

Real Talk #045 – How to respond to bad news

Episode description

Occasionally, someone will come to you with bad news. How should you respond? In this Real Talk episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy discuss the different ways you can be a good friend when responding to bad news.

Fun fact

The example dialogue in this episode revolves around a driver's licence test. Although the legal driving age in most countries is 18, there are jurisdictions in Canada and the United States where you can start driving at the age of 14 with parental supervision.

Expressions included in the study guide

- That's too bad
- I'm sorry to hear that
- Don't beat yourself up over it
- [Something] isn't the end of the world
- To be bummed out
- What a bummer
- Don't stress it
- To kill it



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: Hello there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Welcome back to Culips, everyone. This is a Real Talk episode. Real Talk is the series where we teach you the English that you need to know for everyday, real-world situations. And today I am joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hey there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew. Today's topic is bad news and how to respond to that bad news.

Andrew: Exactly, how to respond when hearing bad news and also how to cheer someone up when they tell you some bad news, right? That is also a very important thing to know how to do in a natural way.

Kassy: Yes, very important.

Andrew: So we'll get to that in just a moment. But before we do, we have a little bit of housekeeping to take care of. And I wanted to start that off by giving a shout-out to one of our listeners, Yossi, who left us a nice rating and review on Apple podcasts. Yossi said, "For me, as a Japanese person and English learner, Culips is one of my favourite, and it is one of the most helpful podcasts. When I'm on the train going to the office every day, I love to listen to Culips. And if you want to hear a podcast which includes not only excited conversation, but also natural and placid or calm conversations, then I strongly recommend this program." So, Yossi, thank you very much for that rating. It's very nice to hear that you enjoy Culips.

Kassy: I totally agree.

Andrew: Kassy, we have a study guide for this episode, don't we?

Kassy: Yes, we do.

Andrew: Yes, everyone. The study guide for this episode is available for all Culips members. And we recommend following along with the study guide while you listen to us here today. To get it, just visit Culips.com.

Kassy: And if you're not a Culips member yet, but would like to see why our study guides are such an awesome resource for studying English, then just visit Culips.com and select the Study Guide Samples option from the Membership menu and you can download six free study guide samples and take a look.

Andrew: All right, so let's break down the plan for this episode for our listeners. Everyone, we're going to listen to a conversation between two friends. And, unfortunately, one of the friends has some bad news to share, because he just failed his driver's licence test. So we'll listen to that conversation. And then after we do, Kassy and I will break down that conversation and we'll take a close look at the expressions that you need to know in order to be able to respond to hearing bad news like this in a very natural way.

Kassy: Sounds good. Let's take a listen now.

Friend 1: So, how did it go? Are you officially a licenced driver?

Friend 2: Ah, didn't go very well, actually. And, no, not a new driver. I just failed the test.

Friend 1: Oh, no. **That's too bad. I'm so sorry to hear that.**

Friend 2: Yeah, and the worst part is that I almost passed. I just failed at the very end during the parallel parking part.

Friend 1: Ah, that part is the hardest. **Don't beat yourself up over it.** I actually failed my first test the same way.

Friend 2: Oh, really?

Friend 1: Yeah, and then I passed it on my second try. So don't worry too much. **Failing isn't the end of the world.** Practice up a little bit and you'll definitely pass next time.

Friend 2: Thanks. That's good advice.

Andrew: All right, everyone. So in that conversation, two friends were talking and one of the friends just failed his driver's licence test. And that was the bad news that he told to his friend, right? I have bad news to tell you. I just failed my test.

So, Kassy, we're going to break down this conversation now. But before we do, we should let all of our listeners know about the kind of bad news we're talking about today. So when we're talking about bad news, what does that exactly mean for this episode?

Kassy: Yeah, so this kind of bad news is more of a disappointing kind of bad news rather than tragic bad news.

Andrew: Right. So if you failed a test, or if you didn't get hired for a job. Maybe you, you know, had a job interview and then you weren't selected for the job. Or maybe you went on a date with somebody, and it just didn't go very well even though you're really excited for the date. It's this kind of disappointing bad news.

