

Catch Word #268 – I cracked under the pressure

AD-FREE

Episode description

Have you ever been so nervous or stressed about a presentation that you forgot everything you had prepared? Have you ever performed well during sports practice but made mistakes during the big game? There are lots of great idioms to describe these nightmare scenarios in English and, in this episode, Andrew and Kassy introduce listeners to two of the most common ones: to crack under the pressure and can't take/handle the heat.

Fun fact

One of the best things you can do with a heavy, stressful workload is to break your responsibilities into manageable tasks. Try the Pomodoro Technique to stay focused and avoid feeling overwhelmed. Work on a task for 25 minutes and then take a 5-minute break. Repeat this pattern three or four times, and then take a 15-minute break. You'll be surprised at how much you can get done!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To crack under [the] pressure
- Can't take/handle the heat
- [One's] mind goes blank
- To egg on
- Gut feeling
- To suck the joy out of



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Catch Word #268, I cracked under the pressure, featuring Andrew and Kassy.

Welcome back to Culips. This is Catch Word, the series for intermediate and advanced English learners, where we teach you idioms, phrasal verbs, or expressions that will help improve your English listening and speaking. Today, I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hello, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew. And hi, listeners, hope you're all doing well.

Andrew: Kassy, I have to ask. I've got a question for you here right off the bat. And the question is related to stress. I'm wondering, have you ever been so stressed out that you thought there was just no way that you could deal with the stress?

Kassy: Totally, Andrew, especially during this time of year. It's kind of like the crunch time in the school year, third quarter, lots of projects and activities and stuff like that. And I'm just feeling the pressure a little bit, you know?

Andrew: Stress and pressure can get to everybody, I think. And I like that expression that you just used there, Kassy, crunch time. Crunch time means a very important time, right? When you really have to focus and get things done before a deadline. It's usually like that period of time right before a deadline when you're just super busy and focused on achieving that goal.

And I think it's nice that you brought that up, because today we are actually going to be talking about two idiomatic expressions that are related to stress and pressure. The first one is **to crack under pressure**. And the second one is **can't handle the heat**.

Kassy: That's right, Andrew. And just like how we all handle pressure differently, these expressions can be used in a wide variety of situations. So let's dive in and learn more about them.

Andrew: I love it, sounds great. So today, we're teaching you two idiomatic expressions about dealing with or, Kassy, maybe I should say more specifically, failing to deal with stress and pressure. And the first expression is **to crack under pressure** or **to crack under the pressure**. Sometimes we say this expression with the word "the" and sometimes we can omit it. So it's kind of optional, but sometimes you'll hear people say it and other times you won't, don't worry about that. It's just kind of personal preference, I think.

Kassy, could you break this one down for us? If somebody **cracks under the pressure** of something, what does that mean, exactly?

Kassy: If you **crack under the pressure**, it means that you're under so much stress that eventually you just break down and you become unable to cope or deal with the situation. Actually, Andrew, I know sometimes when we describe phrases, we like to talk about the imagery that pops into our head. And for this one, I imagine, like, an egg that you're holding in your hand and then if you just start squeezing it as hard as you can, and then suddenly it just breaks and there's ooey-gooey egg yolk all over your fingers.

Andrew: I love that image. That's actually more practical than the one that popped into my head, because I thought of putting something into a vise, like maybe a vase. A vase in a vise is what actually popped into my head first, which is more abstract. A vise, for listeners who don't know, is a tool that carpenters use to hold pieces of material together or to use when they're building things. So it's like a tool that holds things together. And if

you were to put a vase, like a flower vase, into a vise and then you kept cranking the vise and making it tighter and tighter and the pressure got stronger and stronger, well, since that vase is made out of glass, eventually it would shatter and break everywhere, right? But your idea is much more practical, Kassy.

So to break this expression down a little bit further, here, the pressure part of the expression just means stress, right? So if you have stress from your job, or maybe stress from a relationship that you're in, stress from a financial situation, any kind of situation related to stress, if that stress is so strong and so big and so great that you can't overcome it, well, then, just like the vase in the vise or just like the egg between your fingers that is constantly getting pressed down on, eventually it's going to break, it's going to crack, it's going to shatter, right? And it just means essentially that you're unable to cope with that situation.

