

How the nation grieves

A Co-op Funeralcare Media Report 2026



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Introduction

United by grief

In modern Britain, our way of life and national consciousness is shaped by the rich cultural and religious diversity that exists within British society.

As a result of our multicultural nation, there are naturally distinctions in the way in which different communities experience and approach aspects of daily life, and this extends to grief.

Sadly, grief is something that we all experience but how much do we know of the ways those in communities outside of our own experience it?

Based on the views of almost 12,000 respondents across Britain, this report explores how different communities approach death and bereavement.

It will also shed light on the cultural and religious funeral traditions that are fundamental to how communities come to terms with the loss of a loved one.

Ultimately, this report will provide a comprehensive view of how, as a nation, we experience grief.



“At Co-op Funeralcare, helping people to say goodbye however they choose and supporting bereaved families is at the heart of what we do. As a nation we are united by the fact that, sadly, we will all experience the loss of a loved one but there are distinctions in the way different communities approach grief.

“Our findings show how different cultures and faiths approach the death of a loved one, including funeral traditions and who they turn to for support, at what can be the most difficult time.

“However, it’s clear that many aren’t aware of how communities outside of their own experience grief and bereavement, making it difficult to understand what others are going through and how we can support one another.

“With this report, we want to encourage the nation to have open and honest conversations about death, dying, and bereavement. Whilst they can be difficult topics, having those conversations can really help when it comes to both supporting others and managing grief.”

Caoilinn Hurley,
Managing Director, Co-op Life Services.



Funerals in modern Britain

Funerals: a celebration of life or a sad farewell?

Traditionally, in Britain, funerals have been seen as sombre affairs but today, half of Brits (50%) view them as a more of a celebration of life, compared to just over one in five (22%) who view them as a sad occasion.

Notably, older generations are more likely to view funerals as a celebration of life, with more than three-fifths (62%) of those aged 65 and over viewing them as such. Meanwhile, just over two-fifths (42%) of 18-34-year-olds view funerals in this way, the lowest of any age group, which suggests that perceptions of funerals change as we get older.

Regional variations - funerals: a celebration of life?

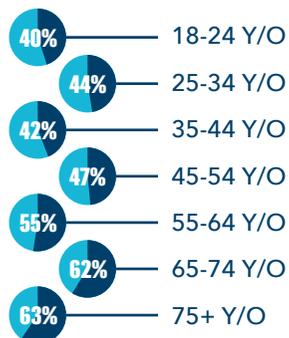
Welsh people are most likely to view funerals as a celebration of life



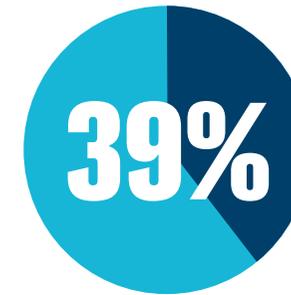
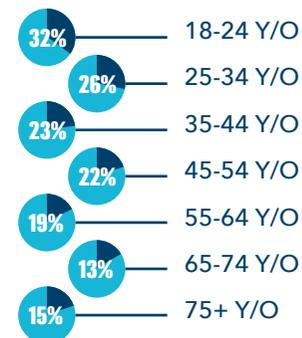
Londoners are most likely to view funerals as a sad occasion

Age affects views of funerals

Celebrations of life...



Sad occasions...



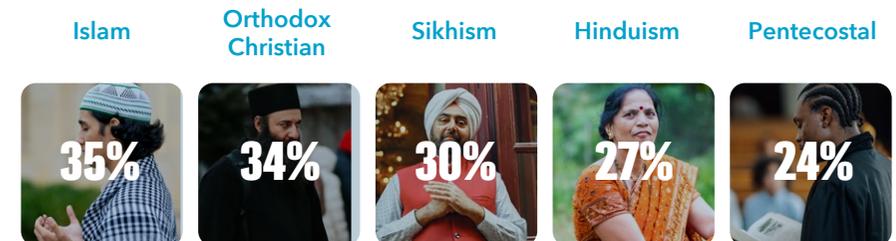
Looking at the national view of what mourners should wear when attending a funeral, almost two-fifths (39%) believe that mourners should wear what the deceased had requested.



Just over one-quarter (26%) think people should wear what they personally would like to.

However, for some cultures and religions, it is prominently believed that traditional outfits or funeral attire should always be worn at funerals.

