

Catch Word #120 – Try not to step on anyone's toes**Transcript**

Maura: Hello everyone. It's Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

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

Harp: Make sure you go to the website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Because there, you can find all our older episodes and you can become a member. And when you're a member, you have access to the learning materials, which include a detailed explanation, a complete transcript, and even a quiz.

Maura: And right now our membership is on sale, 30% off, so go check it out. Now, today's episode is a Catch Word episode, and that's where we give you different expressions and explanations and examples using those expressions.

Harp: Exactly. Let's get started. Today we're going to talk about expressions that deal with annoying someone or bothering someone.

Maura: Right. So our expressions today are used to talk about when one person annoys or bothers or upsets another person.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK. The first expression today is **to rattle someone's cage**.

Harp: **To rattle someone's cage**.

Maura: Right. **To rattle someone's cage**. And this means that you bother another person. This could be intentional, which means you might purposefully want to bother that other person, but it could also be unintentional, or an accident.

Harp: Yeah. It really depends on the situation.

Maura: So, if you imagine an animal that is in a cage, so they have bars around them, they're trapped inside. If you come around and start shaking the cage and banging on it, that bothers the animal inside. They don't like the noise and they don't like to feel disturbed.

Harp: Exactly. If you think about a little bunny or a hamster in the cage and you shake the cage, you're gonna bother the animal.

Maura: Right. It makes noise and it moves around. It's the same idea, except this time you're bothering a person. So, in other words, you're **rattling someone's cage**.

Harp: Yes.

Maura: OK. So, let's give a first example with **to rattle someone's cage**.

Maura: So, how's Brenda doing?

Harp: Well, I saw her last night and she was complaining about her boyfriend, again.

Maura: Oh no.

Harp: Yeah, she's always complaining about him. So yesterday I just **snapped** and I told her to stop complaining about him or to get rid of him. It really seemed to have **rattled her cage**.

Maura: Yeah, well, she probably needed to hear that because **it's really up to her** to make a change if she's not happy with her boyfriend.

Harp: Yeah, I'm sick of hearing her complain.

Maura: So, there is an example where **a person's cage was rattled**, which means they got upset or were annoyed or bothered by something someone else did.

Harp: Yes. And in this example, Brenda was bothered because her friend finally told her, "Stop complaining or do something."

Maura: And in this case, the friend who told Brenda to stop complaining and do something about it probably wanted Brenda to get upset and to realize that she had to do something about it herself.

Harp: Yeah, I'm sure it was intentional.

Maura: Sometimes friends have to tell each other the hard truth.

Harp: Mmhmm. Agreed.

Maura: OK, so, let's do one more example with **to rattle someone's cage**.

Harp: Let's do it.

- Maura: So, how was your meeting with Bob?
- Harp: Well, I don't know. I'm lost now.
- Maura: What happened?
- Harp: He really **rattled my cage**. He told me that the project I've been working on so far isn't what he wanted and now I have **to start from square one**.
- Maura: Did he give you a lot of **constructive criticism**? Did he tell you what you needed to change?
- Harp: Yeah, but I was just so surprised. I had no idea I **was so off base**.
- Maura: So, there was an example where one person **rattled another person's cage**. And this person was upset because they got the news that the project they were working on was not done correctly, so they felt upset and bothered by that news.
- Harp: Exactly. They thought they were doing a good job and then they found out suddenly that they weren't doing a good job so they were upset.
- Maura: Right. We don't know if Bob in that example wanted to **rattle someone's cage**, but the person did get upset. So whether it was intentional or not, the person was bothered.
- Harp: Definitely.
- Maura: OK. Let's move on to the next expression.
- Harp: OK. The next expression is **to ruffle someone's feathers**.
- Maura: Right. **To ruffle a person's feathers**. Now, Harp, I have an important question for you.
- Harp: Yes?
- Maura: Do you have feathers?
- Harp: No.
- Maura: So this expression was first not meant for humans but was more talking about birds. We'll explain that a bit more in our learning materials.
- Harp: Yeah, but basically this expression, **to ruffle someone's feathers**, means that you do something to upset or bother or annoy someone.

