

Catch Word #116 – To walk on eggshells

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone out there. This is Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

Maura: And we're here with your Culips English Podcast.

Harp: Make sure you check out our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Because there you can find all our older episodes and you can also become a member. Because when you're a member, you have access to the Learning Materials, which include a complete transcript, detailed explanations, and even a quiz.

Maura: Right. Also, if you're on Facebook, **why not** like our Facebook page? You can stop by and say hello to us or you can also send us a question if you have a question to ask.

Harp: Exactly. Today we're doing a Catch Word episode, and that's where we look at some expressions, we explain them, we give you examples.

Maura: Right. And today, the expressions we're going to look at are about being sensitive or careful not to disturb others that are around you. So these expressions are used to talk about acting very carefully or cautiously so that you don't upset other people around you.

Harp: Yeah. So use these expressions when you're being careful or you're being sensitive to other people to not disturb them or to upset them.

Maura: Right. Now, let's look at our first expression.

Harp: OK. Our first expression is **to walk on eggshells**.

Maura: Right. **To walk on eggshells**.

Harp: Yes. Let me say it one more time: **to walk on eggshells**. So an eggshell is the outside part of an egg. You crack the eggshell to get the egg out.

Maura: And if you think about **walking on eggshells**, you might have the image in your head that eggs are very fragile and so you don't want to crack them, you don't want to step on them.

Harp: Yeah. So **to walk on eggshells** is when you try to be sensitive or diplomatic so that you don't disturb someone, so you don't offend someone.

Maura: Right. And so, maybe there's someone in your life who is having a very bad day. This is the time when you might **walk on eggshells**, because you wanna be sensitive to how they're feeling and you don't wanna disturb them.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: It could be just that specific time or maybe there's someone in your life who is always sensitive and always gets disturbed easily. So in that case, you might always **walk on eggshells** around them because you know that they get upset very easily.

Harp: Yes, exactly. If it's someone who gets angry or upset really easily, you might **walk on eggshells** around them all the time.

Maura: When you're **walking on eggshells**, you're probably just making sure that you don't say something that you know will upset them. Or if they're the kind of person who just doesn't like talking to people, you might **walk on eggshells** by not talking to them because you know that that will disturb them. Now, let's give an example with **to walk on eggshells**.

Harp: Let's do it.

Maura: Oh, I have a meeting with the boss later today. I'm dreading it.

Harp: Oh no. I'm sure.

Maura: I hate meeting with him, you know. I'm always **walking on eggshells**.

Harp: I know. He's so temperamental. You'll never know when he's gonna **snap** at you about anything.

Maura: I know. I just hope the meeting doesn't last very long.

Harp: I know. Be careful.

Maura: In that example, we had a person **walking on eggshells** around their boss. And the boss in this case is just a person who gets upset or bothered very easily.

Harp: Yes. So you have to be careful about what you say. It's not just about a specific topic, but this boss gets upset about anything.

Maura: Right. So even if you're trying **to walk on eggshells**, you might accidentally say something that gets the person mad.

Harp: Yeah. Sometimes you don't even know.

Maura: Right. You can just try your best.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK. Let's do another example with **to walk on eggshells**.

Harp: Let's do it.

Harp: Hey, are you gonna come to the party with me tonight?

Maura: Man, I want to but, you know, I don't think I should even ask my mom.

Harp: Oh, she's still angry?

Maura: Well, yeah. You know, I was **grounded** last week for staying out past my curfew and I still feel like I'm **walking on eggshells** at home. **You know what I mean?**

Harp: I do.

Maura: So I think I'll just stay home tonight.

Harp: Yeah. It's probably a good idea.

Maura: In this example, we had two teenagers talking about going out at night with friends. And one of the teenagers was **walking on eggshells** because she had just gotten in trouble with her mother and she still didn't want to upset her mother again by going out.

Harp: So in this example, it was someone being upset about a specific situation, while in the first example, the boss just gets upset easily. So you can use this expression, **to walk on eggshells**, in either situation.

Maura: Right. So, that was **to walk on eggshells**. Now let's look at another related expression.

Harp: Yes. The next expression is **to walk on pins and needles**.

Maura: **To walk on pins and needles**.

