2026 Research By empathy.

Grief in the Age of AI

How people are turning to AI for emotional support, practical help, and connection — and what it means for the future of compassionate care.

Table of Contents

FOREWORD	A letter from our Co-Founder & CTO	02
INTRODUCTION	People needed something, and AI was there	03
PART ONE	Where do people go in grief?	04
PART TWO	Grief meets AI	08
PART THREE	What people will — and won't — accept	15
CONCLUSION	The case for a hybrid model	19
	Methodology	20

A letter from our Co-Founder & CTO

I say this as both a human and a builder: *grief is not an issue technology can solve alone.* It is layered, complex, and incredibly personal, and anyone who has lost a loved one knows this innately. But technology, when designed with intention, can do meaningful work on both sides of that experience: clearing the administrative weight that compounds loss, and equipping the humans providing care to show up with more presence and less burden. The most powerful version of grief support isn't AI or human care. It's both, working exactly as they should. I know this because of the work we do at Empathy.

We've spent years building systems that bring human-centered support to millions of people navigating life's hardest moments, at the scale only technology makes possible. We sit at a rare intersection: we understand grief deeply because of extensive insight gained from real-world outcomes, and we work to innovate within the financial and institutional ecosystems that shape how loss is handled in practice. Our unique position means we've known this to be true for quite some time: *AI is entering the grief space, whether these industries are ready or not.*

People are already turning to AI for comfort in moments of isolation, for answers when professional support is out of reach, and for help with the practical, administrative tasks that loss requires. Our research across more than 6,000 people in the US, UK, and Canada makes that crystal clear. This data also reveals that most people are using AI in challenging moments without the frameworks, ethical guardrails, context, or coherent systems they expect. That is the gap this report is designed to acknowledge.

I think ceaselessly about how Empathy's mandate has run far deeper than 'meeting the present moment' in AI — it is to anticipate and iterate, to build tools and systems to serve people at scale, especially in hard moments.

We've deliberately chosen to build Empathy's own AI to serve as an operating system for our frontline care managers: unlocking care coordination, providing meaningful resources before people need them, managing the complexity of estate administration, and enabling the conversations that help families plan ahead.

Because our tools are used by people on the worst days of their lives, we've had to solve real problems around trust, tone, and ensuring the human elements of loss are handled by humans doing what they do best: showing up equipped and fully present in these hard moments. We believe that distinction matters, and this report explains why.

The findings of this research should challenge every startup building with intent, specificity, and human problems in mind to design tech worthy of the nuanced experiences people have.

If our mission at Empathy is any indication, building with purpose is how we get there.

Yonatan Bergman
Co-Founder & CTO at **empathy.**

Introduction

People needed something, and AI was there.

Grief has always been a human experience. It has also always been a practical one — full of tasks, timelines, and decisions that demand attention regardless of how a person is feeling. For decades, the systems meant to support people through it have been built around transactions: the claim filed, the estate settled, the leave taken. The emotional reality of loss has largely been left to family, to faith, and to the communities that surround a bereaved person.

That picture is changing. Today, people are using AI to manage everything from health to finances, and lately, relationships — so it follows that AI is now entering the grief space. AI is already part of how a growing number of people seek information, comfort, and practical help after a loss. This is reality *now*, and it is moving faster than most institutions have kept pace with.

To understand what this shift means for families, for employers, for insurers, and for the broader ecosystem of care, Empathy surveyed 6,002 people across the UK, US, and Canada who have lived experiences of grief and loss. Our goal was to measure AI adoption and to understand the conditions under which people turn to AI, what they find when they do, what they need that they are not getting, and where the human-AI boundary must hold.

What we found is that most people still rely on family and close relationships as the primary anchor of their support in grief. But today, people are using AI in grief — often in unguided, ad hoc ways — because they needed *something*, and AI was there.