Kassy: These feelings that Andrew is describing are things that we all deal with. And it actually shows up in a lot of music lyrics, too. Andrew and I were talking about songs before recording that, you know, have this topic as the main part of their lyrics. The song that came to mind for me, was called *Surface Pressure*, which is the song that the big sister sings in Encanto, the Disney movie.

Andrew: I'm not familiar with that one, but I'm gonna go give it a listen after we finished recording here, Kassy, now that you've brought it up.

Kassy: And, Andrew, what was the song that you were thinking of that deals with this topic?

Andrew: Yeah, I thought of that famous Queen song, *Under Pressure*. Yeah, that one popped into my head. You know, it doesn't really talk about **cracking under pressure**, but it does talk about being under pressure. So, if any listeners out there are music fans, like Kassy and I are, then check out these two tunes. And you can hear these expressions in that kind of real life, natural English situation.



Kassy: Speaking of real-life situations, why don't we head on to our example conversations and hear this expression used in a natural conversation?

Andrew: Yeah, OK. Let's listen to our first example now.

Coworker: I have so much work to do, and the deadline is tomorrow. I don't know if I'm going to finish in time.

Dave: That sounds really stressful. What do you have left to do?

Coworker: I have to finish a report, prepare a presentation, and respond to a bunch of emails.

Dave: Oh, my god, that's a lot. But don't worry, you've got this. Just take a deep breath and focus on one task at a time. You don't want **to crack under the pressure**.

Coworker: I know, but I'm just so overwhelmed. I don't even know where to start.

Dave: OK, well, if I were you, I'd just break everything down into smaller tasks. Start with the most important and then just take things one at a time. When you break it down into smaller parts, it's not so bad.

Coworker: Thanks, Dave. You're right. I feel a bit better now.

Dave: No problem. Just remember, take some breaks and stay focused. You got this.

Andrew: Let's break this example down. So, in that example, we hear two coworkers talking with each other. And one of the coworkers is under a lot of pressure and she is very stressed out. She has to do a report and prepare a presentation and send a bunch of emails, as well. So, she's just very, very busy and she's worried that she might **crack under this pressure**. So one of her coworkers named Dave gives her some advice. And



he suggests just taking things one step at a time, breaking things into smaller chunks so that she can deal with that pressure and deal with that stress without cracking.

Why don't we listen to example conversation #2 right now?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Friend 1: I can't believe I failed that job interview. I was so prepared, but as soon as I got in there, I just **blanked**.

Friend 2: Ah, no, I'm so sorry to hear that. What happened?

Friend 1: I don't know. I practiced all my questions. And I knew the company really well. But as soon as the interviewer started asking some questions, **my mind just went blank**.

Friend 2: It sounds like you were really nervous.

Friend 1: I guess so. I was just so worried about making a good impression that I put too much pressure on myself.

Friend 2: It's understandable to be nervous in a job interview. But you don't want to **crack under the pressure**. Do you think there's anything you could have done differently to prepare?

Friend 1: I guess I should have done more mock interviews with someone else so I could get used to answering questions in that stressful situation when I was under pressure.

Friend 2: Don't worry, you'll get another opportunity to ace that job interview. Just remember to stay calm and be confident.

Kassy: This example conversation, we have two friends who are discussing one friend's kind of failed job interview.



Andrew: That's right, a failed attempt at a job interview.

Kassy: Yeah, this guy was, you know, really nervous. And he said that as soon as he got into the interview and started being asked questions, **his mind just went blank**. He couldn't think of anything.

Andrew: I think many people can probably relate to this. I know that I've had this experience in my life before. Even when you prep and prepare sometimes the pressure can get to you. And in that stressful situation, you can't remember any of the things that you practiced and prepped for. So, yeah, it's a very relatable feeling for many of us.

Kassy: Yeah, exactly. So, then that's why the other friend gave the suggestions to, you know, really keep yourself calm so that you don't **crack under the pressure** when you get to these stressful types of situations.

