



A nation in mourning

Co-op Funeralcare Media Report July 2020

Introduction

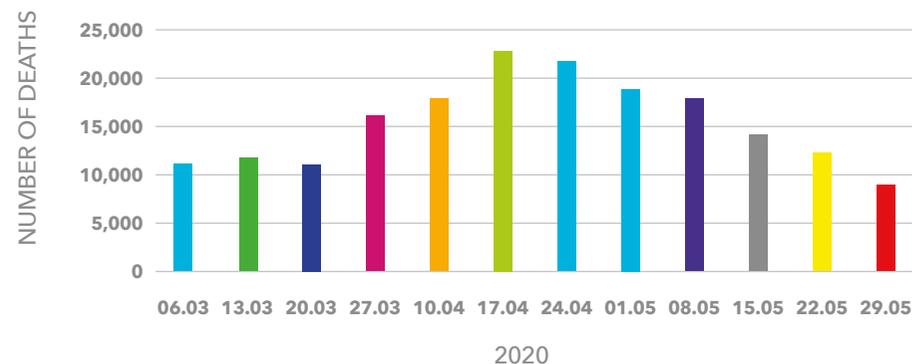
THE GRIEF PANDEMIC

Death, a subject that people in the UK have traditionally tried to brush under the carpet and avoid discussing, has dominated the news worldwide for the last 4 months. At a time where all normality ceased, at the peak of the virus the one constant was that every evening our government reported on the growing loss of life resulting from the coronavirus.

At the peak of the virus, figures on loss of life that would usually stop us in our tracks have been announced each and every day. We've become used to seeing graphs showing the devastating personal toll of this pandemic, and heard heartbreaking stories from families unable to say their last and most important goodbye.



TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS PER WEEK IN ENGLAND AND WALES (ONS DATA).



By the middle of May 2020 one estimate indicated an additional 55,000 more deaths have occurred than would be expected based on the average for the period over the last 5 years. That means that as of May 8, the UK had seen an increase of 67 per cent more deaths than in a usual year. (ONS)

THE PERSONAL TOLL OF THE PANDEMIC

But there's so much more to those figures, and behind every one of those deaths there is a story of a person lost and the loved ones and legacy they leave behind.

In the first of a series of reports looking at how our nation deals with grief, the UK's leading funeral provider, Co-op Funeralcare has shared its observations of the pandemic, highlighting the stories behind those figures. The findings paint a picture of a nation in mourning. They show the personal toll of the lockdown on bereaved families who were unable to say goodbye as they wished and the thousands of people this has left unable to grieve.

The first report makes for sobering reading and as the UK begins to emerge from 4 months in lockdown, the impact of restrictions on our ability to say our last goodbye are only just emerging. Experts are warning that we are on the brink of a grief pandemic.

Funerals on lockdown

Social distancing advice from the government meant that after March 23 in the UK in most cases funerals could only be attended by a few close family members and friends. Meaning millions of people were not able to say goodbye like they would have wished.

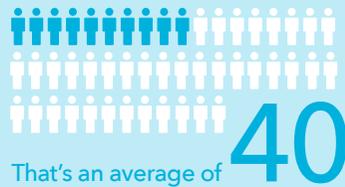
These changes were immediate and many families with funerals arranged in the coming days and weeks were forced to alter their arrangements considerably and come to terms with not saying goodbye as they had wished.

Although a necessary measure to protect the public during the coronavirus pandemic, the restrictions on the number of funeral attendees mean that an estimated 9.7 million mourners have been unable to attend their loved one's funeral. Some councils prohibited any attendees at crematoriums and gravesides. Leeds, York, and Bradford were just a few of the locations that initially chose to not allow attendees at their crematoriums, denying bereaved families and individuals any choice in being present for their loved one's final journey.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the way we say goodbye to our loved ones has drastically changed in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus.



Nearly three quarters (70%) of bereaved people who have lost someone during lockdown said only up to **10 people** attended a funeral service they attended during the pandemic. This compares to an average of **50 attendees** usually.¹



That's an average of **40** mourners unable to pay their respects for every funeral.

CASE STUDY:

CREMATORIUM CLOSURES: ANN AND GEORGE

George, 82, passed away suddenly at the beginning of March. Due to George's sudden death, his funeral couldn't take place until five weeks later, by which time, the government's guidelines on social distancing had already been introduced.