So, as you said, Kassy, more tragic bad news situations, like if somebody close to you passes away, or if your house burnt down in a fire. If something really terrible and awful happened, then actually, you wouldn't wanna use these expressions. Maybe we can deal with that kind of tragic bad news in a different episode, but I thought it was important to clarify that before we get into the nitty-gritty details here.

OK, so in the conversation, we heard that the friend failed the test. OK, this was the bad news. And what was the response to that bad news?

Kassy: She said **that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that.**

Andrew: Yeah, **that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that.** OK. So what are some other ways that we could respond to bad news? For example, let's say I just got an F on my history essay. And I'm a bit **bumped out** about that. So I say, oh, Kassy, I'm feeling a little bit down. I just got an F on my history essay. How could you respond to that in a natural way?

Kassy: I could say, like, oh, man, that really sucks. But don't worry, don't let it get you down.

Andrew: Yeah, so, oh, man, that sucks. Don't let it get you down. Get you down here meaning don't let it cause you to feel depressed, right? We could say, oh, that's terrible. Or that's horrible. That's awful.

Kassy: Or **what a bummer.**

Andrew: **What a bummer.** Again, here **bummer** means a disappointment, right? What a disappointment. **What a bummer.** This is a very casual expression that we wouldn't necessarily use to speak with our boss, for example, but among friends, it's OK.

And also what we heard in the example conversation was the expression **I'm so sorry to hear that. I'm so sorry to hear that.** And to be honest, this is a very good expression for responding to bad news that you can use in all sorts of situations, right? It could be those tragic situations that we mentioned earlier, or also these more disappointing bad news situations.

Kassy: Yeah, and the interesting part about that sentence, I'm sorry, **I'm sorry to hear that.** Even though you didn't do anything wrong, it's not an apology. The sorry is used to show that you support them. Like, I understand. I'm sorry that happened to you.

Andrew: Yeah, that's an excellent point. It's not an apology, right? **I'm sorry to hear that** doesn't mean, like, I'm apologizing for your bad news situation. It just means that I feel sympathy for you. I understand that that's a difficult situation and I wish you didn't have to go through that. That's kind of what you're communicating with this expression.

Now, that's a perfect segue to the next part of this episode where we are going to look at some expressions that you can use when you want to show sympathy, right? And sympathy means that you understand how somebody else is feeling. OK? Because you can imagine somebody else's bad situation and think to yourself, wow, if that was me, I would feel horrible. And so you want to respond with kindness, because you can understand that somebody else's bad news situation is a very difficult position to be in.

So in the example conversation, Kassy, how did the friend show sympathy?

Kassy: She used the expression **don't beat yourself up over it**.

Andrew: Yeah, **don't beat yourself up over it**. OK. **Don't beat yourself up over it**. We have to explain this one some more, I think. So, first of all, why don't we start by explaining what it means to beat up or beat up someone. What does this mean?

Kassy: To beat up someone means to, like, hit them into a bloody pulp or something, to really cause harm to someone else.

Andrew: Right. So if you beat someone very badly by, like, punching them or kicking them or hitting them, then that is beating someone up. However, this expression is **don't beat yourself up**. Now, this is a pretty difficult thing to do physically, right? You can't physically punch yourself very easily. At least I can't. So it's not talking about physically beating yourself up, right? It's kind of an emotional or metaphorical sense of the word that we're using it in. And here it just means don't become too depressed. Don't criticize yourself too much because of your failure.

Kassy: Yeah, there's a famous quote that says, "You are your own worst enemy." Like, those negative thoughts in your mind can hurt you more than anything else. So don't think those negative thoughts. **Don't beat yourself up over it**.

Andrew: Don't be depressed. Don't be too hard on yourself because of your failure. Just regroup, try again, and you'll be OK.

OK. So that is what we heard in the example. But what are some alternative expressions we can use to show sympathy?

Kassy: Another one I like is **don't stress it**.