Top 5 religions in Britain which believe traditional outfits should always be worn at a funeral:



When it comes to how many mourners should attend a funeral, over three-quarters (76%) believe that it depends on the wishes of the individual or family, whilst just 1 in 10 (9%) feel a funeral should be more intimate, with only close family and friends present.

Funeral traditions

When it comes to traditions following the death of a loved one, before the funeral takes place, spending time with loved ones or members of the community is most important for over half (53%) of adults in Britain.

On the day of the funeral, almost three-fifths (59%) of British adults believe that having family and the community gather together to remember a loved one is the most important tradition.

However, when taking a closer look, for over two-thirds Muslims (67%) and over half of Sikhs (51%), the recital of prayers is the most important tradition before the funeral takes place. In Islam, Judaism and Sikhism the ritual of washing the deceased is also paramount before the funeral.

In addition, more than two-fifths (42%) of Christians believe that the use of hymns and songs is the most vital part of the funeral, whereas in other faiths, particularly Muslim (4%) and Jewish (15%), there is much less place for music at funerals. Meanwhile, prayer and religious readings are of high importance to Muslims (65%), Sikhs (54%) and Hindus (47%).



The most important funeral traditions in Britain



Experiencing grief

The loss of a loved one can have a significant impact and the way in which people approach death and bereavement is shaped by their cultural background, as well as their faith.

The impact of losing a loved one is felt deeply across many aspects of life, with half (50%) saying that it has given them a stronger appreciation for life and personal relationships.

However, one in ten (10%) adults who have experienced a loss in the last five years say bereavement has strained their relationships with family. In addition, more than one in six (18%) report withdrawing from social activities or experiencing loneliness as a result, with those in London experiencing this more than anyone else in the country (22%).

An estimated 33 million adults in Britain have experienced a bereavement in the last five years.*



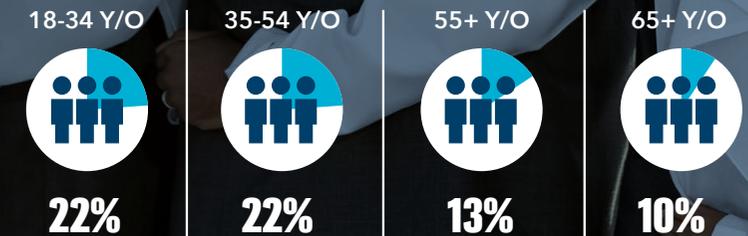
Two-thirds (66%) of those in the North-East of England have experienced a bereavement in the last five years, more than anywhere else in Britain.



The five most common ways losing a loved one affects adults in Britain:

- ♥ A deeper appreciation for life and personal relationships (50%)
- ♥ Stronger bonds with loved ones (28%)
- ♥ A noticeable impact on mental health (28%)
- ♥ Increased social withdrawal or feelings of loneliness (18%)
- ♥ Greater curiosity about what happens at the moment of death or after death (16%)

The proportion of adults who reported withdrawing socially or experiencing loneliness after the loss of a loved one is as follows:



Impact of losing a loved one

- 61% Over three-fifths (61%) of Black respondents say that a bereavement gave them a greater appreciation for the value of life and relationships, compared to the national average of 50%.
- 31% Women (31%) more likely to state that the death of someone close to them has negatively affected their mental health than men (24%).
- 18% More than one in six (18%) withdrew from social activities and felt lonely due to the death of a loved one.
- 37% Those under 45 (37%) were more likely to state that the death of someone close to them has negatively affected their mental health than those aged 45 and over (22%).

Talking about grief

When it comes to grief specifically, adults in Britain feel more comfortable talking to their friends (68%) than family (66%) about a loss.

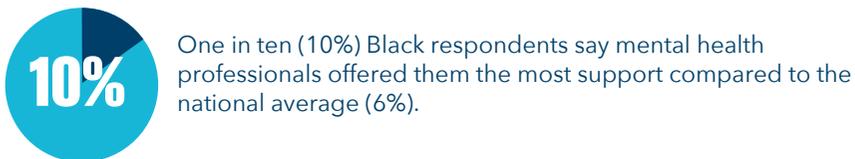
However, experiences differ sharply across ethnic backgrounds. Almost a third (31%) of ethnic minority respondents say they don't feel comfortable discussing bereavement with family compared to the national average (22%).

Meanwhile, there are also distinctions within Christianity, with Roman Catholics tending to feel less comfortable (30%) when talking about grief with family, compared to those who identify as Church of England or Anglican (23%).

