffin decorated with his art certainly brought a touch of joy and happiness to the day.

"Having such a personal element brought a smile to everyone's faces and so many people commented on it.

"Dad would have deeply enjoyed that people got to see his artworks in a final showing, and the pattern and colour was so uplifting." - Alison

Media report 2024:

Travelling in style

The procession to the funeral location can often be just as important and significant for family members as the service itself.

Data from Co-op Funeralcare shows that over the last two years, families use on average up to two limousines per funeral.

10 most requested unique hearses

Co-op Funeralcare colleagues revealed their most unique hearse requested by clients over the last 5 years:

1. Horse & carriage
2. Fire truck
3. Double decker bus
4. Only fools & horses reliant robin
5. Flatbed truck
6. Motorcycle hearse
7. Tractor
8. Leopard print hearse
9. Cement mixer truck
10. Scaffolder's lorry



In 2023, Co-op Funeralcare saw a 46% increase in requests for their bespoke Land Rover hearse

46%



One last ride for Joe

A Glaswegian man experienced 'one last ride' as he was transported to his own funeral by coach. Joe McCrystal, who died aged 88, spent his retirement "pottering about" at his son David McCrystal's coach yard, LA Travel.

It was here that a running joke began that Joe wouldn't have a hearse for his funeral but a coach instead - a final wish that was realised with the help of Tollcross Co-op Funeralcare. As local funeral director and family member Karen O'Neill remembers:

"It was a privilege to arrange and conduct the funeral of my grandfather-in-law and to ensure that his final request was honoured and carried out so perfectly. It certainly was a unique funeral to put together and a first for me; I've seen horses and motorcycles before but never a coach! We so often believe that funerals need to be strictly traditional, but here at Co-op Funeralcare, we help those who want to move away from a traditional funeral and create a unique tribute that is more fitting with their loved one's personality." - Karen

Colourful celebration

Whilst traditionally, funerals have often been seen as very sombre occasions, the research highlighted an interesting shift in the nation's perceptions of this. In 2019, 58% of people asked said funerals were becoming more of a celebration of life.



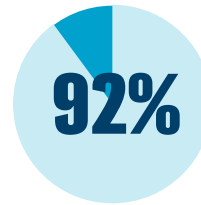
And if we look at that in relation to today's findings, that number has increased, as **over two thirds (68%)** said funerals are now becoming more of a celebration of life rather than a time of quiet reflection.

But how is this reflected in the arrangements?

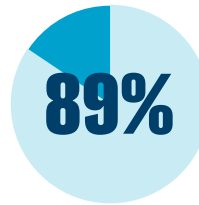
In the past, black has traditionally been the colour of choice for funerals, reflecting their once sombre nature. However, while this is still a popular choice, almost a **quarter (23%) of people said they would want guests at their own funeral to wear bright clothing instead**, whilst over two thirds (67%) believe it will be more acceptable to wear bright colours at funerals in the future, with fewer requests for dark clothes to be worn.

Fashion Favourites

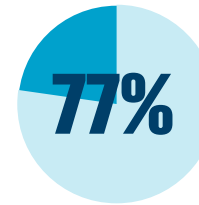
As four fifths (82%) of Co-op funeral directors revealed they'd seen an increase in people requesting no guests wear black at their funeral, below are some of the changing funeral fashion trends they've seen over the last five years:



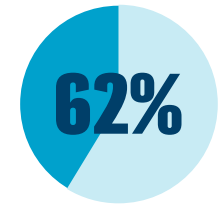
Mourners to wear bright colours



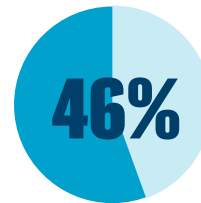
Mourners to dress in the deceased's favourite colour



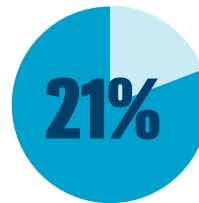
Mourners to wear whatever they wish - bright clothes or black



