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Death Cafes

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A death cafe is a non-profit get together where people can discuss death, bereavement, and end-of-life plans over food and drink, typically tea and cake. Discussions liberate the conversation from the traditional domain of health professionals, priests and undertakers and put a fresh spin on death. The goal of the cafes is to help people consider their own mortality, discuss matters related to dying, and make plans for their own death – in the process finding satisfaction and developing a zest for living.

Death Cafes started when Bernard Crettaz organised the first Café Mortel in Switzerland in 2004. Jon Underwood, a UK web developer, was inspired by Crettaz's work and introduced the Death Cafe to London in 2011. Across the world, 19,246 Death Cafes have now been held in 93 countries – a total of around 192,460 participants. Many people have been inspired to organise their own events in community venues.

Issues to ponder can be presented as starters, mains and desserts, although there is no set formula. The venues are safe spaces where everything discussed remains confidential, and there is no agenda – the group drives the conversation.

Questions asked to provoke discussion include the likes of 'What makes for a good death?', 'What words do you want on your tombstone?', 'Which is more important, longevity or quality of life?' and 'How would you like to be remembered?'

Participants typically feel uplifted and motivated to make the most of the rest of their lives. Breaking down the taboo around death is a profoundly liberating experience for those taking part – meanwhile sharing not only frees up individuals to live their best lives, it also makes for well-informed families and friends, and a stronger, healthier community.

Useful websites

Death Cafe

The Guardian

HUCK

Poppy's Funerals

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Date: 2025-07-01

Translation disclaimer: Content originally written in English.