Maura: Right. So if one person **ruffles another person's feathers**, they've done something to bother them, or disturb them, and make them just not feel good.

Harp: All right. Let's give out first example.

Maura: Guess what my sister did.

Harp: What?

Maura: She went in to my closet and picked out one of my dresses and then wore it.

Harp: Did she ask you?

Maura: She didn't ask me and it was a brand new dress. I hadn't even worn it. She really **ruffles my feathers** when she goes into my stuff and just takes what she wants.

Harp: Ah, yeah. You've talked about this before. Maybe you should have a talk with her about this.

Maura: Oh, I will.

Maura: So, there is an example where a sister **ruffled another sister's feathers** by wearing her clothes.

Harp: This is definitely an example that's happened many times in my life when I was young.

Maura: It's definitely something that happens with sisters.

Harp: Mmhmm.

Maura: So, in this case, one person upset the other person by something that they did.

Harp: Exactly. Let's give one more example.

Maura: How did your weekly meeting with the boss go?

Harp: Not fantastic.

Maura: No? What happened?

Harp: Well, I was asking a lot of questions, you know? I just wanted to make sure I understood, but he got a little angry. I seem **to have ruffled his feathers**.

Maura: Yeah. He doesn't like too many question. He doesn't like to be bothered.

Harp: No, not at all.

Maura: So, there is another example where a person **ruffled another person's feathers**. And, obviously, the employee didn't mean to bother the boss, but he seems to be the kind of guy that gets bothered by too many questions.

Harp: Yes, exactly. He was upset because the employee was asking way too many questions.

Maura: OK. So let's look at our last expression now that also is used to talk about when one person upsets or bothers someone else.

Harp: OK. What's our last expression, Maura?

Maura: The last expression is **to step on someone's toes**.

Harp: **To step on someone's toes**.

Maura: Right. **To step on another person's toes**.

Harp: Yes. And this expression is very similar, and it means that you upset someone, or you annoy someone, or you bother someone.

Maura: And it makes sense. I don't think I would like it if I someone stepped on my toes.

Harp: No. It would make me upset, and maybe even a bit angry.

Maura: Right. So now this expression is not used to talk about anything physical, but it just means that one person bothers another person by something that they did or something that they said.

Harp: Yes, exactly.

Maura: OK. Let's give an example with this expression now.

Maura: Cynthia's really upset with me right now, I think.

Harp: Oh no. What happened?

Maura: Well, I was just trying to give her advice because she said her son has been kind of hyper, with too much energy, so I told her she should probably give him less sugar. But I think **I stepped on her toes** when I said that.

Harp: Oh no, that's not good. She was upset when you said that?

Maura: Well, she seemed a little bit upset. But then she didn't really seem in a good mood any more after that, so I just left and went home.

Harp: Well, it's good advice, so, I'm sure she'll **get over it**.

Maura: I hope so.

Maura: So, in that example, **one person stepped on her friend Cynthia's toes** when she gave the advice to not give her son so much sugar.

Harp: And in this example, Cynthia was upset because, often, parents don't like advice on how to raise their children. It's kind of a **touchy** topic.

Maura: Exactly. So when one person gives a mother or father advice on what to do with their child, sometimes that parent doesn't like it because they think they're not doing a good job or they feel just upset or bothered that someone else gave them advice.

Harp: Yeah. They think the child is their responsibility and they can raise the children how they want.

Maura: And that's really interesting also about this expression. **To step on someone's toes** is often used when someone is offended because another person has done something that was supposed to be their own responsibility.

Harp: Yeah. So in this example, Cynthia's children are her responsibility, so she was upset when the friend gave her advice.

Maura: Right. You might also use this expression at work if one person does the work of another employee, then that other employee might feel offended that someone else did their work.

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: OK. Let's give one more example with **to step on someone's toes**.

Maura: So, I've got a job interview tomorrow.

Harp: That's really exciting.