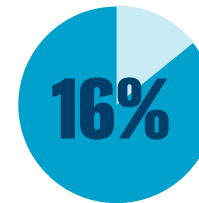
Mourners to wear the sports top of the deceased's favourite team



Mourners to wear casual clothing such as jeans / tracksuits



Mourners to wear printed clothing such as leopard / zebra print



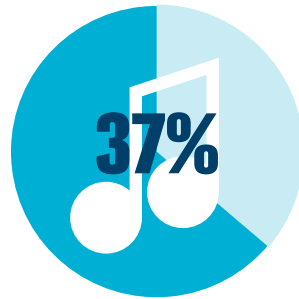
Mourners to wear fancy dress



Musical memories

Music can have a big impact on a person, which is why it is unsurprising how often it can play such a central role in a funeral service.

And while the research showed a 'celebration of life' was one of the most important aspects for people when considering their own funeral, music was highlighted as just as important, with almost **two fifths (37%) of those surveyed saying they would like to have their favourite song played at their own funeral.**



Songs people would most like at their own funeral

1. **Angels** - Robbie Williams
2. **My heart will go on** - Celine Dion
3. **Somewhere over the rainbow** - Eva Cassidy
4. **Chasing cars** - Snow Patrol
5. **Live forever** - Oasis
6. **Wind beneath my wings** - Bette Midler
7. **Someone you loved** - Lewis Capaldi
8. **Halo** - Beyonce
9. **Ring of fire** - Johnny Cash
10. **Dance with my father** - Luther Vandross



Musical memories

Songs chosen for funerals often hold a unique and personal meaning for both families and their loved ones, while the right song choice can even support people through their grief.

In 2023, Co-op Funeralcare's funeral music chart revealed the most requested songs, using data and insights from Co-op's own funeral directors, based on **93,000 funerals conducted across the year.**



The Co-op Funeral Chart – Top 10 Overall

With a change at the number one spot, Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli's 'Time to Say Goodbye' was highlighted as the most requested funeral song from across the year, however another trend saw more traditional hymns feature back in the top 10 in comparison to a more modern selection during the previous chart:

1. **Time to say goodbye** - Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli
2. **My Way** - Frank Sinatra
3. **Supermarket flowers** - Ed Sheeran
4. **Wind Beneath My Wings** - Bette Midler
5. **We'll meet again** - Vera Lynn
6. **Somewhere over the rainbow** - Eva Cassidy
7. **You'll never walk alone** - Gerry and the Pacemakers
8. **All things bright and beautiful** - Hymn
9. **Abide with me** - Hymn
10. **Dancing in the Sky** - Dani and Lizzy



Floral tributes

With flowers often given as a thoughtful gesture throughout life, it's no surprise that they would also have such an important role to play at a funeral. In fact, a fifth (20%) of people surveyed said they would like to have their favourite flower at their own funeral, with only 9% wanting no floral tributes at all.

20% want favourite flower at funeral

Top 5 flowers people would want at their funeral

1. Roses
2. Lilies
3. Sunflowers
4. Tulips
5. Carnations



Personal treasures

Sentimental items placed inside coffins ahead of burial or cremation has long been a tradition, dating back centuries. In 2019, a fifth (22%) of respondents said they had already decided what they wanted beside them as they say goodbye.

10 most common keepsakes

Co-op Funeralcare colleagues reveal the top 10 most common items placed in the coffin:

1. Photographs
2. Letters
3. Toys
4. Cards
5. Teddy Bears
6. Football Tops
7. Flowers
8. Pictures/Drawings
9. Ashes
10. Pet-related items



20% decided what they wanted beside them

Some of the more unique personal items our colleagues have seen placed in the coffin:



More furry friends...

Co-op Funeralcare's research confirms our status as a nation of animal lovers.

Back in 2019, 57% of Co-op funeral directors received a request for pets to be involved in some way, leading the procession, attending a service or joining afterwards at the wake. And the latest data shows a significant increase, with three quarters (75%) of colleagues receiving requests for pets to be involved in the funeral.

