

## 12.2 If I could turn back time, ...

GOALS ■ Talk about life events and choices ■ Use *wish* and *if only*

### Vocabulary & Reading life events and choices

**1a** Work with a partner. Think of two things you have done (or not done) recently and regretted, for example:

- something you bought/didn't buy
- something you said/didn't say
- something you threw away
- an event you attended/didn't attend

**b** Share your stories and find out more.

**c** Do you tend to hold on to regrets for a long time or can you forget about them quickly? Give examples.

**2** You are going to read an article about regrets. First, discuss the questions with a partner.

- 1 What do you think are the three most common things people regret?
- 2 Do you think men and women regret different things?
- 3 Which regrets stay with us for longer – things we didn't do or things we did?
- 4 In what sense can regret be a positive emotion?

**3** Read the article. How does it answer the questions in exercise 2?

### Our greatest regrets of all

By the time most people reach middle age, they can probably name a list of things they regret from their past: the job opening they ignored, the relationship that failed, the investment they did or didn't make.

But the most frequent regrets involve romance, according to a new study in which 370 American adults, ranging in age from 19 to 103 and from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, were asked to describe a memorable regret. Nearly one in five described a missed romantic opportunity. The second most common regret involved family issues (16%). Other top regrets involved education (13%), work (12%), money (10%), parenting mistakes (9%) and health (6%).

The findings showed that gender, age and educational level all influence the types of regrets people feel. Women were far more likely to have romantic regrets, with 44% fretting about a lost love, while just 19% of men had relationship regrets.

Another key finding was that regrets about missed opportunities – things we wish we had done, but didn't – last for much longer than regrets about things we did that we wish we could undo.

Dr Neale Roesse, the psychologist behind the research, notes that regret can harm mental health when we fixate for too long on a missed opportunity. However, regret, although painful, can help us to move on and use the experience to improve decision-making in the future.



- 4a Match the common regrets, a–m, to the categories mentioned in the article in exercise 3.

## TOP REGRETS

- a not having the **courage** to ask someone on a **date**  
*romance*
- b not **making up** after a family **row** \_\_\_\_\_
- c **settling down** with a partner too soon \_\_\_\_\_
- d **missing out on** an **investment** opportunity \_\_\_\_\_
- e having been **mean** to a sibling as a child \_\_\_\_\_
- f choosing the wrong **career path** \_\_\_\_\_
- g not giving **quality time** to your children \_\_\_\_\_
- h buying a **property** which has decreased in value  
\_\_\_\_\_
- i taking up smoking \_\_\_\_\_
- j **turning down** a job offer \_\_\_\_\_
- k not taking studies seriously \_\_\_\_\_
- l not paying into a private **pension** plan early enough  
\_\_\_\_\_
- m not **standing up to** bullies at work \_\_\_\_\_

- b Match seven of the phrases in bold in exercise 4a to their meanings in the box.

building    defending yourself against    disagreement  
having a quieter life, living in one place    rejecting  
romantic meeting    unkind

- c Which of these regrets might be felt by someone in their twenties? Which by someone in their sixties?

## Grammar & Listening using *wish* and *if only*

- 5 12.5 ))) Listen to Greg, Jade, Bill and Michelle talking about major regrets. Which person wishes they had ...?
- a said more \_\_\_\_\_
  - b said less \_\_\_\_\_
  - c followed someone's advice \_\_\_\_\_
  - d ignored someone's request \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 12.6 ))) Listen again and complete the extracts from the listening.
- 1 If only I \_\_\_\_\_ to my dad.
  - 2 If only I \_\_\_\_\_ my big mouth!
  - 3 I wish I \_\_\_\_\_ a bit less honest sometimes ...
  - 4 I wish you \_\_\_\_\_ those records.
  - 5 I just wish I \_\_\_\_\_ the courage to challenge her at the time.

- 7 Answer the questions about the sentences in exercise 6.
- 1 Which sentences describe a regret about the past?
  - 2 Which describe a wish for the present/future?
  - 3 Which describes a desire for somebody else to change their behaviour?
  - 4 What are the full forms of the contraction 'd in sentences 1, 4 and 5?
- 8 Read the Grammar focus box and add examples from exercise 6.

### GRAMMAR FOCUS *wish* and *if only*

- 1 We use *wish* + past simple or continuous to talk about wishes for unlikely or impossible things in the present.  
*I wish we lived by the sea.*  
a \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 We use *wish* + past perfect to express regrets about the past.  
*I wish I hadn't sold my car.*  
b \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 We use *wish* + person/thing + *would* to talk about things we want other people to do or not do. It often expresses annoyance or dissatisfaction.  
*I wish she would stop shouting.*  
c \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 We can use *if only* instead of *wish* in all these situations. It is more emphatic than *wish*.  
*If only I could turn back time!*  
d \_\_\_\_\_  
e \_\_\_\_\_

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- 9a **TASK** Rewrite the sentences using *I wish* or *if only*.
- 1 I didn't work hard enough at school.
  - 2 I regret not having more siblings.
  - 3 I'd like to live in the city centre.
  - 4 It irritates me when people park on the pavement.
  - 5 I'd like to be more patient.
  - 6 It annoys me when people spell my name incorrectly.
  - 7 I worry too much about what people think of me.
- b Which sentences are true for you? Change the others so they are true for you.
- c Compare your sentences with a partner and find out more. Do you share any wishes or regrets?