Where the nation turns for bereavement support

As a nation, the people and places that we turn to for support when we're grieving can depend on many different factors including our cultural and religious backgrounds.

However, it seems that for the majority in Britain, family members (63%) were the main providers of bereavement support, shortly followed by friends (43%). Sadly, almost one in six people (16%) say they were not provided with any support when experiencing their bereavement.



The nation's attitudes towards discussing grief:



Brits feel more comfortable discussing grief with friends (68%) than with family (66%).



Londoners (60%) feel least comfortable talking about grief with family.



Those in the West Midlands (69%) feel most comfortable talking about grief with family.



18-24-year-olds feel least comfortable talking about bereavement of any age group but feel more comfortable talking about it with friends (64%) than family (60%).



Almost a third (31%) of ethnic minority respondents say they don't feel comfortable discussing bereavement with family.



Almost half (49%) of Brits feel comfortable talking to their employer about a bereavement



Three-fifths (60%) of 18-34-year-olds are comfortable talking about grief with family, compared to just over 7 in 10 (73%) * of 65+

Do we know how others grieve?

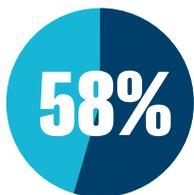
Cultural and religious traditions fundamentally shape how we experience grief, influencing the rituals that are followed after the death of a loved one, as well as the feelings that are drawn from them.

However, when it comes to the death and funeral traditions of cultures and faiths outside of their own, an estimated 31 million people in Britain (58%) have little or no knowledge of them. *

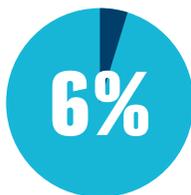


Yet, notably, British adults are more likely (43%) to think that other cultures or faiths in the UK have at least some knowledge of their own traditions than little or no knowledge (37%), with one in 10 (10%) stating that there was good knowledge of their traditions.

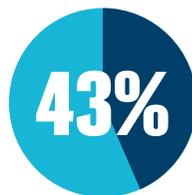
Knowledge of the death and funeral traditions of other cultures and faiths:



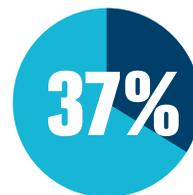
31 million Brits (58%) have little or no knowledge



Just 6% of Brits have a good knowledge



43% believe that other cultures or faiths have at least some knowledge of their own cultural and religious traditions



37% believe that other cultures or faiths have little or no knowledge of their own cultural and religious traditions

How Knowledge Varies



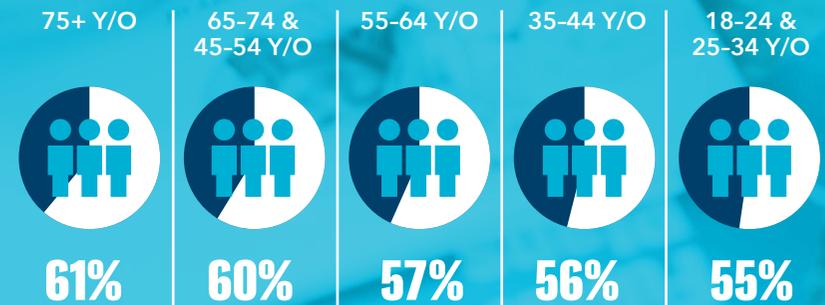
Three-fifths (61%) of White British respondents had little or no knowledge of the death and funeral traditions of other cultures and faiths.



But by contrast, half (50%) of ethnic minority respondents had a good or at least some knowledge.

The older generations tend to know less about the traditions of other cultures and faiths following the death of a loved one than younger generations, with more than three-fifths (61%) of those aged 75 and over having little or no knowledge compared to over half (55%) of 18-24-year-olds and 25-34-year-olds.

Age groups with the least knowledge of other cultural and religious practices in the UK



A closer look at how different communities experience death, dying and bereavement



Mahalia Flasz,
Jewish Faith



Jaswinder Singh Sidhu,
Sikh Faith



Daniel Walker,
Christian Faith

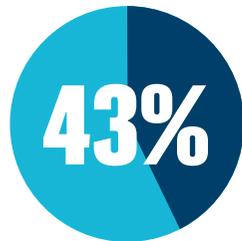


Imam Shafiq Siddiq,
Islamic Faith

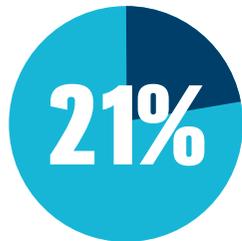
The experience of grief in Judaism

The period of grief is sacred in the Jewish faith and culture, and traditions are fundamental. During this time, Jewish law or Halacha encourages burial as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of death, to honour the body.