Pets are often an extension of the family, and with over three-fifths (62%) of people saying it was important that pets are able to attend their owner's funeral, this is reinforced by the research.



...but no celebrities, please!

However, when it comes to a particular guest that isn't as welcome as our furry friends, over one quarter (28%) of those surveyed said they would not want a celebrity to read their eulogy, while 26% said there were no celebrities they would want to do so.

Top 10 Celebrities for eulogy reading

For those that were interested in a potential star guestlist, these were the top 10 celebrities that people would like to read their eulogy:

1. David Attenborough
2. Ant & Dec
3. Stephen Fry
4. Jeremy Clarkson
5. Tyson Fury
6. Alan Carr
7. Graham Norton
8. Cardi B
9. Romesh Ranganathan
10. Tom Allen

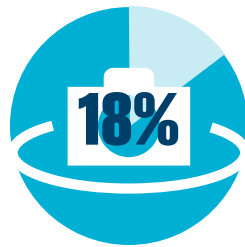
Future of funerals

Funerals are not typically considered a place for phones, but that appears to be changing. At 32%, almost a third said more people will take selfies at future funerals, while over two-fifths (44%) said that social media will play a bigger role moving forward. Moreover, 59% said that live streaming will feature at services over the coming years.

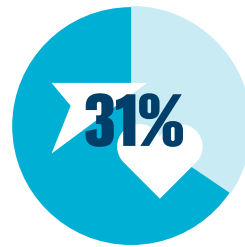
And this is further reflected in what Co-op Funeralcare colleagues have seen over the last five years, as:



98% of funeral directors have had requests to live stream a funeral



18% have seen people taking selfies

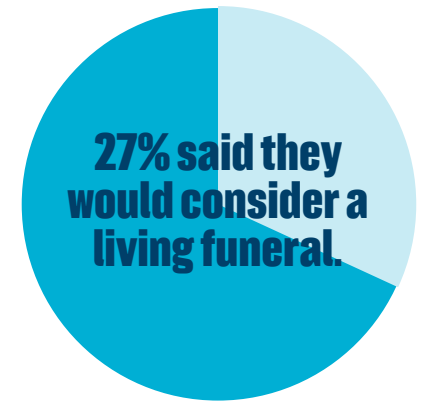


31% have seen more people posting on social media at the funeral



A Living Celebration

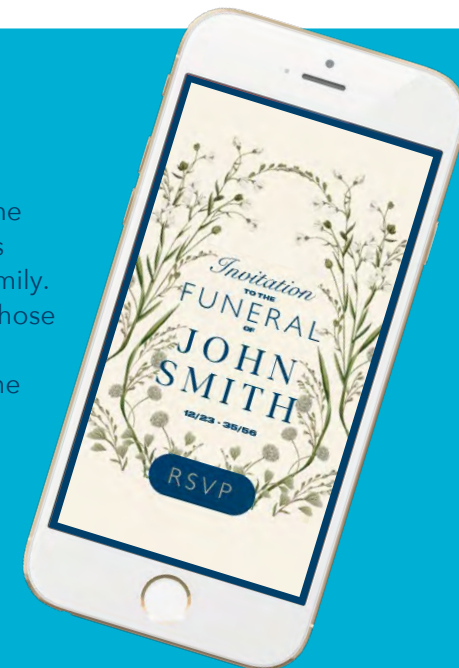
Living funerals – sometimes referred to as fun-erals or pre-funerals – are becoming an increasingly popular way to celebrate someone’s life. They are a way for friends, family and loved ones to begin the grieving process before someone passes on, and also offer more control for those who are near the end of their lives.



Over a quarter (27%) of people said they would consider a living funeral, with those aged between 16 and 44 more likely to consider one. The percentage dropped off considerably among older respondents.

Guest lists

In the digital age, it’s easy to assume people will receive important news and invitations from friends and family. That said, a higher percentage of those surveyed said they still supported sending funeral invites to ensure the right people attend. Overall, 43% said they supported the issuing of invites, while 21% said they opposed.



