

It's good to talk to neighbours



Research carried out among 2,000 adults by The Big Lunch found that despite small talk with neighbours not coming naturally for almost half of those questioned, two-thirds of people said it makes them feel happier.

The study, carried out by Lottery funded initiative The Big Lunch – the UK's annual get together for neighbours – found that 60% make small talk with their neighbours and 52% even go out of their way to start a conversation with a neighbour. Seven in ten of those who do make small talk claim that a simple conversation with a neighbour makes them feel more in touch with the rest of their community.

Small talk comes more easily to the older generation – perhaps unsurprisingly – with 72% of over 55s saying it comes naturally compared to just 35% of under 35s. Twenty per cent of under 25s say that they do not talk at all with their neighbours.

The study of 2,000 people from across the UK, found that although one in five said they don't feel comfortable making small talk with their neighbours, 21% say they are flattered by the interest when a neighbour makes the effort to talk to them with over a quarter saying it makes them feel that they matter and are less invisible. For more than one in twenty, talking with a neighbour is one of the highlights of their day.

Scotland's girl next door, Michelle McManus, is supporting The Big Lunch 2014 and comments about her local neighbourhood: "I've lived on the same street for 13 years and enjoy the strong community feel. I can go into my local deli or book

shop and meet people I've known a long time.

"I'm lucky to have so many good friends on my doorstep and I have the best neighbour anyone could wish for. He's one of the reasons that I haven't moved. We pop in to see each other for a cuppa and a catch up every few weeks or so, he's a fantastic friend and we help each other out. That feeling of community is invaluable to me, it means you're never lonely and you always feel safe."

When it comes to the motivation behind small talk, one third of respondents said they wanted to talk about something that happened locally, while only 1 in 8 used small talk as a means to an end for example asking their neighbour for a favour.



Researchers found that weather is the most popular subject when starting a conversation, followed by holidays and enquiring about a person's well-being. Children, local events or the opportunity to gossip are also among the go-to themes when making small talk.

Top ten small talk subjects

1. Weather
2. Holidays
3. Enquiring about well-being
4. Your/their children
5. Local events happening in the community
6. Gossip or news about another neighbour
7. Work
8. National news/current affairs

9. Traffic

10. Crime levels in the area

Emily Watts, Communications Manager of The Big Lunch in Scotland, said: "The significance of small talk shouldn't be underestimated. It might seem trivial but it can have a powerful impact on people. Small talk might not always come easily and can be awkward to initiate, but taking the time to start conversation can lead to big things.

Small talk is in fact 'big talk' – it's the code or tool which enables us to overcome our shyness. This is where The Big Lunch comes in – it's the ice-breaker that is needed to convert strangers into possible friends or acquaintances. Feedback from previous years has shown that almost everyone who takes part in a Big Lunch feels closer to their neighbours as a result, with two thirds going on to hold other events in their community afterwards, proving it is not just about one day it's about what happens before and after the event."

Robert Scott, who organised a Big Lunch in Oxfgangs in Edinburgh, has seen the benefits of getting together as a community first-hand: "It was a fantastic day for the community and for the centre and it was great to see everyone just coming together and getting to know each other or catching up with old friends. We as a centre want to put on more of these events in the future as gathering the community together like this rarely happens in the post-modern world we live in today. Getting people together can have so many benefits, from chatting to neighbours people have not met before to helping people come out of their comfort zones and try something new, especially for those who may be living on their own, or who are socially isolated."

The small talk that happens in communities is a lifeline for many and The Big Lunch is calling on everyone in the UK to boost the conversations happening in streets and gardens

nationwide. Chatty neighbours are being encouraged to host a Big Lunch event in their communities on Sunday 1 June to spread small talk further and build community bonds. Anyone interested in organising a Big Lunch in their area is invited to request a free Big Lunch pack from www.thebiglunch.com to get their events off the ground. Packs contain invitations and posters to adapt for your community, as well as seeds, a bunting template and an inspiration booklet with lots of ideas and info to help get you started.

With more and more of us living alone, an increase in communication via e-mail and text and feelings of loneliness on the rise, the study found that the simple act of talking to your neighbour is seen by those questioned as not only a way to 'brighten someone's day' (34%) but as a 'lifeline' for those who live alone (30%).

The Big Lunch research highlights that there is more to be done when it comes to making small talk with our neighbours as 53% admit they have got at least one neighbour they have never said 'hello' or 'good morning' to. One in twenty say they have never engaged in small talk with a neighbour, while another one in twenty admits it's been years.

The key reasons holding people back from talking to their neighbours include not knowing what to say (36%), shyness (29%), or a lack of time (22%). Researchers found, of those questioned, more than four in ten claimed they wish they had a better relationship with the people living around them, while only one in ten say they are firm friends with the person living next door.