This distinction matters because the absence of design *is itself a kind of design*. When people turn to general-purpose AI tools in moments of acute grief without context, expertise, or safeguards, the results are mixed: although nearly all of those who used AI in grief found some value in it, most also experienced friction, emotional discomfort, or uncertainty. Having supported families through loss at scale — logging millions of interactions as the first company to deliver tech-enabled grief support broadly — we bring a dataset and depth of expertise on a topic where rigorous, large-scale study is almost entirely absent.

The research that follows reflects that two things can be true: AI offers real value in grief, but its impact is limited without infrastructure. The organizations willing to engage that complexity honestly will define what responsible grief support looks like for years to come.

Part One

When grief arrives, where do people turn?

The foundation of grief support is still human

Family and friends remain the first and most relied-upon source of help across every geography and generation in our research. Formal systems (therapy, institutional leave, digital tools) play a secondary role.

As prominent as those sources are, they simply aren't meeting a grieving person's full need. Only 31% of respondents said they had all the support they needed.

The majority did not — and their unmet needs are concentrated in the most human categories: emotional closeness, time, and presence.

The gaps are widest among younger generations, who are grieving with thinner safety nets and higher expectations for structured support. In short: **AI is showing up where existing systems fall short.**

The primary sources of support during grief

57% Getting support from family

44% Getting support from friends

13% Paid bereavement leave from work

11% Faith community or spiritual practice

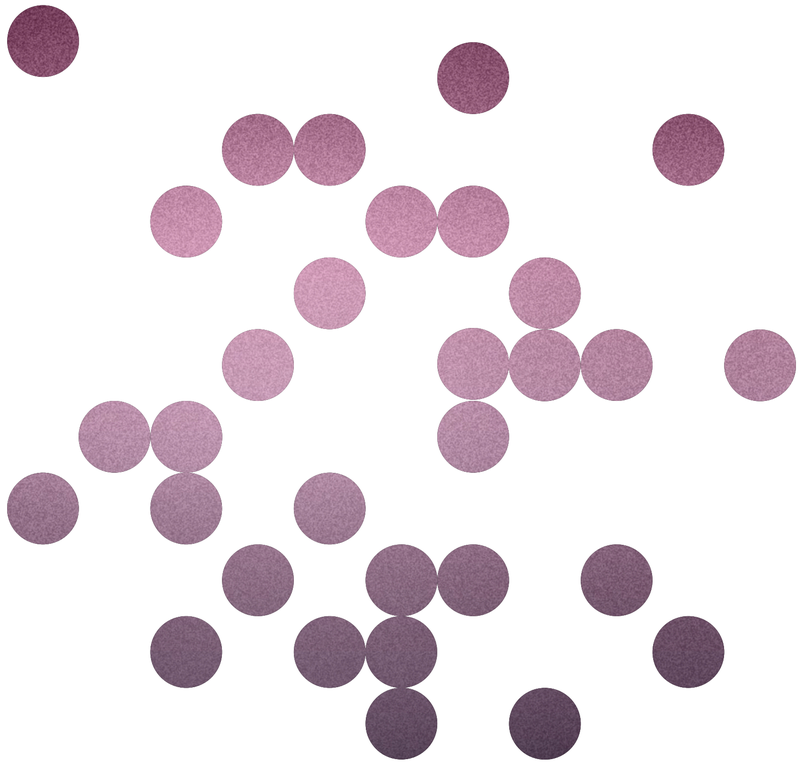
10% In-person therapy or counselling

6% Digital tools

Unmet support needs

Even with family, friends, and formal support in place, most people say something is still missing. The shortfall concentrates in the most human categories: time, presence, and emotional closeness.