Andrew: Exactly. And unfortunately for that guy, it seemed like he did **crack under the pressure** during that interview. And as a result, he didn't get the job. So that's unfortunate, but we'll wish him well in the future.

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: But for now, Kassy, let's move on to our second key expression for today. And it is similar, it's related to being able to not handle a stressful or difficult situation. And this expression is **can't take the heat**. **Can't take the heat** and heat is spelled H-E-A-T. So what does it mean, if somebody **can't take the heat**?

Kassy: It's similar to **cracking under pressure**, it means that you can't handle, deal with, or cope with some difficult or challenging situation. It means you feel overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious.

Andrew: So, the heat in this expression is usually related to stress, right? It means you can't handle the stress, you **can't take the heat**, the heat is the stress or the pressure.

And, again, it could be related to so many different stressful situations. Maybe you have a financial stress that's bothering you, maybe a workplace stress, maybe you're stressed in traffic trying to come home and there's a traffic jam, any of those kind of stressful situations, we could refer to it, in this expression at least, as being heat.

Kassy: You hear this expression a lot in movies, especially related to competitions, like sporting event competitions, cheerleading competitions. One team might **egg on** the other team, which means like tease the other team and say, like, "You **can't take the heat**." Which means, like, "You're gonna **crack under the pressure**, you're gonna fail, you're gonna bomb this."

Andrew: Kassy, correct me if I'm wrong about this. But it's my **gut feeling** that we usually don't use this expression too, too much to talk about our own personal experiences. Like I mean, you can, but I think it's much more common to use it to talk about other people. "That guy **couldn't handle the heat**." "She **couldn't handle the heat**." Or talking about like other people being so stressed out that they had to quit or stop doing something.

Kassy: Yeah, that's totally right. This is an expression that we usually use to talk about other people under pressure rather than ourselves.

Andrew: Although not exclusively, like we could use it to talk about ourselves. But I just don't think we do that much.

One other thing that I wanted to add here before we get to our examples is that there is a very similar expression in English that we use from time to time, which is if you **can't handle the heat**, get out of the kitchen, or stay out of the kitchen, if you **can't handle the heat**, get out of the kitchen. Or sometimes we say stay out of the kitchen. And here the kitchen means, like a kitchen like at a restaurant, right, is a very busy, hectic place with many chefs cooking and there are many stoves burning and ovens going. So it's a very hot place and high-pressure place. And we use this expression to say, like, if you can't handle this stressful situation, then you shouldn't be here, you should quit.

We use this expression in many different situations, not just about cooking. It could be, like, Kassy, maybe you join a volleyball team, and the practices are just too intense. And after every practice, you're just exhausted and you talk to the captain of the team. And you say like, "Oh my god, these practices are just so intense. I can't handle it." Well, if the captain of the team was kind of a jerk, they might say to you, like, "If you **can't handle the heat**, get out of the kitchen." Meaning, like, if you can't keep up with this rigorous practice that we're doing on the team, well, then you should quit the team, that kind of idea.

Kassy: Yeah, it's kind of an intimidation tactic. It's like, "You're too weak for this, what are you, a baby? Come on, man up."

Andrew: Exactly. In fact, I think it's a very rude thing to say to somebody. I've maybe only said this expression to my friends when I'm joking with them. I would never say it seriously because I do feel like to tell that to someone is a little bit too strong for my personality. But you will hear it often in movies and TV shows, like you said. So it's a great one to at least recognize and know what it means when you hear it.

And with that said, I think it's time to jump into some examples. So why don't we listen to our first examples conversation right now?

Kassy: Let's do it.

Friend 1: I can't believe how rude my boss is. Every time I try to talk to her, she just totally shuts me down.

Friend 2: Sounds like you're dealing with a pretty tough situation. But, you know, if you **can't handle the heat**, maybe it's time to talk to HR and get some support.

Friend 1: I don't know if that would help, though. HR seems to always just side with the management and I don't want to rock the boat and cause trouble.

Friend 2: But sometimes you just have to speak up for yourself. It's important to let someone know what's going on so they can help you.