Maura: It is, but it's a group job interview and I've never done one before.

Harp: Oh, that's even more interesting. You really have to make sure you **stand out**, do something interesting. Make sure that you're noticed.

Maura: Yeah. I really want the job and I want to make myself look good, but I don't want **to step on other people's toes**.

Harp: Yeah. Be nice but make sure you **stand out**.

Maura: All right, I guess I'll just do my best.

Harp: You'll be great.

Maura: So, there is an example where someone didn't want **to step on other people's toes**. This means that the person didn't want to upset or bother other people. And this is often how this expression is used. People often say, "I don't want **to step on other people's toes**," or, "I didn't mean **to step on other people's toes**."

Harp: Yes, definitely. It's often used in this way of "I didn't want **to step on their toes**," or, "I don't want **to step on their toes**."

Maura: Right. Because most of the time, you don't want to bother other people or you don't want to do something that another person thinks is their responsibility.

Harp: Definitely.

Maura: OK. So let's repeat the expressions we looked at today one more time.

Harp: All right. Well we started with **to rattle someone's cage**.

Maura: And then we looked at the expression **to ruffle someone's feathers**.

Harp: And we finished with **to step on someone's toes**.

Maura: That's it. So, if you want to know more about these expressions or some of the other expressions we used in this episode, you can do that. All you have to do is go to our website and sign up to become a member.

Harp: Yes. And the website is Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: And, if you're on Facebook, come on over to our Facebook page and say hi.

Harp: Yes, or ask us a question if you have one.

Maura: Yup, we're around.

Harp: That's it for us today. Talk to you soon.

Maura: Goodbye.

Detailed Explanation

To rattle someone's cage

To rattle someone's cage is to bother or upset them a lot. Someone might intentionally **rattle another person's cage** because they want to upset the person or because they want the person to change. Sometimes a person doesn't want to change and so the only way to do this is **to rattle their cage**. One person might also **rattle another's cage** by accident.

When someone **rattles another person's cage**, this person is disturbed or upset by what someone said or did. This expression is not used for little annoyances, but for something that's more serious.

Here's one more example with **to rattle someone's cage**:

Mel: I'm sorry about what I said the other night. I didn't mean **to rattle your cage**. It's just that I think you need to know that your relationship is not healthy.

Jack: You're right. I probably needed to hear that. I'm glad you were honest with me.

To snap

When a person suddenly becomes angry or upset, we can say that this person **snaps**. A person can also **snap** by suddenly using harsh words and a stern voice to express their feelings. A person can **snap** or **snap at someone** by speaking harshly directly to them.

In one of the examples in this episode, someone **snaps** because her friend was continually complaining about her boyfriend. This person suddenly got angry or frustrated and spoke harshly to the friend about her relationship.

Here are another couple of examples with **to snap**:

Joel: When my boss told me he was letting me go, I just **snapped**. I couldn't believe it. I started yelling at him.

Jonathon: Well, I guess it doesn't matter now. He's not your boss anymore.

Adrienne: I feel so awful about fighting with my sister.

Karla: Just apologize for **snapping at her** and I'm sure everything will be OK.

To be up to someone

Instead of saying that one person or a group of people can make a decision, we often say that **the decision is up to them**. Saying **it's up to you** is a way of telling someone that the decision is their choice. This is a very common way to express who will be making the decision. It's also a casual expression, so it shouldn't be used in a formal or professional situation.

In one example in this episode, this expression is used to say that it's a friend's choice to decide whether to stay with her boyfriend or to break up with him. In this case, **it's up to her**.

This expression is almost always used with *it*, but *it* can also be *the decision* or whatever the decision is. Here are a couple more examples with **it's up to someone**:

Ryan: I don't care what we do today. Mike and Sarah can decide.

Olivia: I don't care either. We'll leave **it up to them** then.

Val: Do you want to see a drama or a comedy tonight?

Alexis: What movie we watch **is up to you**. I like everything.

To start from square one

To start from square one means to start at the beginning without any previous work accomplished. Another common version of this expression is **to go back to square one** because sometimes people have to go back to the beginning after they have already made some progress.

