

## Catch Word # 48 – Chicken

### Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp ...

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're bringing you a Catchword podcast.

Maura: Yeah, a Catchword episode. And this is where we look at one expression and we give you lots of examples and similar expressions, and we explain it for you in a lot of detail.

Harp: Exactly. Make sure you check out our website, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. There you can find the Lipservice where you can see the full transcript, detailed explanations and even a quiz.

Maura: Yes -- **important to go to the website.**

Harp: Exactly.

Maura: Now let's get to today's episode.

Harp: What is our Catchword today, Maura?

Maura: **Bawk, bawk bawk bawk ... Chicken!**

Harp: Yes, our Catchword today is **chicken!**

Maura: Which for many of you listening out there ... I'm sure you are thinking, "I already know the word **chicken**. It's an animal." But, we do use it in another way.

Harp: Exactly, there is a slang use for **chicken**.

Maura: Exactly. So you already know the original meaning of the word, which is the animal, but in English sometimes we use **chicken** to describe a person who is very afraid of something.

Harp: Yeah, someone who is scared of things.

Maura: Yeah, so someone who is, yeah, afraid of doing something, doesn't take a lot of risks. We could say they're a **chicken**.

- Harp: Yeah, someone who is a **chicken** is a coward.
- Maura: Right, so they could be afraid or they could also be not courageous. They don't have any courage; they don't want to try dangerous things or risky things.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly, let's give some examples on how this is used.
- Maura: OK.
- Harp: So Maura, how was swimming yesterday?
- Maura: Yeah, it was pretty fun. It was OK. I'm still learning.
- Harp: OK. Did you jump of the high diving board?
- Maura: No, I was too **chicken**.
- Harp: Oh no, you **chickened out**?
- Maura: Yeah.
- Harp: **Maybe next time.**
- Maura: Yeah, so in that case, because I was afraid to jump off a high place into the pool, I was a **chicken**.
- Harp: Exactly, she was afraid to do something.
- Maura: Yeah in that example as well, I called myself a **chicken**. So you can use it to talk about yourself if you know that you were afraid to do something or you can also use it to talk about other people.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: So another thing that you said Harp ...
- Harp: Mhm.
- Maura: You said **to chicken out**.
- Harp: Yeah, I did.
- Maura: So, what does that mean?

- Harp: So when you **chicken out** of something, it's when you were planning on doing something but then you got afraid, you got scared and you didn't do it. You **chickened out**.
- Maura: Right, so maybe I was planning on jumping off the diving board but then I got afraid so I **chickened out**.
- Harp: So an example of **chicken out** is, my friend wanted to **ask this girl out on a date**. He's liked her for so long, but he **chickened out** and he didn't ask her for a date.
- Maura: Oh no, is he going to ask her again later?
- Harp: Hopefully. He's thinking about it but I think he will **chicken out**.
- Maura: So sometimes you want to do something but you're too nervous and too afraid so you act like a **chicken**. So another interesting game related to this word, **chicken**, is the car game.
- Harp: I wouldn't say interesting game. I would say dangerous game.
- Maura: Yes, **very dangerous you're right**.
- Harp: Can you explain the game, **chicken**?
- Maura: Yeah, well I guess it was popular in the 1950s with teenagers. Although we should say it's very dangerous and illegal.
- Harp: And no one should try this ever.
- Maura: Exactly. So the car game was two drivers, each in their own car driving towards each other, and the first person to turn away was the **chicken**.
- Harp: Yeah, it was so dangerous. Lots of people crashed, people died. But this is maybe where the expression came into more popular use.
- Maura: Yeah yeah maybe because of this. But nowadays people are probably much smarter and it's very very rare, and almost never that people do this kind of thing.
- Harp: Yeah, I hope never.
- Maura: Yeah, me too. OK, so a **chicken** is someone who is afraid or not courageous or a coward.
- Harp: Exactly.