"I planned the most beautiful send off for my George, a service with so many special and personal touches to celebrate the life of the most wonderful man" said Ann, George's 78-year-old wife. "But day by day, as the Coronavirus spread, that perfect farewell was slowly taken away from me. It was soul destroying."

Ann couldn't have limousines or fresh floral tributes for George's funeral, and the chosen crematorium was no longer permitting services or attendees, meaning Ann and her family couldn't say their final goodbye in the way they wished.



An estimated

9.7 million

mourners have been unable to attend their loved one's funeral



Funerals aren't changing, funerals have changed

To ensure that funerals could continue safely during the lockdown the following guidance was developed by Co-op Funeralcare and adopted by many other providers:

- The number of attendees at funerals was restricted to a maximum of 10.
- The use of limousines at funerals was paused.
- Funeral arrangements were made over the phone where possible. Where this wasn't possible, we recommended just two loved ones meet with the funeral arranger.
- There were some restrictions to viewing the deceased and in cases where people had passed away from Covid 19, families may not have been able to be present in their final days and hours.



From June onwards there has been a gradual easing of funeral restrictions

- From 15th June Government permitted places of worship to re-open for private prayer.
- The Church of England provided guidance on reopening for funeral services from 15th June, 2020 with the Catholic Church also providing guidance on funerals on 19th June.
- From 4th July, 2020 places of worship were permitted to re-open for public services. The government advised that funerals in places of worship should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to.



David Collingwood,
Director of Funerals at Co-op Funeralcare

"We completely supported the need to introduce these restrictions at the beginning of the devastating Coronavirus pandemic in the UK. We had to make some tough but responsible decisions to protect our colleagues and clients, and to fulfil our social responsibility of slowing the spread of the disease.

"Tragically, we don't yet know what the long-term psychological effects will be for families denied the last opportunity to say goodbye. As lockdown begins to lift it is vital now that funeral restrictions are also safely eased.

As funeral traditions start to return, it is so important that families have the opportunity to safely come together again to say their best possible goodbyes in honour of those who they love and miss so much."



Since the beginning of lockdown, the way we say goodbye to our loved ones has drastically changed in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Due to the restrictions placed on our daily lives, Co-op Funeralcare has recognised a shift towards more simple funerals. The pandemic has transformed the way families can say goodbye to their loved ones and our business data shows a move towards direct cremation.

Direct cremation is a simple, unattended cremation that takes place without a funeral service. Due to the restricted attendance at funerals some families have chosen this option and added very personal touches in other ways, for example by working with their funeral director to plan a memorial service with family and friends after the lockdown ends. Though it might have proven difficult to say goodbye when it's not possible to attend the funeral, the offering of cortège services has also helped.

