that awkward, icky conversation about love

There is a chapter withing Melody Harper’s Moon, where my character takes a frank exploration about what it really means to love someone.

It’s a really important piece to me, but back in 2017, as my son packed to leave home and do his overseas experience in the UK, I realised it was a talk which had been long overdue.

Every day at home, his suitcases become a little more packed and a reality I don’t feel ready for gets a little closer. My son is getting ready to leave home. I was supportive of this. It was even me who suggested the idea of spending time with his grandparents back there, trying to find work, reconnecting with old school friends.

But it's hard to imagine how quiet this bustling home will become, and it’s actually quite scary. I should be celebrating ‘getting my life back’ after parenthood. But truth be told, I don’t feel ready to let go.

Change is hard, and for parents watching their child going out, it’s a little anxious and lonely. You smile for them, you say “you’re going to have a great time”, but then you feel a little teary, and before you know it, you’ve selected another sad song to match your mood from Spotify — it seems an appropriate soundtrack to your life right now.

Have you prepared them for everything?

That’s the thing going through your mind. You’ve seen them deal with levels of bullying at school and cope well. You’ve talked to them about sex, sexuality, sexting, consent. Expressed so very strongly the importance of consent. You’ve seen how they behave with friends, how they can mix with almost anyone. How their sense of humour helps them to cope when people are nasty. You’ve encouraged them to talk to you when they have a bad day.

Over the years we’ve talked history, politics, my battle with mental health.

But one thing has bothered me in the last few weeks — he’s never had a girlfriend or a boyfriend. I’ve talked to him about sex, but not about love and relationships.

In so many ways, it’s a much harder conversation than sex. I’ve taught sex education at secondary school — you teach a spectrum of topics how you have sex, what happens, how babies come to term, how to use birth control to prevent pregnancy and sexual disease. This is science, it’s all pretty well known.

But love? As a society, we talk about it all the time. There are cards, gifts and movies dedicated to it. But what is it?

Can we promise to love someone without knowing what that truly means? And if we don’t, when we whisper to someone that we love them, isn’t it nothing more than a beautiful lie.

To me, love at its core is when someone’s well-being means as much to you as your own. It’s the only definition which covers the spectrum of emotion I feel for my parents, my son and my partner.

Of course, when it comes to my partner there is that whole “sexual activities” that happen between consenting couples. But love is more than a word to use in order to get sex from someone you like. It’s the desire to support another’s wellbeing. It’s something that has got us as a family through tough emotional and physical hurts. My son has witnessed this every step of the way.

But maybe because love’s a feeling, and an intense one at that, it just cannot be pinned adequately down to words. It’s almost why we need art through painting and music and sonnet to help portray and express something we so struggle to express. Perhaps that’s the reason we fear the words “I love you”, because in a way those three words feel inadequate.

When Nina Simone sings “To Love Somebody”, you’re left in absolutely no doubt through the sincerity of her singing and the raw power in her voice that she knows what love is, and it’s something that moves her so deeply …

https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x13...

I’ve tried a couple of times to have this conversation with him. It’s either not been the right situation, or I’ve bottled out. To talk about love is to talk about how it makes us feel, and that’s an awkward and vulnerable conversation.

So, we had that awkward, icky conversation about love. And his first reaction was to scoff, “really, we’re doing this?”. But I told him that this was important to me, and he had the grace to humour me.

I told him that love can be intoxicating, it’s probably the most euphoric drug you’ll experience. And also, the most dangerous.

Because there’s a dark side to it. Love can make us want to do crazy things, things we’d not normally consider. Sometimes it’s because we’re desperate to impress someone we love. And a sad reality is that when we love someone and either they don’t feel the same, or they hurt us, it feels like there’s no defence against it. It can make us feel angry or incredibly sad.

Sometimes from the hearts, flowers and cards you think love can only make you feel warm and fuzzy, but it can make us feel other emotions, and all at a really loud intensity.

I asked him to remember everything he’d seen in my relationships. The times my partner and I didn’t speak to each other for days, but also that it didn’t last forever. That we got angry, but we had limits. But most of all, we could work through things. And heck, even with such oddballs that my partner and I were, we’d found someone in each other who matched our weird.

It took us a lot of dating to find each other. I reassured him he’d find his odd match too one day.