The origin of this expression is not known for certain, but it may be related to playing board games. Many board games have squares, which mark the players' progress in the game. Square one is at the beginning of the game, and if a player's game piece is there, it means they have not made any progress.

Here's one more example with **to start from square one**:

Chantal: I don't know anything about home renovations, but I'm sure I can fix up my bathroom myself.

Irene: If you're up for the challenge, I'm sure you can do it. You'll just have **to start from square one** and learn as you go.

If you want to know more about expressions related to starting again, check out our episode about going back to the drawing board.

Constructive criticism

Most people don't really like to be criticized. When people are criticized, they are told negative aspects about themselves. A criticism might be that a person is always late, or that their work is not done properly, or some other negative aspect that another person has noticed. It's easy to see why so many people don't like to be criticized, because hearing negative things about yourself isn't fun!

Constructive criticism is a bit different. If you receive **constructive criticism**, you hear about negative aspects of yourself from another person in order to improve and change any bad habits. If something is constructive, it's something that promotes improvement.

A person is most likely to hear **constructive criticism** in school or at work. In an example in this episode, Maura and Harp talk about **constructive criticism** at work.

Here's one more example with **constructive criticism**:

Nicole: I hate getting **constructive criticism** on my paintings at school.

Kevin: I know it's though, but if you don't hear it now you may never learn.

To be off base

When a person is described as **off base**, it means that they are not right. If you imagine that the base is correct, **being off base** means that you're wrong and far from being correct. This is a casual and less direct way to tell a person that they're wrong.

In this episode, in the dialogue about a project at work, an employee found that they **were off base**. This means that the work they had done on the project was not right.

In order to emphasize someone being completely wrong, you might also hear **to be so off base** or **to be way off base**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be off base**:

Kyle: I told him he **was way off base** when he started saying that I didn't deserve to work for this company.

Brendan: I can't believe he said that! You're one of the best employees there.

Florence: Let me see the work you've done so far. You don't seem **to be too far off base**.

Ted: Thanks. I always like to get a second opinion.

To ruffle someone's feathers

Here's another expression that means to bother or upset someone. **To ruffle someone's feathers** is related to birds, with two possible explanations. The first is that when some birds are bothered, they display ruffled feathers that make the bird look larger and more dangerous. In this case, the bird is trying to protect itself by ruffling its feathers. The second explanation is that this expression might be related to the fact that a bird's feathers lie in one direction. If a bird's feathers are disturbed, or ruffled, this bothers them.

Here's one more example with **to ruffle someone's feathers**:

Fred: I didn't mean **to ruffle any feathers** when I quit. It was just time for me to move on.

Rosemary: It's just that you're going to be missed around here and people were surprised.

To step on someone's toes

Here's another expression that means to bother or upset a person. Like we say in this episode, if someone **steps on your toes** it's annoying, it disturbs you, and it may even hurt, just like the meaning of this expression.

This expression can also be used to talk about bothering someone in a specific way. When one person does work that's the responsibility of somebody else, this person may be **stepping on their toes**. It really depends on how the person feels. For example, if Jenny does some of David's work and it doesn't bother him, then **no toes were stepped on**. If Jenny does some of Frank's work and it does bother him, then she **stepped on his toes**. In both cases, Jenny might say that she didn't mean **to step on anybody's toes**.

In the example from this episode, a parent feels **her toes were stepped on** because someone gives her parenting advice. This person did not try to do her work, but just told her how she should do something that's her job.

Here are a couple more examples with **to step on someone's toes**:

Mike: Do you think I would be **stepping on Anita's toes** if I asked her if she wanted any help planning the party?

Nancy: I don't think so. She would probably appreciate your offer.

Charles: I think I **stepped on Jared's toes** when I suggested changing the design of the kitchen.

Anna: Well, he is the designer, but it's your kitchen, so he has to listen to what you say.

To get over something

To get over something means to accept something that is upsetting and continue with your life. When a person is **over something**, they don't think about it anymore and they don't let it affect their life.