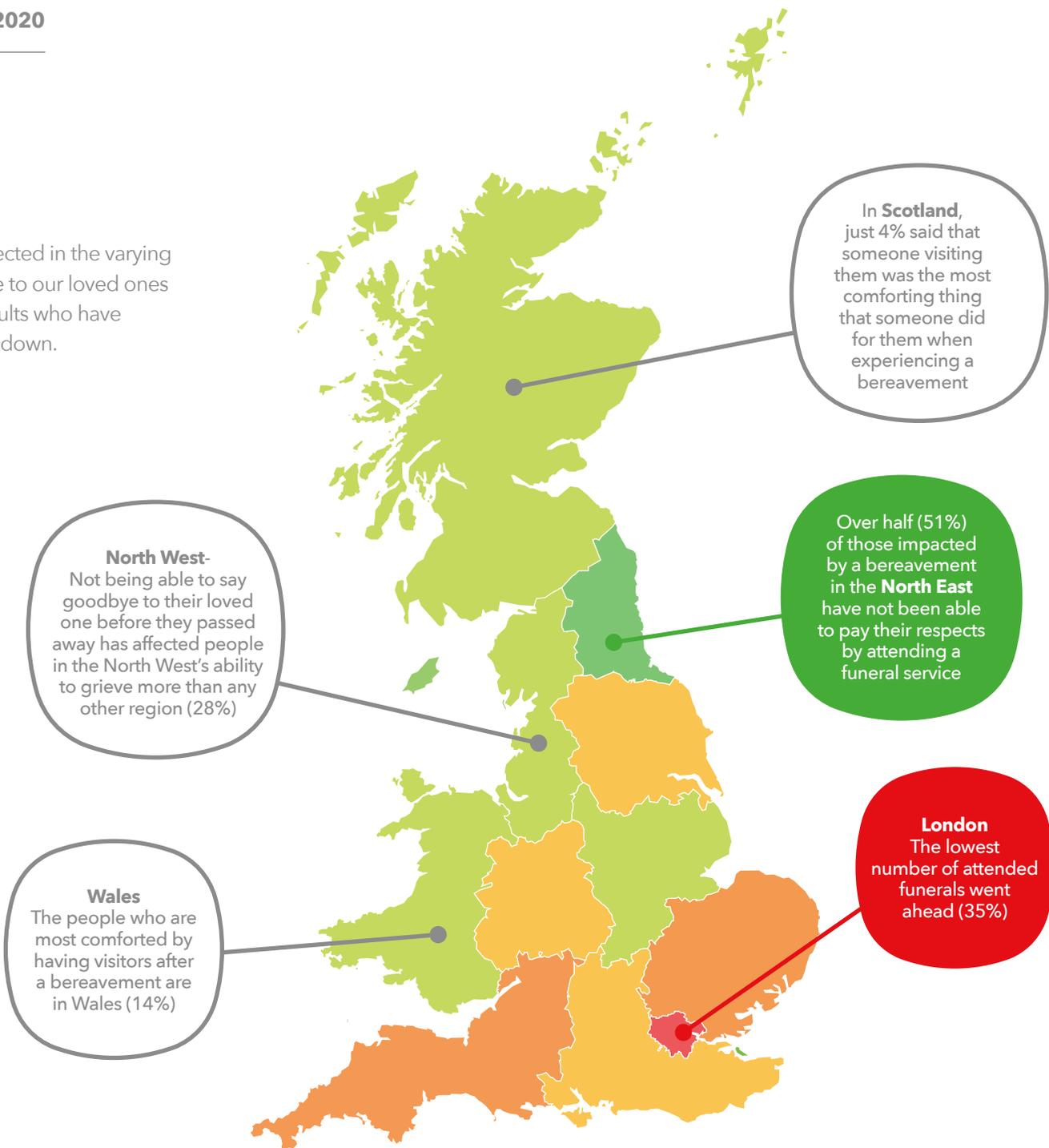
A hearse passing by the home or a special location provides a moment to pause, reflect, and say goodbye. Communities needed to pull together to support one another during a time of great loss and grief, so Co-op Funeralcare encouraged the revival of the old tradition of removing your hat, nodding your head, or taking a bow when a hearse passes by.

 One in 10 families
opt for direct cremation funerals,
whereas prior to the pandemic it was
one in every 25¹

Loss at a local level

Grief is a very personal and individual experience and this is reflected in the varying national picture when it comes to the way we have said goodbye to our loved ones during the lockdown. The following shows the answers of UK adults who have experienced the bereavement of someone they know since lockdown.

Area	The funeral will go ahead/ went ahead, with restricted attendance
London	35%
South West	36%
East of England	39%
Yorkshire and Humber	41%
South East	45%
West Midlands	45%
East Midlands	49%
North West	52%
North East	59%
England (NET)	43%
Wales	49%
Scotland	50%



In **Scotland**, just 4% said that someone visiting them was the most comforting thing that someone did for them when experiencing a bereavement

North West-
Not being able to say goodbye to their loved one before they passed away has affected people in the North West's ability to grieve more than any other region (28%)

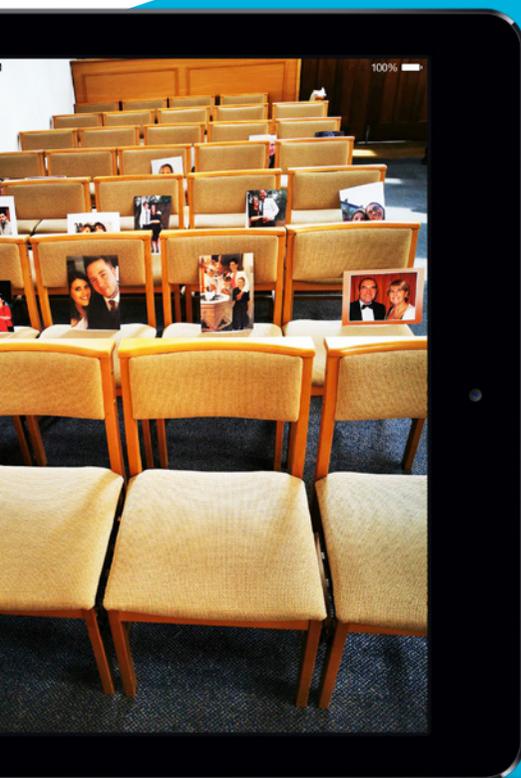
Wales
The people who are most comforted by having visitors after a bereavement are in Wales (14%)