Harp: Yes. One more time: **to walk on pins and needles**.

Maura: And this expression is just like the first expression. We would use this expression, **to walk on pins and needles**, when you have to be careful about what you say or how you act around somebody who is very sensitive.

- Harp: Yes. They could be sensitive because they're just a sensitive person and get upset easily or it could be because they're sensitive about a specific situation.
- Maura: Right. And so, you don't want to disturb these people. You're acting very cautiously around them.
- Harp: Exactly. So **to walk on pins and needles** is when you're careful not to disturb or upset someone.
- Maura: And if you imagine actually walking on pins and needles... Actually I don't want to imagine walking on pins and needles, because it would hurt a lot.
- Harp: Yeah, me neither.
- Maura: So if you were actually **walking on pins and needles**, which are very sharp, you would do so very carefully because you don't wanna hurt yourself.
- Harp: Exactly. That's a good point.
- Maura: It's just like this expression; you act very carefully around this person because you don't want to make a bad situation.
- Harp: All right. Let's give our first example.

- Harp: Hey, how are you?
- Maura: Yeah, I'm good.
- Harp: Did you have a good day at work today?
- Maura: Mmhmm.
- Harp: Anything special?
- Maura: No, nothing really, no.
- Harp: Are you mad at me?
- Maura: No.
- Harp: Really? I feel like I've been **walking on pins and needles** since I didn't clean up after I cooked that day.
- Maura: Well, it honestly did **bug** me a little bit, but I'll get over it.
- Harp: I'm sorry. I'll try **to clean up after myself** right away.

Maura: OK, thanks.

Harp: Do you wanna watch a movie?

Maura: OK.

Maura: Now in that example, we had two roommates and one felt like she'd been **walking on pins and needles** because she thought the other person was mad at her. The other person didn't seem very friendly.

Harp: Yeah. So she had to be cautious to not upset the person even more.

Maura: Exactly. This is definitely a situation that could happen between roommates.

Harp: Definitely.

Maura: I find that roommates tend to **hold grudges** against each other when one of them does something that's bothersome.

Harp: Yeah. I've never really had a roommate, but, yeah, I've heard this.

Maura: Yup. Well you're lucky not to have had a roommate.

Harp: I guess.

Maura: OK, so let's give another example with **to walk on pins and needles**.

Harp: All right.

Maura: So how was class this morning?

Harp: Oh, not good at all.

Maura: Oh, no?

Harp: No. Mrs. Hannigan was in a bad, bad mood.

Maura: Oh no. I have her this afternoon. I guess I better be **walking on pins and needles** if I don't want a **detention**.

Harp: I think so. She's not happy today.

Maura: And there's an example with two students talking about a teacher who is in a bad mood for some reason, we don't know why. And so the students have **to walk on pins and needles** to not upset the teacher.

Harp: Exactly. They have to be careful about what they say to not upset the teacher.

- Maura: Now, let's talk about one more related expression today.
- Harp: All right. Our last expression is **to tread lightly**.
- Maura: Yes. **To tread lightly**.
- Harp: Yes. **To tread lightly**.
- Maura: And really, the word *to tread* is like a kind of walking and a kind of movement.
- Harp: Exactly. So **to tread lightly** means that you're careful not to disturb people around you.
- Maura: Right. You act in a certain way so as not to disturb certain people who are sensitive.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK. Let's get right into a couple examples with **to tread lightly**.
- Harp: Sounds good.

- Harp: So, I'm hanging out with Jen tonight.
- Maura: Oh really? What are you gonna do?
- Harp: I think we're gonna see a movie and then maybe go for dinner after.
- Maura: All right. Can I give you some advice?
- Harp: Yeah, sure.
- Maura: You should definitely **tread lightly** with her. She's been so sensitive since she broke up with her boyfriend last week.
- Harp: Yeah. I noticed. She was a bit sensitive on the phone when we planned for tonight.
- Maura: Right. She just gets upset so easily. She can start to cry **at the drop of a hat**.
- Harp: I know.

- Maura: So there's an example between friends where one person is very sensitive because of a breakup so the other friend has to **tread lightly** around that friend.

Harp: Yeah, exactly. This friend who went through the breakup is very sensitive and cries really easily so the friends have to **tread lightly**, to be careful not to upset her.