Friend 1: Yeah, I guess you're right. I'll schedule a meeting with HR tomorrow and see what they suggest.

Friend 2: Great idea. Good luck.

Andrew: Let's break this example conversation down. So, in this example, two friends are talking and one friend is complaining just about how rude his boss is. And every time that he tries to talk with her, she is just very rude and shuts him down, essentially just ignores him. So his friend sympathizes and says, like, you know, maybe if you **can't handle the heat** in that situation, if you can't handle the pressure, the stress, then you should talk to the HR department at the office, the human resources department, and try and resolve the issue that way. So, he thinks about that for a moment and says, yeah, OK, that's not a bad suggestion. I'll try that and see if it will help me out. The reason why he doesn't want to do that Kassy is because he thinks that that will rock the boat. He said, "I don't want to rock the boat and cause trouble." It's another great idiom there, to rock the boat. What does rock the boat mean?

Kassy: Literally rocking the boat, you know, causes maybe water to slosh into the boat or disrupts the balance of the boat. So, in this case, he doesn't want to disrupt the delicate balance of the relationships in his company.

Andrew: To rock in this situation, doesn't mean to grab your guitar and go crazy with a solo. It means to move from side to side, like you could rock a baby to put the baby to sleep. Imagine that you were in a canoe and then suddenly you stood up and started jumping from one side to the other side in the canoe. Well, that canoe, that boat would start rocking and like you said, so much water would pour in and there would be a massive problem as you begin to sink into the water. So, yeah, to rock the boat just means to

cause problems. And this guy doesn't want to rock the boat, but he's going to because he **can't handle the heat** of this stressful situation and it needs some help.

Kassy: If he doesn't do some things soon, he's gonna **crack under the pressure**.

Andrew: That's right. That's right. Let's listen to our second example conversation now.

Friend 1: I heard you quit the soccer team. What happened?

Friend 2: Yeah, the coach was always pushing us to win and yelling at us. I just **couldn't handle the heat** anymore. And I actually started to hate the game.

Friend 1: Ah, I'm so sorry to hear that.

Friend 2: Nah, really, it's for the best. I've been playing soccer for so long that I feel like I've been missing out on all the other fun things life has to offer. So, I want to take up some new hobbies, I think.

Friend 1: Oh, that sounds like a great plan. You know, I love mountain biking. So if you ever feel like trying it out, just let me know.

Friend 2: Thanks. I might just do that one day.

Kassy: In this example conversation, two friends are talking about this one friend quitting the soccer team. And the reason she quits is because it's stressful, it's not fun anymore. The coach is super intimidating, always pushing, pushing, pushing the players, and yelling at them. And it's just like she's lost the joy of playing soccer. And, Andrew, I can, not me specifically, but my students can totally relate to this story. We've actually had three students quit the basketball team this year at our school because they just **couldn't handle the heat** of the constant pressure and yelling by the coach.

Andrew: That's not good. That's not good. I don't know, I think at a professional level, the coach can really push the players. But at the junior high school or high school level, I don't know if that's good or not. But it's a good example, at least, of **not being able to handle the heat**. And, Kassy, you know, earlier I said that we don't usually use this expression to talk about ourselves. But in that example, we actually heard a very natural way that you could use it to talk about yourself, right? I just **couldn't handle the heat**. I couldn't deal with the stress of that coach yelling and pushing us to win so much.

Kassy: I really like this example conversation, too, because it's so useful in today's world where we feel like if we do something like this, we're a quitter but that's not true. You're, you know, trying to preserve your own peace of mind and health, well-being, you know? This is a great example where you're saying, you know, I **can't handle the heat**, but that's OK.

Andrew: Exactly. Like I'm taking care of my mental health first, I don't need to put myself in this situation where I'm feeling terrible all the time. Like, the coach unfortunately **sucked the joy out of** the game for this athlete. So that's unfortunate, but I do like that she was able to communicate that she's putting herself first and prioritizing herself.

Well, everyone, I think that will bring us to the end of today's episode. Thanks for listening and awesome job on completing an English study session here with Kassy and I today.

