

Real Talk #053 – Visiting the dentist

Episode description

Making a dental appointment, finding the time to go, and paying for dental insurance can all be quite the hassle. But of course, the main part of the whole experience is talking with your dentist about dental health. In this Real Talk episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy help you with the English you can expect to hear in the dentist chair.

In this episode, our hosts go over how to respond to the doctor's polite requests. They also help you with some dental vocabulary, such as molar, canine, incisor, and gum tenderness. We hope you don't have to use these expressions too regularly, but it's always good to be prepared before your visit!

Fun fact

Do you have dental insurance? In the United States, only about 50% of adults aged 18 to 64 have coverage. That number goes up to around 65% in Canada.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Why don't you
- Tenderness
- I'll just get you to
- If you could just
- Molar, canine, incisor
- To fill a cavity
- To be covered by insurance
- To go a long way
- To brighten [one's] smile
- Two-way street



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.

Hello, and welcome to Culips, everyone. You're listening to Real Talk, the series for beginner and intermediate English language learners where we teach you the English expressions that you need to know for everyday, real-world situations. And joining me today to teach this lesson is my cohost, Kassy. Hello there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew. And hey, listeners. So, everyone, today's lesson is all about visiting the dentist. It's a continuation of a previous episode that we did, Real Talk episode #052. And in that episode, we learned about how to make an appointment to visit the dentist. Today, we'll learn about what to say and which expressions to use during a dental checkup.

Andrew: That is right. Now, everyone, we have a full transcript and a study guide that accompanies this episode that's available to all Culips members. And to become a Culips member and get the study guide, just visit our website, Culips.com.

So, Kassy, could you let us know about the plan for this episode?

Kassy: Sure, absolutely. So first, we're going to start by listening to an example conversation about our patient we met last time, Brian Turner, when he's meeting his dentist, Dr. Fairfield, for a dental checkup. After we listen to that conversation, Andrew and I will break it down for you all and teach you some of the finer details, the information, and the expressions that you need to know to have a successful dental checkup in English.

Andrew: Sounds like a great plan. So we'll start by listening to that example conversation. And, everyone, just to set the context for you, the patient, Brian Turner, has arrived at the dental office. He's filled out his new patient forms and he's just been called from the waiting room to the examination room to meet with the dentist, Dr. Fairfield. So let's pick things up from here and listen in on their conversation as it continues.

Kassy: Sounds great.

Dr. Fairfield: Hi there, Brian. I'm Dr. Fairfield. Lovely to meet you.

Brain: Yeah. Nice to meet you, Doctor.

Dr. Fairfield: So you're just in for a scaling and a checkup today, is that right?

Brain: Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Fairfield: Great. Well, **why don't you** put on those safety glasses for me and Shirley, my assistant, is going to put a protective dental apron on you as well.

Brain: OK, yeah, no problem.

Dr. Fairfield: And we'll just put your seat back, too. OK, great. So **I'll just get you to** open up nice and wide so I can take a look.

Brain: Ah, OK.

Dr. Fairfield: Do you have any tooth pain or gum **tenderness**?

Brain: Uh uh.

Dr. Fairfield: OK. So, Brian, **I'll just get you to** rinse out your mouth real quick. You can spit out the water in the sink beside you.

Brain: OK.

Dr. Fairfield: OK. Next, we'll need to take some X-rays. So **if you could just** follow Shirley for a moment and she'll take you to the X-ray room.

Brain: OK.

Dr. Fairfield: OK, Brian, welcome back. So please look up here at the screen and we'll take a look at what's going on in your mouth together. So, overall, things look pretty good. Your gums are healthy and there are no major issues, but you do have a small cavity in your left lower **molar**, as you can see here. So I recommend that you come in and get that **filled** in ASAP.

Brain: OK, yeah, absolutely. Now, apart from that, is everything good?

Dr. Fairfield: Well, it's a personal choice, but you might want to think about coming in for a teeth whitening procedure. It's **covered by your insurance** and it would **go a long way to brighten up your smile**.

Brain: Hmm. OK, I'll think about it. Now about the filling, what options do you offer?

Dr. Fairfield: Well, ceramic fillings are the most popular choice, but we do gold fillings as well. After the scaling, the receptionist will explain your treatment options and help you to book another appointment.

Brain: Oh, OK, that sounds good.

Dr. Fairfield: All right, then. If you don't have any other questions, then Shirley will take over from here with the scaling.

Brain: All right, perfect. Thank you, Doctor.

Dr. Fairfield: You're welcome. See you next time.