Maura: Right. And this could be another situation where you might not know what could upset your friend. It could be that you mentioned a movie that she saw with her boyfriend or you walk by a store that she went to with her boyfriend. So you really just try to be sensitive, but you can't always know for sure.

Harp: No, definitely.

Maura: All right. Let's give one more example, at work.

Harp: I just came back from talking to John the **IT** guy.

Maura: Yeah, so?

Harp: Well, I asked him when he was gonna fix my computer and I was really nice 'cause I know I have to **tread lightly** with him. He's a bit sensitive about **anything and everything**. And he still just got so angry with me. He just **snapped**.

Maura: I think there's nothing you can do.

Harp: He's just grouchy and so sensitive.

Maura: Yup. Well, I hope you at least get your computer fixed.

Harp: I think he might put a virus in it now.

Maura: Now there's another example with **to tread lightly**, which means that a person acts very carefully around a certain other person, either because they always get upset easily or maybe something's gotten them in a bad mood.

Harp: Yes. And in this example, the **IT** guy they're talking about always gets upset, he's just a sensitive person.

Maura: Right. Now, let's review our expressions one more time.

Harp: OK. Well, we started with **to walk on eggshells**.

Maura: And then the next expression was **to walk on pins and needles**.

Harp: And finally **to tread lightly**.

- Maura: Now here comes the important part. Go to our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And if you're interested in our podcast and you want to know more about the expressions you hear, you can become a member, where you will see the transcripts for our episodes, learn even more about the expressions we use, and you'll even find a quiz.
- Harp: Yes. And also remember we're on Facebook, so come like our fan page and you can ask us questions and tell us how you're doing.
- Maura: We will talk to you again soon. Bye for now.
- Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

Why not

This looks like a question and with *not* it sounds negative, but it's actually positive! Asking **why not** can be an expression that means you are suggesting doing something. Asking **why not** is like suggesting that something is a good idea. You can replace the question **why not** with the statement *you should* and the meaning is the same.

When Maura says "**Why not** like our Facebook page?" she's really saying that you should like our page. It's like saying there is no reason not to. Using **why not** in this way is a very casual way to speak.

Here's another example with **why not**:

Henry: I'm working on my final project for class, but I'm not sure what else I need to include to make it look really awesome.

Serena: **Why not** include a colourful title page?

Why not is used similarly to *why don't you*. Remember that both of these can be actual questions when the person asking wants a real answer. But in the right situation, these are expressions used to make suggestions.

You can also answer yes to a question by saying **why not**. Saying **why not** is like saying there is no reason not to, so in this way, it's like saying yes. This is also very casual.

Here's an example using **why not** to mean yes:

Alan: Do you want to meet up for a drink tomorrow night?

Jamie: **Why not**? Where do you want to go?

To walk on eggshells

When one person has to act a certain way because another person or group of people is sensitive and gets upset easily, we can say this person is **walking on eggshells**. If you were to actually walk on eggshells, you would want to be careful just as you would around a person who is sensitive. Just like **walking on eggshells**, if you're not careful, you could do some damage.

Here's an example with **to walk on eggshells**:

Kyle: I hate **walking on eggshells** around my coworkers all the time. They always want everyone to be so quiet at the office.

Nate: That's not fun. You gotta talk sometimes.

To snap

A **snap** is a quick, sharp sound, often as something breaks. The noun **to snap** means to make this sound, or to break suddenly with a sharp sound.

In this episode, the verb **to snap** was used to talk about a person's behaviour. A person **snaps** when they suddenly speak or act quickly and sharply. A person who **snaps** is often experiencing an extreme emotion, like anger or frustration.

To snap is used twice in this episode. It is used in the first example dialogue to talk about a boss that **snaps** at you. This means the boss can get angry very quickly and acts or says something mean or impolite. Later on it is used again to talk about a grouchy IT person. This IT person **snaps** because he was asked to fix a computer.

Here's one more example:

Ken: Sorry about earlier. I didn't mean **to snap** at you, I was just in a bad mood.

Carl: It's all right. I know you've been frustrated with the assignment you've been working on.

We can say **to snap** or **to snap at someone**.