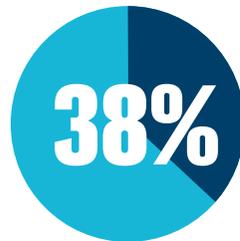
Before the burial, Tahara (purification) must take place, which sees the body undergo ritual washing and purification. Both the funeral and burial should be simple and modest, with the body being placed in a plain wooden coffin or directly in the earth to symbolise equality and humility.



Over two-fifths (43%) of Jewish respondents say that people should wear what they want at a funeral.



Just over a fifth (21%) of Jews believe that there should be a large gathering of mourners



Almost two-fifths (38%) of Jews say that funeral traditions have brought them comfort

"When it comes to grief, whilst those outside the community or my family sympathise, I don't believe they can fully empathise and that's why I value the support from within."



Mahalia Flasz,
Jewish faith

The family or community gathering together is the most important funeral tradition in the Jewish faith.

Mahalia Flasz, who is from a Jewish background explained: "Judaism is very community-based and a large attendance at a funeral is encouraged. Indeed, in order for the funeral to go ahead, you need 10 men to be in attendance.

"We will have the eulogy, psalms and prayer but it's a very simple, sombre service and contrary to a lot of funerals in this country, there is no music played and there's traditionally a strict avoidance of joy."

On the anniversary of the death of a loved one, a Yahrzeit candle will be lit for 24 hours to honour their memory. Many will also light a candle to mark the anniversary of the Holocaust to remember the lives lost.

Sikhism and grief

In the Sikh faith and culture, funerals mark the passage of the deceased entering into the next phase of life and due to the belief held by Sikhs in the natural return of the body to the elements, a cremation is always chosen.

Jaswinder Singh Sidhu, Director of the North East Sikh Service, and NHS and University Sikh Chaplain explained: "Before the funeral, there is usually a period of recitation from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji either at home or at the Gurdwara. On the day of the funeral, Ardas or prayer is performed, followed by Kirtan and reading of Hukamnama, which is a verse from Guru Granth Sahib Ji chosen at random."

Viewing the deceased and spending time with them before the funeral is also vital, Jaswinder said: "Seeing the body helps family and friends accept the reality of death and the transition of the soul, reinforcing the principle that the soul is eternal while the body is temporary."

In Sikhism, the Gurus teach that death should be met with celebration or meditation rather than outpourings of sadness. Jaswinder said: "Ultimately, a funeral is an opportunity to celebrate the life lived and the selfless service that this person has carried out, as well as mark their passing into their next phase of life through reincarnation."

"Viewing the body, performing Ardas, and participating in the cremation allow family and friends to say their final goodbyes. These acts create a structured way to process grief and move toward acceptance of the transition into the next phase."



Jaswinder Singh Sidhu,
Director of the North East Sikh Service,
NHS and University Sikh Chaplain



One in six (17%) Sikhs say that religious or spiritual leaders have provided them with the most support when experiencing a bereavement.



7 in 10 (70%) Sikhs have experienced a bereavement in the last five years.



Two-thirds (66%) of Sikhs believe that the number of mourners attending the funeral depends on the wishes of the individual or family.



Two-fifths (42%) of Sikhs believe that funeral traditions have helped to bring them closure and acceptance.



Grief in Christianity

Christianity has historically been the largest religion in Britain and while the nation has become increasingly secular, Christian traditions continue to shape how many people understand and respond to grief.

In Catholicism, the funeral will consist of the funeral mass that includes the readings from Scripture, the Eucharist prayer and incense, as well as prayers entrusting the soul to God before the Committal and the wake. In other denominations, there is a similar emphasis on prayer but a difference in other elements such as the hymns and the reading of a sermon.

Daniel Walker, who attends Bridge Chapel in Liverpool, explained: **"For me, the funeral rituals of prayer and readings, as well as the fundamental focus on the resurrection and eternal life are really important in coming to terms with a loved one.**

"While they don't necessarily solve the feelings of grief entirely, they do bring a lot of comfort."

Since the early 20th century, there has been a choice between cremation and burial in Britain in both the Christian faith and culture.