Andrew: **Don't stress it**. Yeah. **Don't stress it**. One that I use all the time is it's no biggie. It's no biggie.

Kassy: I like that one. Not a big deal. It's no biggie.

Andrew: Yeah, biggie means big deal. And it just means, like, it's not too important. If you fail your driver's licence test, this is just a small thing. You can do it again. You'll pass later. It's not a biggie.

Kassy: That's a good segue into another one that was used in this example: **it's not the end of the world**.

Andrew: **It's not the end of the world**. Yeah. All right. It's, like, it's not too consequential. Your life is not over, it's not finished if you don't pass the driving licence test. Or if you go on a first date, and that date doesn't work out, well, you can find somebody else to date. Or if you don't get the job because you had a bad interview, you can get another job somewhere else. **It's not the end of the world**.

Kassy: Another way that you can show sympathy for someone's bad news is by relating it to your own experience of bad news. So in the example, the friend who was giving sympathy, she mentioned that she also failed her test the first time that she took it.

Andrew: Yeah, precisely. So this is more of a cultural thing, rather than an expression. What you say is going to change in each situation, but this is one thing that, culturally, English speakers do is that when someone is sharing some bad news, we can show sympathy by saying that, oh, we have a similar experience. That happened to me, too, and now I'm OK. I got through it. So if you have this kind of story that is relatable or shows that you went through a similar experience, then this is something that is a good idea to share at a time when someone is hurting and you want to show sympathy towards that person.

Kassy: Exactly. And it's not a way to make that person's failure less, right? You're not trying to focus on yourself. You're trying to show that person that you experienced it too and you understand how they're feeling and there's a light at the end of the tunnel, like, it'll get better.

Andrew: Yes, exactly. All right, so the final aspect of, you know, responding to bad news and showing sympathy that we are going to take a look at today is how to encourage someone. Because, you know, when someone goes through a failure or disappointment, they often feel down or depressed or maybe sad. So it's a natural thing to want to encourage that person and make them feel better. And in the example conversation that we heard, the friend said, don't worry about it too much, **failing isn't the end of the world**. Practice a little bit, and you'll definitely pass next time. So these are the kinds of things that she said to show sympathy and encouragement.

Kassy, what about you, what kind of expressions would you use in this situation, Kassy?

Kassy: I really like the word great. So I would use the phrase, ah, don't worry, you'll do great next time, or you're gonna be great.

Andrew: You're gonna be great, you're going to be great, you're going to do great. Something like this. Yeah, it's an interesting grammar construction there, everyone. We actually have two options. We can say you'll do great, like, you will do great, you'll do great. Or you're going to do great. And this is an example of us using, kind of, present continuous sentence, but, actually, the meaning is in the future in this context.

Personally, I say you'll **kill it**, you're going **to kill it**, you'll **kill it** next time. That means, like, you know, if you have to redo a test or redo an interview, it means you are going to 100% do a perfect job. You're going **to kill it**. Or sometimes I also say you're going to nail it or you'll nail it. So nail it means the same thing, to do an amazing job.

Kassy: I was thinking you'll smash it the next time.

Andrew: Yeah, all of these expressions mean the same thing, nail it, **kill it**, smash it. It means doing a really good job on, you know, a test, an interview, an exam, an assignment, a project, that kind of thing.

Well, that brings us to the end of this episode, everyone. Thank you for studying English with us here today. And we hope that you feel good and feel encouraged in your English studies, because what you did right here with us today is the kind of work that you need to do every day if you want to become a fluent English speaker. So we're glad that you showed up and put in some study time with us today.

Kassy: Yes. And to recap this episode, we talked about how to respond to bad news, how to show sympathy towards that bad news, and how to encourage someone to do better the next time. And we learned some cool expressions like, ah, **what a bummer** or that sucks. Or showing sympathy, **don't stress it**, don't let it get you down. Or to encourage someone, you'll **kill it** next time or you're going to do great.