- Maura: So what is another way that we could describe someone who is afraid?
- Harp: Well, a fun way of saying that someone is a **chicken** is to say that they're a **scaredy cat** or a **'fraidy cat**.
- Maura: Yeah, those are some really funny expressions. Let me repeat them for you, **scaredy cat**, so two words, or **'fraidy cat**.
- Harp: Yeah and the meaning is the same. It's a person who is not courageous, who is afraid, who is scared.
- Maura: Yeah, so you can see the connection with the word scared and **scaredy cat**.
- Harp: Yeah, the same way that you can see the connection with afraid and **'fraidy cat**.
- Maura: The other really important thing to remember is that **scaredy** is not really a word.
- Harp: No.
- Maura: And **'fraidy** is not really a word either. It's really just a slang way in this expression to be used.
- Harp: Yeah.
- Maura: So yeah **scaredy** and **'fraidy** are not actually words, they're just used in these expressions.
- Harp: Yeah, for sure, so don't use them on their own.
- Maura: No, and probably if you tried to look them up in the dictionary they won't be there.
- Harp: No.
- Maura: So this expression possibly came from cats, because you know cats, they can seem very afraid. When there's new people around they run away.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly.
- Maura: Right so they don't like, maybe, something dangerous or unknown.
- Harp: Exactly.

- Maura: OK. Another important thing to keep in mind with these expressions is that they're very playful, or they're used more by kids.
- Harp: You wouldn't really hear an adult calling another adult a **scaredy cat**
- Maura: Right, even a **chicken**. Maybe not.
- Harp: No, it's more playful. It's more fun. It's for children.
- Maura: Right, um if an adult was using it, it would only be in a fun way as a joke.
- Harp: Yeah exactly.
- Maura: Ok so let's give a funny example with **scaredy cat**.
- Harp: I didn't go into my basement yesterday.
- Maura: Why not, Harp?
- Harp: I'm kind of a **scaredy cat** and it was a bit too dark.
- Maura: You're afraid of the dark?
- Harp: Sometimes.
- Maura: You are a **scaredy cat**!
- Harp: I am a little bit.
- Maura: OK, so that's a really good example. It's an innocent thing, you were afraid of the dark, but I called you a **scaredy cat**.
- Harp: Exactly. Let's recap what we talked about today.
- Maura: Yeah so we started with **chicken**.
- Harp: Yes, a **chicken** is someone who is **scared**, **afraid**, **frightened** to do something.
- Maura: Exactly, or we can also say **to chicken out**.
- Harp: Yeah.
- Maura: And then the other similar expression was ...?
- Harp: A **scaredy cat**.

- Maura: Or?
- Harp: Or a **'fraidy-cat**.
- Maura: Yeah, so these are cute little names that usually are for kids but you might hear them.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly.
- Maura: I called you a **chicken** the other day, didn't I Harp?
- Harp: You did.
- Maura: Harp was afraid to go outside because it was too cold.
- Harp: I'm afraid of the cold.
- Maura: It is pretty cold.
- Harp: Really cold.
- Maura: OK, so that's it for today. We hope you enjoyed this lesson and the other meaning of **chicken**.
- Harp: Exactly, so have a good day!
- Maura: And we will talk to you later.
- Harp: Bye everyone.
- Maura: Bye.

## Detailed Explanation

### Chicken

In this episode **chicken** is used to describe someone who is afraid or who is a coward. There are a few different ways that you can use **chicken**.

1. You can simply say, "Chicken!"
2. You can say, "You are acting like a chicken," or "You are being a chicken."
3. You can say, "You are a chicken," or "You are chicken."

These all mean virtually the same thing. The one small distinction is that 1 and 2 are used to speak in the moment, but 3 could be used in the moment or to speak in general. Here are a couple examples to show the difference.

Victor: I'm scared!

Nina: Stop being a chicken! (in this moment; now)

Sasha: I know I have to do it, but I just can't!

Jess: You are a chicken. You always feel afraid for no reason. (in general)

Remember also that if you want to use **chicken** to mean that someone is afraid or a coward, you should only do so with friends or family. Calling someone a **chicken** may not be a nice thing, so it is best to say this to someone you know very well. Some people say **chicken** as a joke in a playful way, but others, like children, can be mean.

### Bawk, bawk

This is the sound a chicken makes. In English it is written **bawk** but we couldn't find it in any dictionaries. You might also see it written like *bok*. A chicken also makes a *cluck* sound. Maybe you were taught that chickens make a *cluck* sound!