Over half (51%) of those impacted by a bereavement in the **North East** have not been able to pay their respects by attending a funeral service

London
The lowest number of attended funerals went ahead (35%)

A virtual goodbye

Despite millions not being able to attend the funerals of loved ones, Co-op Funeralcare has seen a growth in live streaming of funeral services. Many crematoriums have the ability to live stream the funeral service so mourners that can't physically be there on the day still get to pay their final respects. 10% of those who have experienced the bereavement of someone they know since lockdown said that attending a funeral that was live streamed has helped them to grieve during this time.

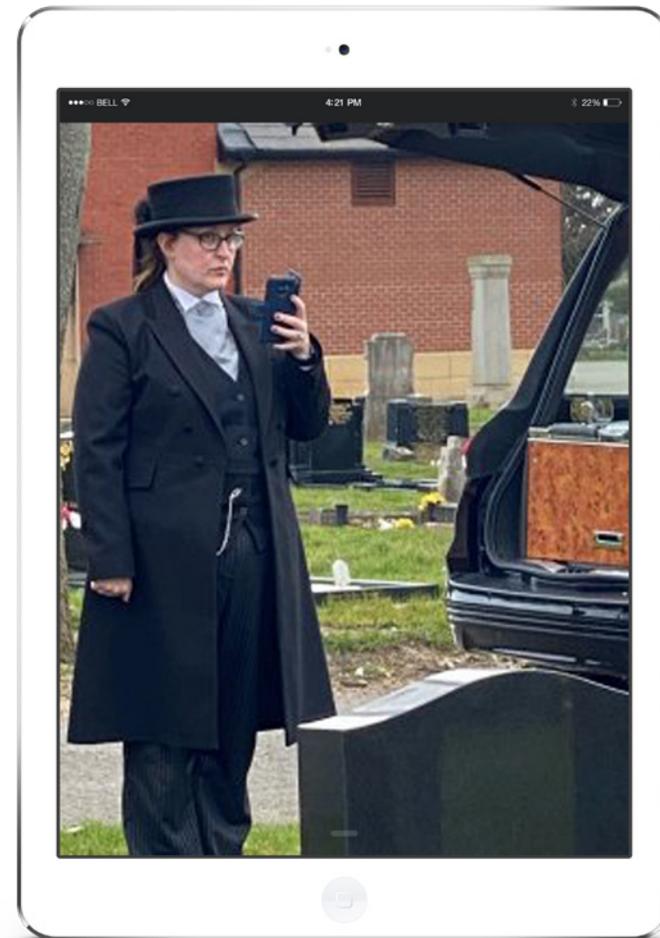


CASE STUDY: JEAN BRACKENBURY

Jean, 84, moved to West Sussex from Grimsby so that she could spend lockdown in the company of her son Alan and daughter-in-law, Pat.

Sadly, Jean had unknowingly contracted coronavirus and died. Jean's funeral took place at Chichester Crematorium. Because of the restrictions on funeral numbers, coupled with the fact that most of her family lived up north, Alan and Pat thought it would be a beautiful idea to place a photograph of every family member and her friends on the seats in the crematorium.

Jean's service was live streamed so that loved ones could feel part of the service on the day.



Howard Hodgson, CEO of Memoria which runs memorial parks and crematoria.

"It has been crucial for the industry to pull together during what has been a devastating period of loss, to ensure the safety of everyone whilst continuing to serve the bereaved families who put their trust in us all. Live streaming has become such a valuable grieving tool for many bereaved families and has helped loved ones say goodbye, regardless of where they are in the world."