Andrew: If you enjoyed this episode and found it educational and entertaining, then please support us. You can do so in a variety of ways. You could, for example, become a paid Culips member. Guys, we couldn't keep doing Culips without the support of our members. So thank you to all of our members. And when you become a Culips member, you'll get unlimited access to our study guide library, ad-free episodes, access to our members-only exclusive series, the Culips Fluency Files, and so much more. We're working on some new bonus things for our members right now that we will hopefully be announcing soon. So, everyone, if you wanna sign up and become a Culips member, then just do it on our website, Culips.com.

But that's not the only way you can support us. You could also leave us a five-star rating and positive review, just like Yossi did on your favourite podcast app, like Apple Podcasts, for example. You could tell your friends about the Culips English Podcast or, finally, you can follow us on social media, like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook.

Kassy: And you can always get in touch with us by emailing us at contact@Culips.com.

Andrew: We will be back soon with another brand-new Culips episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye, everyone.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

That's too bad

Idiom

That's too bad is one of the most common ways to react to bad news. **That's too bad** is a general statement acknowledging the disappointing news that the other person has announced. Similar expressions are **that's terrible**, **that's horrible**, and **that's awful**.

Here's one more example with **that's too bad**:

Fay: Did you manage to buy that snowboard online?

Ollie: No, I couldn't.

Fay: What happened?

Ollie: It was for sale in an online auction, and someone outbid me at the last second.

Fay: Oh, **that's too bad**. Keep looking, though. There are tons of deals at this time of year.

I'm sorry to hear that

Idiom

I'm sorry to hear that is another way to express sympathy for someone else's situation. You say **I'm sorry to hear that** to show that you understand how the bad news affects someone else. It is also a way to wish the other person was not afflicted by whatever bad news you just heard.

Here's one more example with **I'm sorry to hear that**:

Chuck: Are you coming to the lake with us this weekend?

Jeff: I can't. My aunt passed away and the funeral is this weekend.

Chuck: **I'm so sorry to hear that**. Please send my condolences to your parents and the family.

Jeff: I will. Thanks.

Don't beat yourself up over it

Idiom

Don't beat yourself up over it is an expression you can say to encourage the other person not to be too depressed by a bad situation. In other words, it means don't hurt yourself psychologically over this, and please try not to get depressed over what happened. This expression is intended to encourage the other person to think positively.

Don't beat yourself up over it is often used when the other person is responsible in some way for the bad circumstances. For example, you can say **don't beat yourself up over it** when someone fails an exam. However, you wouldn't say it when the bad news is about a death in the family because the person is not responsible for the death.

Other similar expressions are **don't be too hard on yourself** and **don't let it get you down**.

Here are a couple more examples with **don't beat yourself up over it**:

Vera: How did the job interview go?

Cindy: Not well at all. Usually they tell you that they'll keep in touch. This time they told me I wasn't a good fit for the position.

Vera: Oh, no. But **don't beat yourself up over it**. There is no doubt that you'll be a perfect fit for one of your job interviews.

Cindy: You're right. I have a few more left this week.

Vera: Chin up.

Leo: I can't believe we lost the championship game. This sucks.

Mike: I know. But **don't be too hard on yourself**, you did everything you could.

Leo: I don't think I'm ever going to get over this.

Mike: **Stop beating yourself up over it**. There's always next year. Let's work hard in the off-season and come back stronger.

[Something] isn't the end of the world

Idiom

In the example dialogue, one friend tries to console the other by saying that **failing the driving test isn't the end of the world**. Saying **[something] isn't the end of the world** is another way to help someone deal with their bad situation. In this sense, you are putting things into perspective. Sure, failing the driving test isn't good, but nobody is going to die because of it. The sun will still rise tomorrow and the world will not end. This might sound overly dramatic, but **[something] isn't the end of the world** is a common expression English speakers use to help people see that their problems aren't that bad after all.

Here are a couple more examples with **[something] isn't the end of the world**:

Kyla: Did you get accepted to the University of Ottawa?

Beth: No, I didn't. But I got accepted to a different program at the University of New Brunswick.

Kyla: Oh, that's far.