Kassy: To summarize what we've covered today, we learned two idiomatic expressions about not being able to deal with stressful situations. The first was **to crack under the pressure** and the second was **can't handle the heat**.

Andrew: If you have any questions or comments about this episode or would like to practice making some example sentences with the key expressions that we learned, well, then, just leave us a comment on Culips.com or on our discussion forum and share them with us.

That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To crack under [the] pressure Idiom

The first expression featured in this Catch Word episode is **to crack under the pressure**. Kassy and Andrew explain that this happens when you're under so much stress that you stop being able to cope with the situation and you react negatively.

To cope means to effectively deal with problems or tough situations. Some of the ways you might stop being able to cope and **crack under intense pressure** are physical—sweating, hyperventilating, becoming clumsier than usual. You might also experience cognitive effects—forgetting important information, being unable to get words out, feeling more anxious than usual. For example, a student might begin **to crack under the pressure** of a strict teacher's gaze and stammer when answering a question.

Since the word “pressure” is used in this idiom, you should only use it to describe a person's reaction to high-pressure, stressful situations. It wouldn't sound natural to say that your teenage son **cracked under the pressure** of tidying up his room, for example.

There are a few variations of the verb used in this expression. You can also say that someone **choked under pressure** or **buckled under pressure**.

Here are a few more examples with **to crack under [the] pressure**:

Troy: Did you hear about the football game?

Michelle: I did. It's such a shame to lose during the last game of the season after having such a long winning streak.

Troy: It really is. I went to watch it with my girlfriend. It seemed like the quarterback was **cracking under the pressure** of keeping that winning streak going. He messed up a lot of simple plays.

Sally: How did the meeting with the client go? Were you able to negotiate a better contract for the next fiscal year?

Howard: Uh, no ... It went really badly, actually. **I completely cracked under the pressure** and gave in to all of their demands without any pushback. All the negotiating tactics I had been practicing seemed to vanish from my mind the moment I stepped into that boardroom.

Can't take/handle the heat

Idiom

The second expression featured in this episode is **can't take the heat**. Andrew and Kassy explain that this is pretty similar to the idiom to crack under the pressure; if you **can't take the heat**, then you can't cope with the stress or pressure of a difficult situation.

One small difference between **can't take the heat** and to crack under pressure is the type of stressful situation that causes these reactions. While both idioms can apply to high-stress situations like job interviews, important exams, presentations in front of others, negotiating with clients, or performing surgeries, **can't take the heat** is used more often when the person is being criticized or scrutinized.

For example, you could say, "When speaking at a press conference after passing the controversial piece of legislation, the governor acted like she **couldn't take the heat**. She made rude gestures at the booing crowds and responded unprofessionally to the press."

As Andrew mentions, this idiom is often included as part of a longer expression, "**if you can't take the heat**, get out of the kitchen." This means that if you can't handle high pressure, you should leave that situation. Since this is a very well-known saying, you will sometimes hear the second part omitted. For instance, let's say you're complaining about how stressful your job is to an unsympathetic friend. He might tell you, "You know, **if you can't take the heat....**" He is implying that you should find a different, less stressful job.

Here are a couple more examples with **can't take/handle the heat**:

Bobby: That debate last night was unbelievable. Did you see it?

Winona: Yeah, I watched it with my roommates. Candidate B **couldn't take the heat** at all. There's no way he's making it through the primaries.

Bobby: Every time someone challenged him, he got so defensive and childish. That's not what I want in a president. You have **to be able to handle the heat** when you're trying to be diplomatic with the leaders of other countries!

Fiona: Hey, are you all right? You look down.

Nathan: Yeah, it's just ... I read some new reviews about my performance in the play last week and they were pretty hurtful.

Fiona: Listen, Nathan. For every good review, you're going to have a scathing one. Pursuing acting means you're going to be judged constantly. **If you can't take the heat....**

[One's] mind goes blank

Idiom

In the second example dialogue about the expression to crack under the pressure, the friend who had a job interview complained that **their mind just went completely blank** once the interviewer started asking questions. Because of the pressure, the job candidate forgot all the information and responses they had prepared.