31% said they had all the support they needed



22% Wished for more emotional support from family or friends

21% needed more time off or flexibility

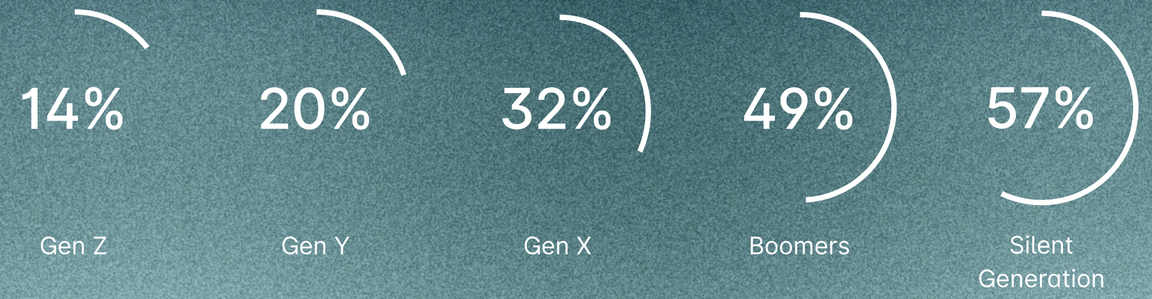
15% wanted in-person therapy they couldn't access

Support works... coverage doesn't.

When people can access support, whether from family, friends, or digital tools, it works. Family and friends rate at 95%, digital tools close behind at 88%. The real gap isn't quality. It's coverage, and it runs sharply along generational lines: just 14% of Gen Z feel they have all the support they need, compared to 57% of the Silent Generation.

The people with the thinnest support behind them are also the ones with the most reason to look elsewhere for it.

Generational gap in feeling fully supported



Support works when accessed, and how helpfulness stacks up:

95% Family

95% Friends

88% Digital Tools

Part Two

Grief meets AI

"Grief doesn't keep business hours. People fall apart at 2 a.m, on a Tuesday, when no one picks up. We've built a world that prizes speed and convenience, and grief resists both. It humbles us, slows us down, reminds us that love is fragile. When the systems meant to carry people through loss aren't there, people reach for whatever is.

The question is whether what they find was built with any understanding of what grief actually asks of us."

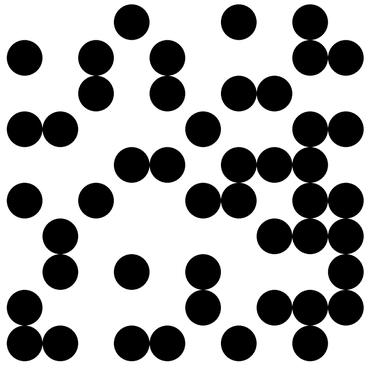
David Kessler

Grief Expert, Chief Empathy Officer

Awareness of AI grief tools

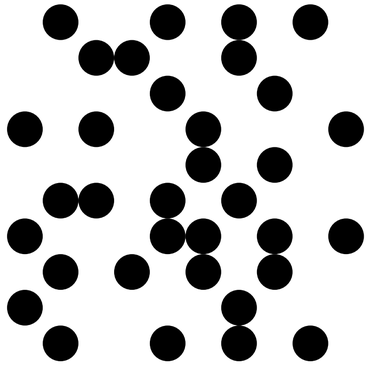
Nearly one in four AI users have already turned to it in grief. Among Gen Z, that figure is nearly 40% — a generation that feels least supported through loss and has normalized AI in ways older generations haven't. But the more surprising finding is how open older generations are. Across age groups, people turn to AI when isolated, when support is unavailable, and when the practical demands of loss feel unmanageable.

They are finding real value in it, and also running into real friction, including emotional uncertainty around dependency and artificiality. Unfortunately, what we are seeing in the numbers looks like improvisation at scale rather than purposeful engagement. People are reaching for whatever is available, with no guidance or ethical framework around them.