Beth: I know. I don't really want to move away.

Kyla: **It isn't the end of the world.** You'll be able to enjoy a new city. It will be fun.

Bernie: Do you think you're one of the candidates for the promotion?

Sophia: I think so. But I don't think I'm in the top five.

Bernie: Really? That doesn't sound positive.

Sophia: Exactly. I'm not very optimistic.

Bernie: Don't worry. Even if you don't get the promotion, **it won't be the end of the world.** You love the job you already have.

Sophia: That's true.

To be bummed out

Phrasal verb, informal

In this episode, Andrew gives Kassy a hypothetical situation for her to react to. He says he got an F on his history essay and that he's a little bit **bummed out** about it. **To be bummed out** is to be unhappy with something. In this sense, you are feeling down and a little depressed.

Here's one more example with **to be bummed out**:

Gregoire: You look down. What's the matter?

Benny: Do you remember the girl I was dating?

Gregoire: Yeah. She's works at the bank, right?

Benny: Yes. I just found out that she has a boyfriend. I'm **so bummed out**.

Gregoire: That's terrible. Do you want to go have a drink and play darts? That might change your mood.

What a bummer

Idiom, informal

In this episode, our hosts also mention the expression **what a bummer**. When used in this sense, **a bummer** is a bad situation that causes you to be bummed out. **What a bummer** is an informal way of reacting to minor bad news in a more humorous way.

Here's one more example with **what a bummer**:

Jiwon: Do you remember those concert tickets I got us?

Tara: Yes. Oh, no. What happened?

Jiwon: The singer lost his voice at their last concert. So they're cancelling our show.

Tara: **What a bummer.**

Jiwon: Total **bummer**. I was looking forward to it.

Tara: At least they're refunding the tickets.

Don't stress it

Idiom

One of Kassy's favourite expressions to say when she is encouraging someone is **don't stress it**. **Don't stress it** is similar to don't worry about it. **Don't stress it** focuses on the worrying part of the bad news, because worrying might make things worse, especially if you're in a situation you can't control.

Here's one more example with **don't stress it**:

Hassan: I'm worried about Patricia. She's running late and I can't contact her.

Nicky: **Don't stress it**. Patricia is never late.

Hassan: What if she got into an accident? There's a lot of snow on the roads.

Nicky: Again, don't worry about it. She's an excellent driver in the snow. Look over there. That's her coming right now.

To kill it

Phrasal verb

At the end of this episode, our hosts discuss ways to offer encouragement. One of Andrew's personal favourites is to tell someone they will **kill it** the next time. **To kill it** is to do an extremely good job at something. You can tell someone they're going **to kill** their test the next time. **To nail it** and **to smash it** are similar expressions. Although these may seem like violent expressions, they are friendly ways to offer words of encouragement.

Here's one more example with **to kill it**:

Marcy: You look nervous. What's wrong?

Erika: This is the first time my whole family will be in the audience for my dance recital.

Marcy: How many people are coming?

Erika: At least 20.

Marcy: That's a lot. But you're an amazing dancer. You're going **to kill it**. You always do. Today isn't any different.

Quiz

1. What does don't beat yourself up over it mean?

- a) don't care about it at all
- b) don't punch yourself
- c) don't punch someone else
- d) don't get depressed about it

2. Which of the following is NOT similar to the expression to kill it?

- a) to do extremely well
- b) to nail it
- c) to smash it
- d) to do a fairly good job

3. True or false? If someone is bummed out, they're really happy.

- a) true
- b) false

4. Which of the following is NOT similar to that's too bad?

- a) that's terrible
- b) that's OK
- c) that's horrible
- d) that's awful

5. Which of the following is the best way to encourage someone?

- a) what a bummer
- b) you'll nail it
- c) I'm sorry to hear that
- d) that's too bad

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you usually react to bad news?
2. Are you the type of person to beat yourself up over past mistakes?
3. When do you get bummed out?
4. Does stressing out about something help you do a better job or not? Please explain.
5. In what situation do you know you will always kill it?

Quiz Answers

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

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