Andrew: OK, everyone. So we just heard an example conversation between the patient, Brian Turner, and the dentist whose name was Dr. Fairfield. And Dr. Fairfield did a dental checkup on Brian, she looked in his mouth, made sure everything was OK, took an X-ray, and also explained some of the dental problems that Brian has. In fact, he has one **cavity that needs to be filled**. And she also recommended a teeth whitening procedure to **brighten up his smile**. And, Kassy, **brighten up your smile**, what does this mean? This is kind of an idiomatic expression.

Kassy: Well **brighten up your smile** just means to lighten your teeth to make them look whiter and brighter.

Andrew: Exactly. So if you make your teeth look whiter, then you have **brightened up your smile**. So now, everyone, what we're going to do is go through this example conversation one more time. And Kassy and I are going to highlight and explain some of the important expressions that we heard in that conversation.

And, Kassy, one thing that jumped out at me, which is something I'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about, is the way that Dr. Fairfield instructed the patient to do things. And I counted three different structures that Dr. Fairfield used when asking, or rather telling, Brian to do some things.

And I thought we could talk a little bit about all of them, because, you know, going to a doctor's appointment, dentist appointment, something like this, it's not just about knowing what to say, but it's also about knowing how to understand what the doctor or the dentist is telling you, right? It's a **two-way street**. You need to know what to say, but you also need to know how to understand what the doctor and the dentist say to you. And we use these kind of interesting structures in this kind of situation to tell people what to do in a friendly and polite way. We usually don't just say, "Open your mouth, close your mouth, spit," right? That's too direct, and too strong, and just sounds kind of rude. So we use some different ways to ask people what to do.

Kassy: As a sidenote, I think that's very interesting. In English-speaking countries, we do kind of avoid being too abrupt or too aggressive. I'm wondering, in other countries, when you translate something like this, like if you'd go to a doctor, do they do similar things in another language? Or do they also, you know, try to make it less severe, less demanding? I'm curious to know.

Andrew: Yeah, it's really interesting, actually, Kassy, when we compare it to the language that we both study, Korean, because Korean has a very nice verb ending. You can just conjugate the verbs in a certain way when you are telling somebody what to do. It's very easy and friendly and polite, and very efficient. But I feel like English is not as easy to do this and we have to make a whole different sentence structure when we want to achieve the same goal, so that's what we'll cover right now.

In this conversation, in fact, I counted three different ways that the dentist asked the patient to do something, commanded the patient to do something. And the first one was almost by asking a question, OK? The dentist asked Brian, the patient, to put on some safety glasses. And this is something that many dentists will do, they'll give you some kind of sunglasses, almost, some safety goggles, just so that water and spit and liquids aren't flying in your eye. Also, usually there's a very bright light that the dentist is using shining down into your mouth to take a look inside there, right? So it's also protecting your eyes from the bright light.

And when the dentist asked the patient to put on these glasses, she said, "**Why don't you** put on these safety glasses for me?" "**Why don't you** put on these safety glasses for me?" And, yeah, this structure, **why don't you** do something for me is something that I think you're very, very likely to hear a dentist or a dental assistant say to you when you go there for a dental checkup.

Kassy: For example, they might ask, "**Why don't you** sit down over here for me?" Or "**Why don't you** close your eyes for a moment for me?"

Andrew: Maybe the receptionist would say, "**Why don't you** fill out these forms for me?" when you arrive at the dental office. So it's just a polite way to ask somebody to do something, but maybe it's not one that would immediately pop in your head as a kind of sentence style that someone would use when commanding you to do something.

Now, the second way that the dentist asks the patient to follow their commands is with another interesting sentence structure, Kassy. So the dentist wanted the patient to open his mouth very wide, right? Usually, we say in this situation open wide. Open wide means open your mouth as big as you can. And when the dentist commanded this, she said, "So **I'll just get you to open wide.**" "So **I'll just get you to open wide.**"

And then a little bit later on, after the checkup was finished and she asked the patient to rinse his mouth and to clean his mouth, she said, “**I’ll just get you to** rinse your mouth out.” And I think that’s a really interesting structure we can use **I’ll just get you to** do something essentially means please do this for me, right? I’ll just get you to open wide means please open wide **I’ll just get you to** rinse your mouth means please rinse your mouth.

Kassy: For those of you listening right now, it’s kind of weird, I agree. But this is a common phrase that we use, and that we hear in this kind of setting, at the dentist or at the doctor’s office.

Andrew: Even when you’re getting your haircut, right? Maybe the hairdresser will say to you, “**I’ll just get you to** tilt your head back.” Or “**I’ll just get you to** look to the left.” “**I’ll just get you to** look to the right.” And it essentially means turn your head to the left, turn your head to the right. Put your head up, put your head down. It’s this kind of command that they’re asking you to do.

Kassy: But in a polite way.

Andrew: Yeah, it’s very polite, for sure. But it is a unique structure.