The idiom **[one's] mind goes blank** means that one suddenly forgets information or fails to come up with a response to a question. Blank means that there is no information, writing, or decoration on something, such as a piece of paper or a whiteboard. When **your mind goes blank**, it's as though all your thoughts have disappeared.

This often happens due to stress, exhaustion, or nervousness. For example, let's say you're planning to finally confess romantic feelings to someone. When the right moment finally arrives, you feel so anxious that **your mind goes blank** and you can't get a single word out.

You'll also often just hear **to blank**, which means the same thing. For instance, if you couldn't remember how to form the future perfect tense on your English exam even though you studied grammar rules all last night, you could say that you **blanked**.

Here are a couple more examples with **[one's] mind goes blank**:

Kyle: That exam was a complete disaster.

Jessie: I know, right? I thought I was pretty good at geometry, but there's no way I'm getting a passing grade.

Kyle: I'm really frustrated about it. I actually tried to study really hard for this one, but **my mind just went totally blank** when we got to the trigonometry section.

Jessie: Oh, well. There's going to be another exam next month, so hopefully we can get a better grade on that one.

Patricia: Whoa! What happened to your finger?

John: Oh, yeah, I accidentally closed my car door on it. I was actually so shocked when it happened that **my mind went blank** and I didn't even think to open the car door and release it. My wife had to do it!

Patricia: Wow. It's all black and blue. That must have hurt so much.

To egg on

Phrasal verb

Kassy brings up the use of can't take the heat as a taunt during sports competitions. She says that sometimes one team will yell things at the other team such as, "You can't take the heat! There's no way you can win! You'd better just give up now!" in an attempt **to egg the other team on**.

To egg someone on means to tease someone and dare them to do something that is either foolish or unpleasant. For example, a group of boys might **egg on** the youngest boy until he plays a trick on his mother. You might also **egg on** a shy co-worker to perform a karaoke song at the holiday party. **Egg on** is usually followed by "to" or "into" and then the desired action; for instance, someone might say, "I **egged my brother into** a fight with our cousin."

As with other separable phrasal verbs, if you use **egg on** with a direct object pronoun (such as him, her, or me) instead of a regular noun, then it must come between egg and on. For example, you can't say "I egged on him" but you can say "I **egged him on**."

One good synonym for **egg on** is **goad**. For example, you could goad someone into starting an argument. However, while **egging someone on** can be done in either a playful or a mean way, goad is more often used when you hurt someone's feelings or irritate them so that they behave a certain way.

Here are a few more examples with **to egg on**:

Joey: Come on, Becky. Climb up the tree! Don't be a coward!

Becky: No, I don't want to.

Joey: What's the worst that could happen? Just do it! You're being a baby.

Becky: Stop trying to **egg me on**! It's not going to work!

Sophie: You look terrible. What happened last night?

Trevor: I have an awful hangover. The guys were **egging me on** into playing childish drinking games with them. I think we played flip cup and beer pong until 4:00 AM.

Sophie: Trevor, you're in your thirties. Isn't it about time you stopped succumbing to peer pressure? Here, I'll make you some herbal tea.

Gut feeling

Noun

After the hosts explain the general meaning of the expression can't take the heat, Andrew tells Kassy that his **gut feeling** is that people don't usually use this idiom to refer to themselves. Most of the time, it's used to refer to other people.

A **gut feeling** is a sense of intuition that cannot be explained by fact or logic. Often, it's a sense you get from personal experience or instinct. For example, let's say your sister invites her new boyfriend over to dinner with your family but you just can't seem to get along with him all night. He hasn't done anything wrong, but you just have a **gut feeling** that he isn't a good guy and he isn't trustworthy.

Gut feelings can be positive feelings, too. For instance, let's say you're setting up two of your friends on a date with each other. Even though they haven't met each other before and they have pretty different interests, you've got a strong **gut feeling** that they'll fall for each other.

The reason this is called a **gut feeling** is because when you have this kind of immediate intuition about something, you often feel it in your stomach, or gut. Lots of idioms about feelings in English involve the gut or stomach, such as getting butterflies in your stomach (feeling excited or anxious), not being able to stomach something (feeling like you can't tolerate or deal with something), and feeling gutted (feeling deeply disappointed).