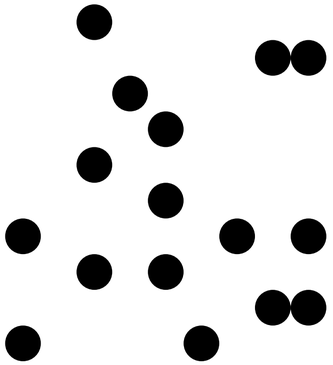
47%

had heard of general chatbots



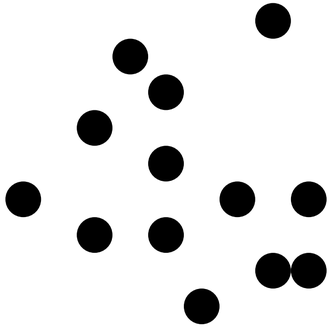
34%

were not aware of any AI grief tools



16%

aware of memorial apps



13%

aware of griefbots or interactive avatars

AI in grief — who's turning to it most

AI use in grief is gaining traction across generations, led by Gen Z and Millennials, who are turning to it at nearly twice the rate of older cohorts.

24% of AI users have used it during grief

Why people turned to AI in grief

31%	emotional comfort
29%	faster support
25%	could not access or afford professional support
20%	no one else to turn to
20%	practical help

Types of AI used in grief

25%
practical grief-related tasks

19%
memory preservation tools

45%
emotional chatbot support

11%
avatar simulation of the deceased

12%
voice cloning

What AI delivers in grief, and where it falls short

97%

Reported at least one positive impact

Negative experiences reported:

Concerns about emotional dependence	28%
Interaction felt artificial	25%
Emotional uncertainty about the tool	21%
Sense of boundary crossing	18%
Respondents from Gen Z reported no negative experiences	7%

Positive impacts reported:

Emotional comfort	39%
Feeling less alone	34%
More able to talk about grief with others	28%
Felt more ready to return to work and responsibilities	25%
Of full-time workers said AI helped them show up at work more effectively	28%

