



Male celebrities share their GRIEF to help tackle the taboo

Last month, the UK-based American actor Rob Delaney, star of Channel 4's *Catastrophe*, spoke out in the *Evening Standard* about the longer term impact of grief, saying he is still “a mess” after the death of his two-year-old son Henry in 2018. He followed up the interview with a whole series of tweets saying he felt a sense of duty to others in a similar situation, and responding to individual messages from other grieving parents and siblings.

While anyone that is able share their own experiences, to help others, makes an important contribution to easing the UK's traditional reluctance to talk about loss what is, perhaps, notable about Delaney is that he is one of a growing number of male public figures to speak openly about their emotions to help other

people, particularly men, to feel more comfortable in moving beyond the traditional British ‘stiff upper lip’ when it comes to discussing emotions and asking for help.

Delaney, who lives in London, has shared his grief regularly in interviews and on social media and said his motive for speaking out was to help other parents in the same situation. He said: “My child died 14 months ago and I’m basically a bag of wet rubbish. I need a lot of help. The reason I’m being honest with you and not trying to impress you, and make you think I’m cool or that I’m a tough guy, or maybe working through loss in an inspiring way, is that I have found that if a bereaved parent or bereaved sibling reads this, I want them to know that it’s okay that they feel terrible, sad, confused and so brutally humbled.”

He isn't the only public figure to speak out about his struggle with grief. Sky Sports presenter Simon Thomas, who lost his wife Gemma suddenly in November 2017, regularly discusses his ongoing struggle with grief through media interviews, again in an attempt to help other people in similar situations to recognise that they are not alone. Paul Elliott, one half of comedy duo the Chuckle Brothers, has also spoken to the media about the loss of his brother and comedy partner, Barry, last year. He said he wanted to encourage a country whose attitude to death remained "clouded by awkwardness" to open up about grief and share memories of loved ones they had lost.

"When it comes it hurts badly," Elliott said. "You must grieve and get it out of you. Talk to your close ones and don't let any of them keep it bottled up either. Tell them to grieve along with you. Let it all out."

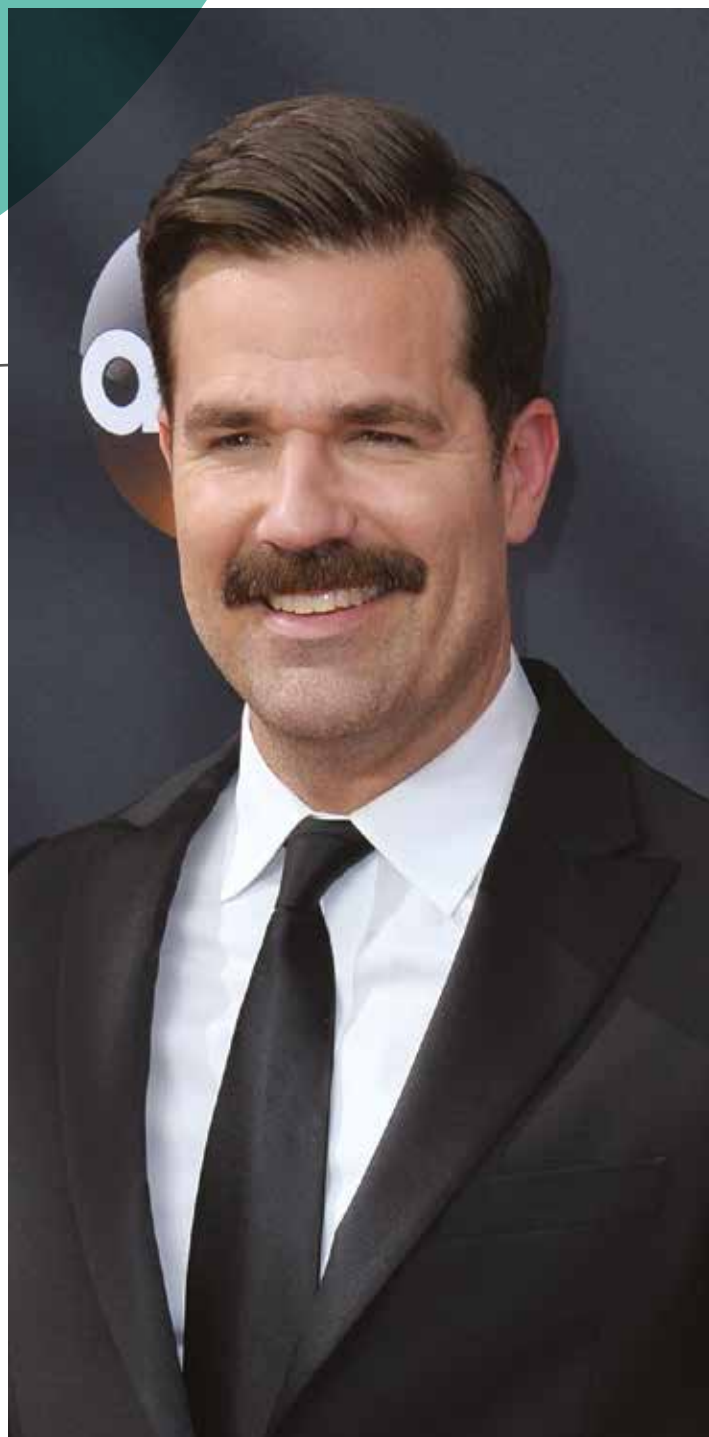
The open way in which these three men, and others in the public eye - like the England footballer turned TV pundit Rio Ferdinand -, have spoken about their feelings is being considered an important contribution to supporting male mental health, given the widespread recognition that the traditional male