Here are a couple more examples with **gut feeling**:

Emily: What are you doing in the living room? You've already finished preparing for your interview?

Nicholas: Yeah, I prepped for about a half hour or so. I just have this **gut feeling** that I'm going to do really well and everything's going to work out. I don't want to overprepare.

Emily: All right, well, I hope you can trust your gut!

Andy: Why do you keep looking at your phone?

Rebecca: I'm worried about Paula. I haven't heard from her in a few hours and I've got this **gut feeling** that something bad has happened to her.

Andy: Don't worry, honey. You know she's just at a sleepover with her friends. I'm sure she's too busy having fun to text you back. Just relax.

To suck the joy out of Idiom

In the second dialogue featuring the idiom can't handle the heat, a girl explains to her friend why she quit the soccer team after being a player for so long. She basically explains that the coach was too competitive and **sucked the joy out of** the game for her, so she felt it was time to find a new hobby.

To suck the joy out of means exactly what it sounds like: to take all of the fun out of something. You usually say that someone **sucks the joy out of** something when their negative attitude and behaviour is ruining others' enjoyment. This is often due to being excessively critical, being competitive, or being mean. For instance, if you go out to a fancy restaurant to celebrate your anniversary with your husband but he keeps complaining about the food and service, one might say that he's **sucking the joy out of** the special occasion.

The meaning of this idiom is very strong, so it's probably best not to tell someone directly that they're **sucking the joy out of** a situation. A kinder, less direct way to ask someone to improve their attitude could be, "You're being a bit of a downer. Could we focus on the good stuff?" or "Let's not dwell on the negatives."

People aren't the only thing that can **suck the joy out of** something. For example, a new rule at work about mandatory overtime might **suck the joy out of** your job.

Here are a few more examples with **to suck the joy out of**:

Chris: Man, I can't wait until this school year is over. If I'm being honest, I really can't stand our band teacher.

Beth: Me neither. He's always so harsh about his feedback. I love playing the trombone at home, but when I walk into his classroom, he **sucks all the joy out of** playing music.

Chris: I couldn't agree more.

Lois: How was your trip to Massachusetts?

Brandon: I wish I could tell you I had fun, but we only had one day of good beach weather. The nonstop rain **sucked all the joy out of** vacationing in Cape Cod.

Lois: Sorry to hear that.



Quiz

1. **You ask your friend how she did during the interview and she tells you, “I think I cracked under the pressure.” What does she most likely mean?**
 - a) she experienced skin irritation from the stress of the interview
 - b) she decided the job seemed like it would be too stressful and declined the job offer
 - c) she was really anxious during the interview and didn’t perform well
 - d) she thinks she did a good job showing off her skills and job experience

2. **Your mom tells you, “Stop egging on your little brother.” She wants you to _____.**
 - a) stop teasing him
 - b) stop throwing eggs at him
 - c) stop playing tricks on him
 - d) stop playing with him

3. **Which of the following behaviours is NOT a good example of sucking the joy out of something?**
 - a) criticizing the food and decorations at your birthday party
 - b) making fun of your sister while she’s trying to practice playing the piano
 - c) yelling at your son’s soccer teammates because they’re playing poorly
 - d) encouraging your friend to try something new at a restaurant

4. **What is the second part of the saying? If you can’t take the heat, _____.**
 - a) get out of the kitchen
 - b) jump ship
 - c) drop out of the competition
 - d) leave the meeting

5. **When your mind goes blank, that means you _____.**
 - a) are dreaming
 - b) can’t remember something
 - c) have no opinions
 - d) aren’t smart

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you perform well under pressure?
2. What is the most stressful situation you've ever experienced? Were you able to push through to the end or did you crack under the pressure?
3. Have you ever had a gut feeling about someone that was accurate? How about a gut feeling that misled you? Please explain.
4. What advice would you give someone who is extremely stressed and preparing for a very important job interview?
5. Do you think "If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen" is a good rule to live by? Why or why not?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.a 3.d 4.a 5.b

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