This expression is used in this episode when one person upsets another by giving her parenting advice. The upset person **gets over it** when she is not angry anymore and doesn't let what happened bother her. Every time a person is made or sad, they **get over it** when they feel happy or back to normal again.

Here's one more example with **to get over something**:

Simone: I don't think I'll ever **get over this break up**. I'm just so sad.

Gina: I know it's hard, but you'll start to feel better. It just takes time.

This expression can also be used to talk about relationships, as in **to get over him**, or **to get over her**. When a person can accept that a relationship with another person will not work and they don't think about the person anymore, then they are **over him or her**.

Touchy

The adjective **touchy** is used to describe a person who is sensitive, especially about certain topics. A topic or situation can also be sensitive, which means that people react strongly to it and may become upset. In North America, **touchy** subjects generally include politics, money, and religion.

In this episode, Maura and Harp say that giving people parenting advice is a **touchy** subject. The reason for this is that people can get offended that another person has told them how to raise their children. This is because people often have very strong personal beliefs about how this should be done.

Here are a couple more examples with **touchy**:

Paula: I didn't know it was such a **touchy** subject for Sheena when I brought up Clive the other day.

Kira: Yep. She's still not over him. She gets really upset when we talk about it.

Lyle: My colleague who sits next to me is so **touchy**. I don't know how to talk to him about problems at work without him getting offended.

Ben: It's hard to deal with someone who's oversensitive all the time.

To stand out

To stand out is to be different. A person or thing can **stand out** in comparison to others who are the norm. Being different from the norm can be positive or negative depending on the situation and the people involved. If you imagine a group of people with one person standing separate from them, this person is different and does not belong as part of the group.

In this episode, **to stand out** is used to talk about a situation where it would be good **to stand out**. If you **stand out** in a job interview, it means you look better than the others.

Here are two more examples, one positive and one negative, with **to stand out**:

Andrea: I went to a party last night and I **stood out** so much. I thought it was a formal party so I wore a nice dress, but everyone else was wearing jeans.

Irena: I'm sure it wasn't that bad! Maybe you stood out in a good way because you looked so nice.

Emily: Antonia's paintings always **stand out** as being some of the best in our class.

Henry: She is definitely talented.

Quiz

1. One of the expressions in this episode is *to rattle someone's* _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) cake
 - b) cage
 - c) body
 - d) trap
2. When one person snaps at another, what happens?
- a) One person is very excited about the other person.
 - b) One person suddenly doesn't remember the other person.
 - c) One person is suddenly not angry at the other person anymore.
 - d) One person suddenly gets angry with another person.
3. Which of the following is another way to tell someone that something is their decision?
- a) It's down on you.
 - b) It's on to you.
 - c) It's up to you.
 - d) It's under you.
4. What does *to start from square one* mean?
- a) to play games
 - b) to be boring
 - c) to start at the beginning
 - d) to start by following the rules
5. Josh just found out that the project he was working on was completely incorrect.
- Which of the following describes this situation?
- a) He was off base.
 - b) He snapped.
 - c) He ruffled someone's feathers.
 - d) It was up to him.

6. **Sylvia got angry when Jack tried to take complete control of the project she was responsible for.**

Which of the following describes this situation?

- a) Sylvie stepped on Jack's toes.
- b) Jack stepped on Sylvie's toes.
- c) They both stepped on each other's toes
- d) Sylvie stepped on someone else's toes.

7. **Camille: I still can't believe I was fired. I don't think I'll ever accept it.**
Enid: You have to _____ and move on.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) get into it
- b) get over it
- c) get under it
- d) get onto it

8. **Which of the following is NOT normally a touchy subject North America?**

- a) religion
- b) money
- c) weather
- d) politics

9. **All of the following people are at a formal, fancy party. Which one is most likely to stand out?**

- a) Elaine is wearing a ball gown.
- b) Adam is wearing a tuxedo.
- c) Jim is wearing jeans.
- d) Viviane is wearing a cocktail dress.

Answers:

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