disinclination to talk about matters of the heart is leading to unresolved grief and mental health issues in men.

In BBC One's *Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad* in 2017 the footballer shared how he was struggling to move on and to support his children after the death of his wife from cancer in 2015. During the programme he joined a support group comprised of bereaved men, brought together by social media, who were finding comfort and support in sharing their experiences of loss.

One of the men, Benjamin Brooks Dutton, said: "There's something very levelling about bereavement. Perhaps if anyone in that room had met Rio in another situation they might have been intimidated or starstruck, but instead he was just one of us. Another man whose life was going swimmingly until catastrophe struck and left him drowning in a sea of grief, confusion and conflict."

In the days after the documentary was broadcast, charities noticed an increase in calls. Jigsaw South East was one bereavement charity that saw more families calling in. Its Operations Manager, Nickey



Rob Delaney ▲



HRH The Duke of Sussex ▲

Price, said: "Since the BBC One documentary about Rio Ferdinand's experiences aired we have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of calls and emails we are receiving from families seeking support following the death of a loved one. The film has clearly resonated with a lot of parents who have suffered the death of their partner and are striving to do the best to support their children."

Driven by their own experiences following the loss of their mother, Diana Princess of Wales, the Duke of Cambridge and Duke of Sussex have also sought to open up the discussion about the impact of grief on mental health through the founding of Heads Together, a mental health initiative that combines a campaign to tackle stigma and change the conversation on mental health.

"I can safely say that losing my mum at the age of 12 and, therefore, shutting down all of my emotions for the last twenty years, has had a quite serious effect on not only my personal life but my work as well," said the Duke of Sussex during a candid interview with *The Telegraph*.

"I have probably been very close to a complete breakdown on numerous occasions. The experience I have had is that, once you start talking about it, you realise that actually you're part of quite a big club."

At a Heads Together event in 2017, the Duke went further, articulating the importance of famous people talking about grief. He said: "Once you've got people in public life coming forward and talking about it, it should open the way for everyone else to do it... you can be as tough as you like on the exterior but, inside, there's all sort of emotions going on."

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