To be grounded

We've previously talked about this expression in other episodes, especially when talking about kids, parents, and growing up. When a person is **grounded**, it's almost always a child or a teenager. **To be grounded** means to be forbidden to leave a certain area, almost always the home. Getting **grounded** is a punishment for bad behaviour. It works as a punishment because the child or teenager can't go out to have fun and see their friends.

When an airplane is **grounded**, possibly because of bad weather or some technical problem, it means the airplane can't fly or go anywhere; it has to stay on the ground. This expression is connected to the other meaning, since neither the child nor the airplane can leave if they're **grounded**!

Here's an example with **to be grounded**:

Mom: You're **grounded**. You can forget about going to the party tomorrow night.

Nathan: But mom! Everyone is going to be there!

You know what I mean?

This is a question that leaves out the first word, *do*. The full question is **do you know what I mean?** This question also works like a statement because the speaker is expecting that the person who responds does understand them or and does know what they mean.

This phrase ***you know what I mean*** is a common, natural expression. People often check that the person listening to them understands what they are saying by asking this.

Here are a couple more examples with ***you know what I mean***:

Pia: I'm just not feeling well. **You know what I mean?**

Karen: I understand. You don't have to come if you don't want to do.

Andy: I'm having problems with my girlfriend. She says she's not sure how she feels and then I get confused. It's just so hard to figure out what to do about our messed up relationship. **You know what I mean?**

Matilda: Yeah, I know what you mean. Relationships can be hard.

To walk on pins and needles

To walk on pins and needles means to act carefully in a certain way so as not to disturb another person who is sensitive. Just imagine a person walking on pins and needles. They would probably be walking very differently and very carefully so as not to get hurt by the sharp pins and needles.

Here's one more example with this expression:

Hannah: I feel like I'm always walking on pins and needles around my friend James lately. He seems so agitated.

Karla: Maybe it's just a phase. What is he upset about?

To bug someone

To bug someone is to annoy or bother them, just like a little bug flying around your head or buzzing in your ear. One person can **bug** another person by the way they talk or something they say. They might also **bug** a person by how they act. The expression **to bug someone** can be used in a playful way or in a serious way. In the dialogue example with roommates, it's the behaviour of one roommate that **bugs** the other one, and so it is not a joke.

Here are a couple more examples with **to bug someone**:

Carmen: I'm gonna **bug** you. I'm gonna **bug** you. Lalalalala.

Maria: I don't care if you sing. It's doesn't bother me.

Johnny: Veronica was really **bugging** me the other day. She kept asking me questions about my love life.

Jerome: It's harmless. She's just curious.

To clean up after yourself

To clean up after yourself means to clean up whenever you make a mess. When you say that you **clean up after yourself**, it means that when you are done doing something, you clean up whatever mess you made. In this episode, a roommate talked about **cleaning up after herself**.

Here's another example with **to clean up after yourself**:

Jennifer: I'm always so messy. I want to change!

Brian: You've just got to make a new habit of always **cleaning up after yourself**. If you take something out of the closet, just make sure you put it back when you're done with it.

To hold a grudge

A person **holds a grudge** against another person. This means the person is mad about something the other person did. Even though the event is in the past, the person continues to be mad about it and so acts differently toward the person they **hold a grudge** against. A person can **hold a grudge** for days, or even years.

Anyone can **hold a grudge**, but some people never do. Maura comments that roommates tend to **hold grudges**. This is because in a close living situation, people may do things that bother the other person. Some roommates don't find it easy to talk about these things and so they **hold grudges** instead of solving their problems together.

Here's one more example:

Cara: What he did was wrong, but don't **hold a grudge**. It will only make you feel bad. It's better just to accept Scott's apology and move on.

Steve: I know you're right, but I just feel so angry still.

A detention

A detention is a punishment for students in elementary, junior, or senior high school. **A detention** is given to a student for inappropriate behaviour in class, and it means that a student will have to stay after class is finished. The punishment is that they are not able to be with their friends, but additional punishments, like extra homework, may also be given during **a detention**.

To tread lightly

This is the third expression in this episode that means to be careful around a person who may get upset easily. *To tread* can be to walk or to swim. It can also mean to walk on something. This expression refers to wanting to move lightly so as not to disturb a person who may get upset.