Part Three

What people will — and won't — accept

Openness to using AI in grief

50%
Gen Y

45%
Gen X

42%
Gen Z

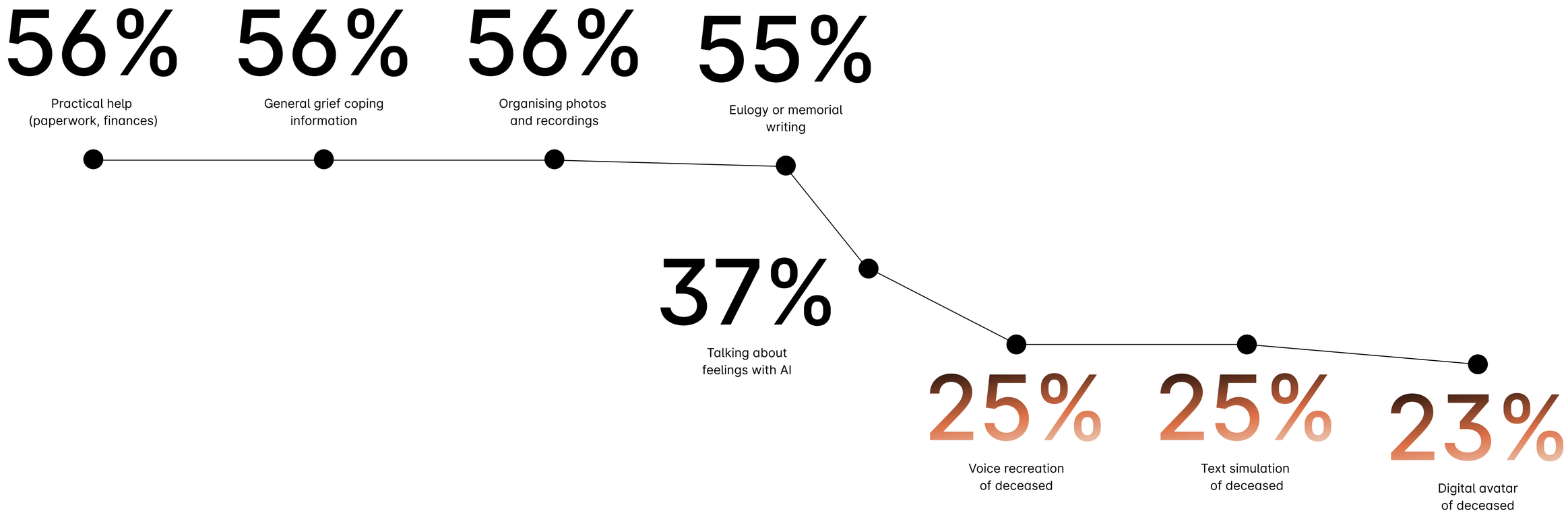
33%
Boomers

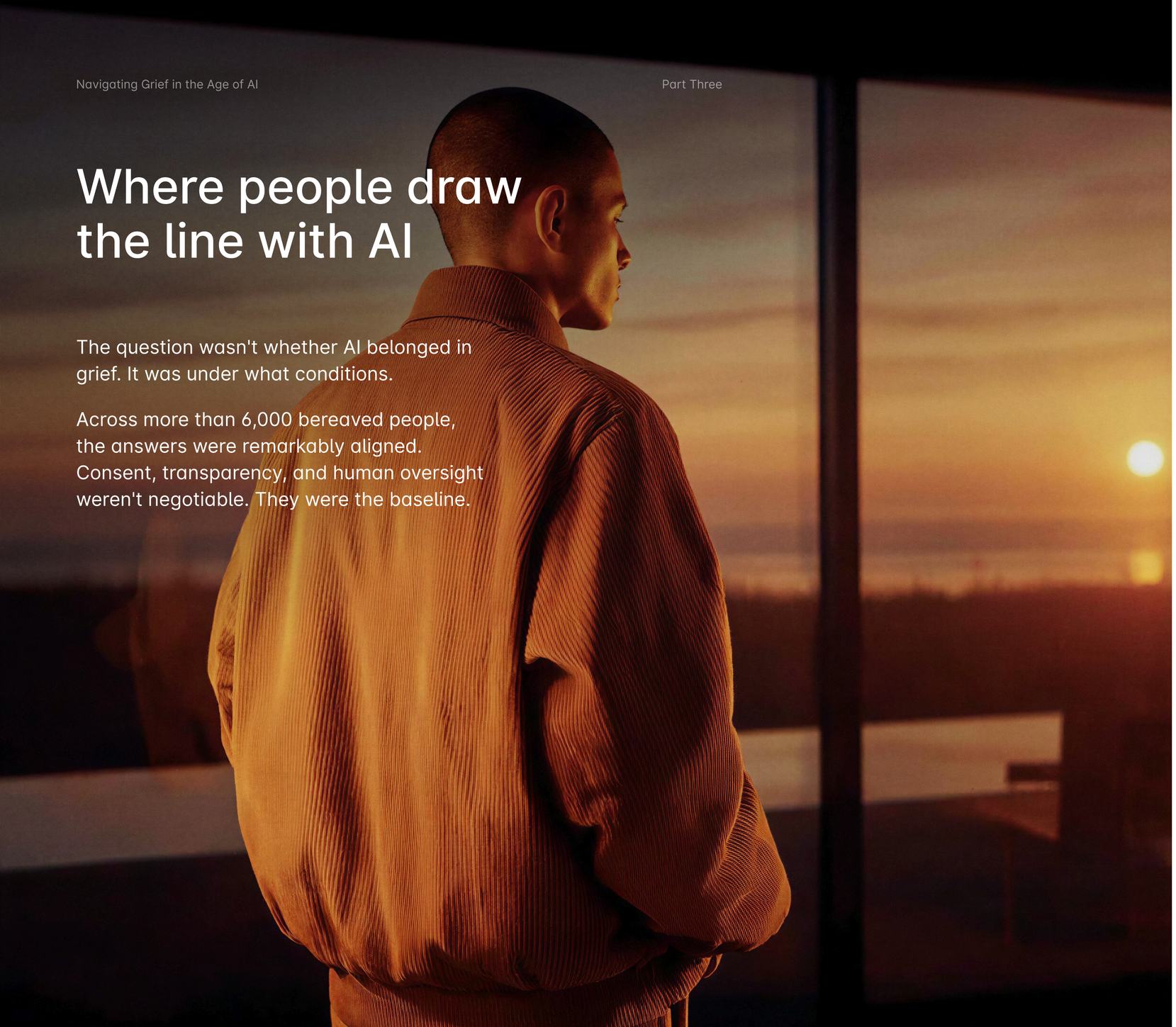
16%
Silent generation

Comfort depends on the use case

Data shows that people are broadly comfortable with AI that reduces administrative burdens — and they are broadly uncomfortable with AI that enters emotional intimacy or simulates the deceased.

Across every use case, people hold consistent expectations around consent, transparency, and human oversight. The demand for a responsibly designed, purpose-built grief support system is here. Most people just don't yet know it exists.





Where people draw the line with AI

The question wasn't whether AI belonged in grief. It was under what conditions.

Across more than 6,000 bereaved people, the answers were remarkably aligned. Consent, transparency, and human oversight weren't negotiable. They were the baseline.

86% person uses the tool voluntarily