Daniel explained: **"There's no defined teaching on how someone should be committed and it's ultimately up to the individual. The most important thing is ensuring that they get the service that they would want."**

When it comes to grief, Daniel said: **"I think there is a lot of encouragement of talking about your feelings when you suffer a bereavement. Whilst we believe in God's plan, losing a loved one is still extremely difficult and you get so much support from people at church as well as friends and family."**



"I think as society has become more open about mental health, there's more openness in Christianity as a whole and less of a taboo about talking about things that you may be struggling with, like grief."

Daniel Walker,
attende of Bridge Chapel in Liverpool



Just over one in 10 (11%) Roman Catholics say that religious or spiritual leaders provided them with the most support during a bereavement



More than half (53%) of respondents of Church of England faith said that eulogies or tributes to the deceased is the most important funeral tradition



More than two fifths (42%) of Christians believe that the use of hymns and songs is the most important funeral tradition



Three-tenths (30%) of Christians feel that funeral traditions have helped to bring their family or community closer together.

Funeral traditions in the Islamic faith

In the Islamic faith, there are a number of traditions and rituals that form part of the period of mourning following the death of a loved one.

Imam Shafiq Siddiq, Head of Faith Engagement at the British Muslim Heritage Centre, explained: **"The purpose of a funeral is to honour the deceased, pray for their soul find peace and mercy, and remind ourselves of the temporary nature of life. Ultimately, it is a peaceful, reflective atmosphere rather than a celebratory one."**

Muslims traditionally will also choose to have a burial, within 24 hours of death and when it comes to the funeral itself, Imam Shafiq explained: **"In Islam the most important elements of a funeral are simplicity, dignity, and prayer. A Muslim funeral focuses on washing the body in a dignified manner, shrouding the deceased in simple white cloth, offering the funeral prayer known as Salat al-Janazah - a communal obligation - and quickly burying the person, ideally on the same day, to honour them and allow loved ones' closure to begin."**

"Islamic rituals aim to guide loved ones through grief with clarity and purpose and in the days after the funeral, there is also a strong focus on comforting the family of the deceased and offering them support. These rituals are not just religious duties, they provide structure, compassion and communal solidarity, which all help with healing during a bereavement."

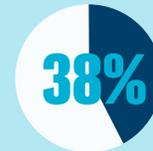
When it comes to bereavement Imam Shafiq noted that: **"In many Muslim communities, talking about bereavement is normal and encouraged, as supporting one another is seen as an act of compassion. Islam teaches that comforting a grieving person is a virtuous deed, so the culture leans toward openness rather than silence."**



Imam Shafiq Siddiq,
Head of Faith Engagement at the British Muslim Heritage Centre



One in six (17%) people of Islamic faith report that religious or spiritual leaders were their main source of support during a bereavement



Almost two in five (38%) Muslims say the death of a loved one increased their interest in their religion



More than one in three (35%) Muslims believe traditional attire should always be worn at a funeral.



Just over a third (35%) of Muslims say that funeral traditions have helped bring the family or community closer together.

Glossary

Ardas - Sikh congregational or personal prayer, acting as a humble, request or petition to God (Waheguru / Creator) for blessings, guidance, and strength

Committal - The deceased being laid to rest, either through burial or cremation

Eucharist - the Christian service, ceremony, or sacrament commemorating the Last Supper, in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed.

Guru Granth Sahib Ji - Sikh holy scripture

Halacha - Jewish Law. It guides religious practices and beliefs, as well as aspects of daily life

Hukamnama - a hymn randomly selected from the Guru Granth Sahib (the religious scripture), believed to be the Guru's guidance for that specific day.

Kirtan - Spiritual singing

Salat al-Janazah - The Islamic prayer for the deceased, which is performed as a communal obligation to seek forgiveness for the dead

Tahara - The Jewish ritual of cleansing the body

Yahrzeit Candle - Jewish memorial candle

Notes to Editor

Research conducted on behalf of Co-op by YouGov. Total sample size was 11957 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22nd December 2025 - 20th January 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted by region, social grade, age/gender and ethnic group. It is representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).*

*Adult population of Great Britain (based on extrapolations from ONS 2025 mid-year estimates)
= 53,529,934

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About Co-op

Co-op Group is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives, operating across food retail, funerals, insurance and legal services. Owned by 7 million active member-owners, Co-op exists to meet their needs and champion the causes they care about. With more than 2,300 food stores, 800 funeral homes and a wholesale business supplying around 8,000 additional outlets, Co-op employs 53,000 colleagues and generates annual revenues of over £11 billion. It is a recognised leader in ethical business and community-led programmes, creating long-term value for members and communities across the UK.