Here's one more example with this expression:

Ned: **Tread lightly** today. Everyone's stressed out about the science exam.

Monica: I would be too if I knew I had to write that test! I'm glad I'm not in your class.

At the drop of a hat

When something happens **at the drop of a hat**, it means that it happens suddenly and easily, without any warning. There is often only some small reason for the change in behaviour. It is unexpected when a person does something **at the drop of a hat** and so other people may feel surprised. This expression can be used with something negative or positive, but it is often used with something negative.

For example, if you have a friend who cries **at the drop of a hat**, it means that she cries easily, and for almost no reason. Imagine if someone started crying just because a hat fell on the ground. That would seem like a surprising and unexpected response.

In one example dialogue, Maura and Harp talk about a friend who is sad about a breakup. Maura says that she can cry **at the drop of a hat**. This means that the friend may start to cry suddenly and easily. Other people with her may not understand what happened to make her cry, but there is likely some small reason that causes her to have a big reaction.

Here are another couple of examples with **at the drop of a hat**:

Sam: Our boss always wants to stop what we're doing **at the drop of a hat** and start working on whatever new project he has on his mind.

Victor: That's so annoying.

Greg: If I had the money, I'd go on a vacation **at the drop of a hat**.

Christopher: Yeah, I wish. If I won the lottery, I'd quit my job tomorrow.

IT

IT is an area of study, and a department in many companies. **IT** is short for *information technology*. Short forms of longer terms are called abbreviations. This one can also be called an initialism, because the first initials are used to represent the words. Initialisms like this might also be written with periods in between like *I.T.* but the trend nowadays is not to use periods.

Anything and everything

Oftentimes in English, we have expressions or slang that make saying something shorter and faster. But sometimes we have expressions that are actually longer, as in this case. A person will sometimes say **anything and everything** to emphasize *everything*.

In this episode, Harp says that the IT guy gets upset about **anything and everything**. This means that he gets upset at everything, and to emphasize this, she uses the expression ***anything and everything***. This expression can also be switched around by saying ***everything and anything***.

Here's one more example:

Doug: What is Mel bringing on the camping trip?

Zack: **Everything and anything**. She doesn't know how to pack lightly.

Quiz

- 1. Paula: I need to get in shape.
Selena: Why not join a gym?**

What does Selena mean?

- a) There are many reasons not to join a gym.
- b) There are not many reasons to join a gym.
- c) Paula should join a gym.
- d) Paula should not join a gym.

- 2. Which of the following is an expression from this episode?**

- a) to walk on eggshells
- b) to talk on eggshells
- c) to walk on broken eggs
- d) to walk on eggs

- 3. If Joe snaps at Ryan, what does this mean?**

- a) Ryan says something angrily to Joe.
- b) Joe says something angrily to Ryan.
- c) Joe hits Ryan.
- d) Ryan is happy for Joe.

- 4. Which of the following pairs of expressions are both punishments for teenagers?**

- a) to bug and to hold a grudge
- b) to be grounded and to get a detention
- c) to bug and to get a detention
- d) to be grounded and to hold a grudge

- 5. Sharon really bugs Nathan.**

What does this mean?

- a) Sharon really likes Nathan.
- b) Sharon annoys Nathan.
- c) Nathan annoys Sharon.
- d) Nathan likes Sharon.

6. Jackie never cleans up _____.

Complete the phrase that means that Jackie cleans after she makes a mess.

- a) after yourself
- b) yourself
- c) after herself
- d) herself

7. **Why do roommates tend to hold grudges?**

- a) because they are good friends
- b) because they always do the dishes
- c) because roommates are usually more sensitive than other people
- d) because they annoy each other and stay mad about it

8. **Rebecca gets mad very easily and for what sometimes seems like no reason at all. Rebecca gets mad _____.**

Please fill in the blank.

- a) when treading lightly
- b) off the bat
- c) at the drop of a hat
- d) when she sees a hat

9. **Which of the following is a way to emphasize *everything*?**

- a) anything and everything
- b) very everything
- c) almost everything
- d) not nothing

Answers:

1.c 2.a 3.b 4.b 5.b 6.c 7.d 8.c 9.a