**Bawk** can be said to a person and it is just like calling someone a chicken. Here is an example where **chicken** and the sound **bawk** are used the same way.

Gary: I am afraid to go down there.

Norm: **Chicken!**

Gary: I am afraid to go down there.

Norm: **Bawk, bawk, bawk, bawk!**

\*Here, you can say **bawk** any number of times! But you cannot use the word *cluck* as a sound to mean that someone is afraid.

To chicken out (of something)

We can also use **chicken** as a verb, **to chicken out**. Here are a couple more examples.

Donna: I'm scared. I don't know what to do.

Nicole: Well, don't **chicken out**.

Brenda: I am really nervous. I don't think that I can do it.

Jack: Are you really going to **chicken out of giving the speech**?

Maybe next time

In this episode, Harp says, "**Maybe next time**" after Maura admits to **chickening out of something**. Here, when Harp says, "**maybe next time**" she means "maybe next time you will jump from the high diving board." Here are a couple examples.

Gloria: I wanted to go to the movie last night, but I didn't make it there.

Tim: **Maybe next time**. (you will be able to see the movie)

Harry: I didn't pass the test.

Kim: **Maybe next time**. (you will pass the test)

-- important to go to the website/Yes, very dangerous you're right.

Here are a couple examples of how in English we sometimes leave out certain important words. In these two examples we leave out the subject.

For "**-- important to go to the website**," the full sentence is "It is important to go to the website." And for "**Yes, very dangerous you're right**," it should be, "Yes, it is very dangerous for sure." English speakers sometimes leave out the subject when speaking but it is rare to do it when writing.

To ask someone out

**To ask someone out on a date** is said a couple different ways in this episode. Harp also says *to ask someone for a date*. You can also say *to ask someone out* or *to ask someone on a date*.

Chicken (the car game)

This dangerous game is explained in this episode. Two drivers drive toward each other and the first one to swerve (move out of the way) is a **chicken**. But actually the worst situation would be if no one swerves because then both drivers die. This game is no longer played and is very dangerous. It was an example we use in the episode to possibly explain how the term **chicken** came to be popular.



Scaredy cat/'Fraidy cat

These are the two strange synonyms of **chicken**. **Scaredy cat** and **'fraidy cat** are used just like **chicken**, to mean that someone is afraid or not courageous.

Remember also that **scaredy** and **'fraidy** are not real words. You probably won't find them in the dictionary and you should not use them on their own.

Scared/afraid/frightened ...

**Scaredy** in **scaredy cat** and **'fraidy** in **'fraidy cat** come from the words *scared* and *afraid*. There are lots of words to talk about people who are afraid. Here is a short list for you.

- Scared
- Afraid
- Frightened
- Petrified
- Terrified
- Fearful

Who uses these expressions?

So who uses the slang expressions? They are used by younger people and children in a joking or serious way. These expressions can also be used by adults but usually in a joking way. Some adults may use these expressions with children.

**Quiz** (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

**1. What is the definition of *chicken* when it is used as an idiom?**

- a) a meal
- b) an animal
- c) someone is afraid or a coward
- d) someone is courageous and brave

**2. Which word is missing from this sentence?**

**Important to go to the website.**

- a) was
- b) they
- c) it
- d) them

**3. Which sound does a chicken make?**

- a) bawk
- b) meow
- c) bark
- d) cheep

**4. Charlie: Why didn't Bernice talk to him?**

**Amanda: She \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Please fill in the blank.**

- a) chickened
- b) chickened out
- c) chickened in
- d) chickened up

5. Kelly asked Jamie out. What does that mean?

- a) Kelly asked Jamie for a meeting.
- b) Kelly asked Jamie to go outside.
- c) Kelly asked Jamie to leave.
- d) Kelly asked Jamie on a date.

6. What is the chicken game?

- a) a car game
- b) a card game
- c) a game with chickens
- d) a game that you play at the farm

7. Ned: I am afraid to go talk to her.

Robbie: Don't be such a \_\_\_\_\_.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) rooster
- b) 'fraidy cat
- c) cat
- d) dog

8. Which of the following are not real words?

- a) 'fraidy
- b) scaredy
- c) bawk
- d) all of the above

**Answers:** 1.c 2.c 3.a 4.b 5.d 6.a 7. b 8. d