86% transparency about what is real vs. AI-generated

85% restricted to adult use only

80% consent for voice, likeness, and data

80% AI uses only real content, not generated responses

76% family authorization

71% involvement of a grief counsellor or therapist professional support

Conclusion

The case for a hybrid model of AI + human support

The data in this report tells a more nuanced story about AI and grief: AI is not transforming how people grieve or replacing human support, but it is playing a meaningful role within an ecosystem of support that's rapidly changing.

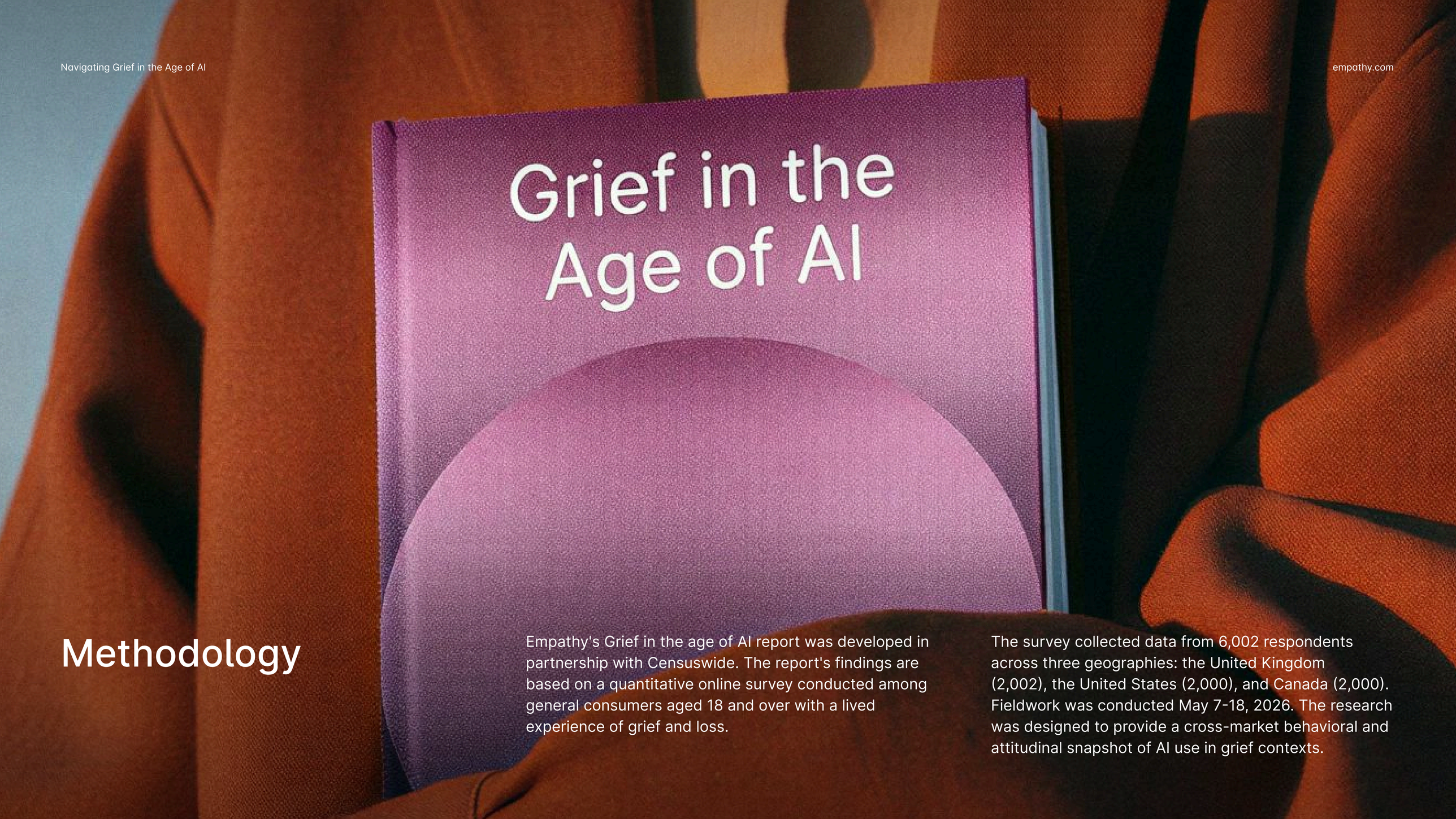
Loss creates needs that are both emotional and practical — often simultaneously, often urgently, often at times and in places where human support is not available. AI, when designed well, can fill specific and meaningful parts of that gap. It can extend access. It can provide continuity between human touchpoints. It can handle complexity so that human energy is reserved for connection.