Unique lockdown tributes

The restrictions in place meant an estimated 243,000² bereaved families have been unable to have the services they would have chosen for their loved ones. However, our colleagues have worked tirelessly and passionately to be able to deliver inspirational tributes that are unique to each individual during lockdown. From a farmyard service to graveside broadcasts, Co-op Funeralcare has helped families say goodbye to loved ones in the most fitting ways possible during an extremely challenging time.

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243,000
bereaved families have been unable to have the services they would have chosen for their loved ones²



A SEND-OFF FIT FOR A QUEEN

Jade passed away suddenly aged 36 in April. The wife and mother of two was a Disney fan. Wanting Jade to have the most imaginative and fitting send-off possible, her family chose to have a Disney-themed farewell, including a coffin decorated with her favourite Disney characters. Mourners dressed up as Mickey and Minnie Mouse and a Disney princess led her coffin through the local community. Family and friends who were unable to attend the service paid their respects and lined the streets. A lorry with speakers formed part of the cortège and played iconic soundtracks from the hit film Moana.





THE PERFECT FAREWELL FOR A MUCH-LOVED FARMER

When 85-year-old Les' funeral was unable to go ahead because of the coronavirus pandemic and the Church of England closing its doors, his quick-thinking granddaughter, Tamsin, came up with an alternative idea - to hold the ceremony on his beloved family farm. The night before the funeral service, Tamsin's husband and father tidied and washed Les' cherished tractor, which he bought from new in 1968. Instead of a traditional hearse, Les' coffin was led by his tractor and carried on a trailer on the day of the service. Family members, including his wife, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and two friends, gathered on the smallholding in Frogmore, South Devon, to celebrate his life.



PAY YOUR RESPECTS WITH A PORK PIE

When Alec, 76, was diagnosed with cancer three years ago, he began planning his funeral and had a rather unusual final request - for a giant pork pie to be placed on his coffin. An Open All Hours fanatic, Alec's idea was inspired by his love of the 'well catered funeral' episode, which saw Ronnie Barker's character, Mr Arkwright, putting a buffet into the back of a hearse.



Unlocking grief

Our ability to grieve has been significantly impacted during the lockdown. The survey revealed that 21% of UK adults experienced the bereavement of a close friend or family member during lockdown, with 9% stating they experienced a loss due to Covid-19. Sadly, 28% of those surveyed said they had lost a friend during lockdown.

Our research shows that over one third of bereaved adults have been denied their final farewell. **37%** of UK adults, who have experienced the bereavement of someone they know since lockdown, feel they haven't been able to pay their respects by being unable to attend the funeral of their loved one, while just over one quarter expressed that they feel guilty their loved one hasn't been able to have the funeral they deserved.

59% of UK adults who have lost a loved one during lockdown said their grief process has been negatively affected by the restrictions in place, nearly two thirds (**61%**) said that nothing has helped them to grieve.

As being present during the passing of a loved one and attending the funeral haven't been possible for many bereaved individuals during the pandemic, the grieving process has been significantly delayed for millions, as an estimated **9.7 million³** mourners have been denied the opportunity to say their last goodbye at their loved one's funeral. Lockdown has also meant that grieving individuals will have had to experience special milestones, such as birthdays and anniversaries, alone.

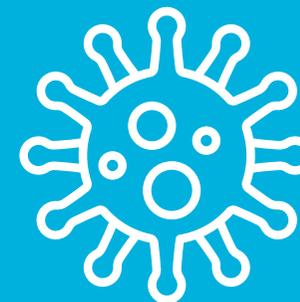
Returning to a new normality post-lockdown will be harder for those who have sadly lost a loved one.

21% of UK adults were bereaved during the lockdown



37%

of UK adults, who have experienced the bereavement of someone they know since lockdown, feel they haven't been able to pay their respects by being unable to attend the funeral of their loved one



9% said that the death of their loved one was due to Covid 19

An estimated **9.7 million** haven't been able to attend the funeral of a loved one due to the lockdown



59%

of UK adults who have lost a loved one during lockdown said their grief process has been negatively affected by the restrictions in place

42%



of UK adults chose being present when their loved one passed away as the most important way of saying goodbye, something that wasn't possible for those with Covid-19



Co-op Funeralcare is helping bereaved families plan memorial services, which enables them to remember and celebrate the life of their loved one at later date when it is safe for communities to physically come together.