Symbolic scatterings

Scattering ashes has its roots in religious ceremony, as a funeral rite symbolising rebirth and the continuous circle of life.

But many of those without a faith still choose this practice today, often as a way to return to nature or connect with a meaningful place. And it's particularly popular now the majority of people in the UK choose to be cremated rather than buried.

However, ashes are not just scattered but can be used to create a host of different tributes. In Co-op Funeralcare's 2019 report, Co-op Funeralcare funeral directors revealed some of the more unique ways ashes have been scattered or used as a form of memorial, such as in tattoos and fireworks.

Co-op Funeralcare funeral directors revealed some of the more unique ways families have told them they've scattered their loved one's ashes over the last five years:

Unique scatterings:

- Placed into fireworks
- Used as tattoo ink
- Scattered at London Zoo
- Taken on a world cruise
- Blown through a steam train
- Placed in an egg timer
- Carried to church on a digger
- Mixed with a pet's ashes
- Taken to the Sydney Opera House
- Placed into a space rocket



We still value special landmarks...



Scattering planting under a tree

At 35%, scattering at an important place or special landmark was the most popular choice among those who had chosen to be cremated. This was followed by planting under a tree at 22%.

However, 15% of respondents said they still hadn't decided what to do with their loved one's ashes. Some of the more unique choices included ashes forged into a diamond, turned into a work of art or vinyl record, and being sent into space.

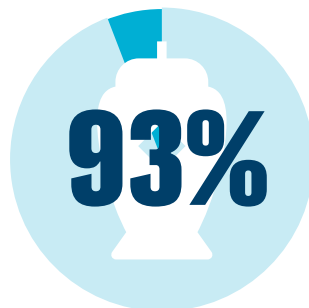
It's a difficult choice for some...

The passing of a friend, family or loved one can often be incredibly challenging, and choosing what to do with their ashes can be a confronting part of the grieving process. There are many options and sometimes people do not leave clear requests for others to act on once they have passed.

This sentiment was clearly seen among those who had planned a cremation on someone's behalf. For example, one third (34%) said they carried out their loved one's wishes as instructed, while the same number of people said they simply went with what felt right. Meanwhile, one fifth (20%) said they chose something that honoured an interest of their loved one.

...but most believe they made the right decision

Despite there being a host of different ways to honour someone's memory, at 93% the vast majority of respondents were confident they made the right decision when handling a loved one's ashes. Only 6% were not confident in their choices.



In 2020, Co-op Funeralcare launched their partnership with MuchLoved - an online memorial tribute and donation page.

Since then, families have raised more than £4M for over 1500 charities and causes, all in honour of their loved ones.

£4.44M > 1500 CHARITIES

Still, there are certain parts of funerals that remain largely unchanged. Here are some mainstays from the latest research:

Top 10 commemorations

1. Plant a tree (36%)
2. Gravestone (30%)
3. Having a get together (29%)
4. A memorial bench (27%)
5. Raising money for charity (26%)
6. Memorial garden (23%)
7. Plaque (22%)
8. Setting up a charity (13%)
9. Sponsoring an animal (11%)
10. Naming a star (11%)

Media Report 2024:

About Co-op

Co-op is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives with interests across food, funerals, insurance and legal services. Owned by millions of UK consumers, the Co-op operates almost 2,400 food stores, over 800 funeral homes and provides products to over 6,000 other stores, including those run by independent co-operative societies and through its wholesale business, Nisa Retail Limited.

Employing 56,000 people, the Co-op has an annual turnover of over £11 billion and is a recognised leader for its social goals and community-led programmes. The Co-op exists to meet members' needs and stand up for the things they believe in.



Notes to Editor

Co-op Funeralcare internal research data and insights from Co-op funeral directors based on the last five years

Consumer research of 4,002 Nationally Representative UK Respondents conducted between 31/05/2024 -04/06/2024



For more information contact
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