But the corollary is equally true: AI designed poorly, or introduced into grief without ethical grounding or guardrails, creates new difficulties. The complexity of grief cannot be left to improvisation — and right now, for too many people, it is. Traditional sources of support are eroding. Communities are more dispersed. The networks that once carried people through loss are no longer reliable, and nothing has been built to replace it at scale.

The answer for institutional partners (namely, employers, insurers, and financial institutions) who encounter people navigating grief is to build a deliberate, hybrid, AI and human care structure: one that can uphold a standard of support that holds human connection and understanding at its center. That is the work Empathy was built for.

Here's what we know: People are not asking for less technology. They are asking for more support — and they are open to AI being part of how they get it. What they are not willing to do is navigate grief with tools that weren't built for it. The opportunity for institutions is profound: to step in where general-purpose AI falls short, and to provide something worthy of the people who need it most. Consent, transparency, and human oversight (coupled with technical expertise and insight-driven design) should be the baseline for support that is worthy of this moment.

No one wants to experience grief. But everyone deserves a system built to carry the weight of it.



Methodology

Empathy's Grief in the age of AI report was developed in partnership with Censuswide. The report's findings are based on a quantitative online survey conducted among general consumers aged 18 and over with a lived experience of grief and loss.

The survey collected data from 6,002 respondents across three geographies: the United Kingdom (2,002), the United States (2,000), and Canada (2,000). Fieldwork was conducted May 7-18, 2026. The research was designed to provide a cross-market behavioral and attitudinal snapshot of AI use in grief contexts.

About empathy.

Empathy is a leading technology company transforming the way the world plans for and deals with life's hardest moments, serving more than 50 million policyholders globally. With $162 million in funding from top-tier venture firms including Index Ventures, General Catalyst, and Adams Street Partners, Empathy combines AI + human care to provide unparalleled support for bereavement, estate management, legacy planning, disability and more.

Recognized by Apple, Google Play, Fast Company and others, Empathy is redefining the standard for modern family care — with technology built to both serve people and honor the irreplaceable value of humans who support them.

Learn more at **empathy.com**