Grief continues to be hard to deal with long after a death.¹

52% said that the period immediately after finding out about the death (52%) and during the funeral (46%) were amongst the most difficult

26% said that birthdays and the anniversary of their death (25%) were difficult times

21% said that Christmas or religious festivals proved to be the most difficult periods for them, when thinking about their loved ones

12% referenced their return to work after the funeral as a time when it was hard to deal with grief

In our Biggest Ever Survey¹, 81% of respondents said they hadn't saved anything towards their funeral, and 8% admitted to experiencing financial hardship due to paying for the funeral of a loved one. Co-op understands the impact financial worries can have on those trying to navigate the grieving process, so has extended the financial support available through its own Funeralcare Hardship Fund.

The Hardship Fund provides a grant of £250 to anyone who is in financial hardship and arranging a funeral for a loved one who died as a result of coronavirus, or a coronavirus related illness.

Co-op Foundation has partnered with Co-op Funeralcare to deliver grants of up to £10,000 for projects that help young people to support each other through bereavement. The funding will help build confidence, skills and a sense of belonging among young bereaved people, while helping them to make a long-term impact on their peers who have gone through similar experiences.

While grief itself is not a mental health problem, it can cause mental health problems for some of us. Co-op is working with its partners Mind, SAMH and Inspire to encourage those affected by grief to access support from bereavement charities before their mental health deteriorates.





Sam Tyrer, MD of
Co-op Funeralcare

"The nation has experienced a devastating time of great loss and we will continue to feel the repercussions of the pandemic for months, and even years, to come. Our colleagues have worked tirelessly to support bereaved families, protect communities, and provide the most thoughtful and unique tributes to loved ones despite the challenges we have faced. It's vital we all play our part in supporting those who have experienced great loss and as communities, we all have a part to play in ensuring that no one feels alone in their grief."

Stephen Buckley,
Head of Information at Mind

"The loss of a loved one during the pandemic is leaving many people struggling with grief. In most cases, grief is not a diagnosable mental health problem. It is absolutely normal that grief places strain on our everyday lives and it can take a long time to adapt to life after a loss. If you feel that you're mental health is suffering following a bereavement beyond the stages of grief or if you have an existing mental health problem that is being worsened following a bereavement and you're struggling to cope, it's important to seek help, speak to a loved one, GP or contact a bereavement charity."



“
Talking
grief
”



Andy Langford,
Cruse Bereavement Care
Clinical Director

"When you feel you have no control over how you can grieve, and over how you can experience those last moments with someone, that can complicate how you grieve. There are things people can do, such as live streaming the funeral or holding a memorial at home. However, the most important thing is to keep in contact with others as you're going through this unprecedented and upsetting experience. Similarly, if you know someone struggling, we would encourage you to reach out to them or refer them to an organisation like Cruse. Just knowing someone is there for them can make all the difference."

Jon Levett,
Chief Executive of the National
Association of Funeral Directors

"Funeral directors found their role changed, in almost every way, overnight. Working within the restrictions, to ensure they could safely care for people who had died and those who mourned them, their determination to find ways to comfort families and help them to plan funerals that are personal and meaningful has been both humbling to witness and a privilege to support. The pandemic has also brought the quiet professionalism of funeral directors, and the difficult nature of their job they do, to the fore. Witnessing the funeral of a loved one is an important part of the grieving process, and reducing funerals to their most essential elements has provoked a national conversation about the importance of being there to say goodbye."



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Note to editors:

Research was commissioned by YouGov and took place between 7th and 13th May 2020.

Research was conducted with a total sample of 9551 UK adults, with 2008 respondents having experienced a bereavement during lockdown, and 9% stating a bereavement was due to coronavirus.

The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

¹ Results revealed from our 2018, Biggest Ever Survey

² We used the number of funerals Co-op Funeralcare carried out during lockdown and the Co-op's market share to estimate the total number of funerals carried out across the country by all funeral directors.

³ Co-op Funeralcare allows a maximum of 10 attendees to attend funerals under the discussed restrictions. Our Biggest Ever Survey report revealed that on average 50 people attend a funeral in the UK. We multiplied the estimated total number of funerals by an estimated 40 who have been unable to attend due to lockdown restrictions to reach the estimated total.