And there was one more way that the dentist asked the patient to do something. And that was using a sentence like this: “**If you could just** do this for me.” OK, so when the dentist was telling the patient to follow the dental assistant into the X-ray room to get an X-ray, she said, “So **if you could just** follow Shirley for a moment, she’ll take you to the X-ray room.” Right? So **if you could just** follow Shirley means, please follow Shirley. It’s just another way to politely request that someone does something for you.

Kassy: Yeah, for this example, I kind of imagined finishing the sentence, like, something like this, “**If you could just** do this for me, I’d be very grateful.” But we’re just getting rid of that I’d be very grateful part at the end.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. **If you could just** do this for me, that would be great. That would be awesome. But often people will just cut out that remaining part. And it’s almost implied that that’s what the meaning is, right? So you may hear a dentist or a doctor say things exactly like that. “**If you could just** tilt your head back.” “**If you could just** open your mouth wide.” “**If you could just** close your eyes.” Just means to do whatever action they are requesting of you.

Kassy: Exactly.

Andrew: Apart from that, Kassy, we also heard many interesting things to do with dental health in this conversation. And I think we can highlight some of those things now and talk about some of the vocabulary and expressions around dental health.

And one of the questions that the dentist asked was, “Do you have any tooth pain or gum **tenderness**?” And of course, at this point in the conversation, Brian, the patient, he’s sitting in the chair with his mouth open, so it’s very difficult for him to respond in a sophisticated way. So he just said uh uh, which kind of means, like, no, right? Uh uh means no. But tooth pain, I think most listeners will understand what tooth pain is, but what about gum **tenderness**? What are our gums and what does it mean if our gums are tender?

Kassy: Yeah, so our gums are, you know, kind of the, the pink fleshy part connected to our teeth.

Andrew: It’s like the area in your mouth that’s not your tongue and not your teeth.

Kassy: Yes, your gums.

Andrew: All the other parts.

Kassy: And **tenderness** is when it’s not, like, super painful, but it’s a little bit painful when you touch it, like, slightly sensitive.

Andrew: Yeah, I think that’s a good way to describe **tenderness**. So, just, regularly, if it’s not being touched or activated, then it’s not painful but as soon as you touch it, then it starts to feel painful. This kind of feeling we can describe as **tenderness** or being tender.

So, yeah, thankfully, Brian has no tooth pain or any gum **tenderness**. But he does have a slight problem. He has a cavity. Now a cavity is when you have some tooth decay, and it creates a hole in one of your teeth. And this is a really common dental issue, right? Many people get cavities, unfortunately. And the cavity that Brian has is located on his lower left **molar**. And, Kassy, could you tell us what tooth a **molar** is? What teeth do we call **molars**?

Kassy: **Molars** are kind of the bigger ones near the back that you chew your meat with.

Andrew: They are very, very good teeth for chewing. So we have, I think, three **molars**, the very last teeth in our mouth that are called **molars**. And then the next two are called premolars. So, really, there are five teeth in a row at the back of our mouths that are called **molars**. And then the next teeth from that are called the **canines**. And I think of vampires whenever I think of **canines**, because they’re kind of like the vampire teeth. If you’ve ever seen a picture of a vampire, those long teeth. Of course, humans don’t really have long teeth like vampires, but they’re in the same location. We call those the **canines**. And then the four front teeth that we have across the centre of our mouth, those are called **incisors**.

So, everyone, if you can just remember those three names for teeth, really, **molars**, **canines**, and **incisors**, then I think you’ll be able to understand which teeth the dentist is talking about when you pay a visit to the dentist.

Kassy: Exactly. And after the dentist told Brian that he had a small cavity, she recommended that he get it filled, he **get the cavity filled**. We use this verb to describe treating the cavity. You're filling that little hole in with some sort of composite.

Andrew: Right. So when you get a tooth filled, or you **get a cavity filled**, that means the dentist does it for you, right? You're not doing it yourself. Somebody else is doing it for you, and that person is a dentist. So we use this as a verb, right? Of course, the dentist **fills the cavity**. Since they are the person doing the action, we can say the dentist **fills the cavity**. And we also have a noun form of this expression, a filling. So you might say something like I went to the dentist and I got two fillings. This just refers to that procedure where they are taking a material and filling the hole in your tooth. Usually it's like a metal. I think amalgam or ceramic or even gold is a popular material to fill teeth with.

Kassy: Andrew, have you ever had any fillings before?

Andrew: Yes, I've had my fair share. My dentist would be very happy with me, I think, because I've made them a lot of money over the years.

Speaking of money, Kassy, it's a good transition into the final thing that I want to talk about with this conversation here. And that is after the dentist told Brian that he has a cavity and that he needs to get it filled, Brian asked if there's anything else that he should be concerned about in his mouth. And the dentist said, well, you might want to consider coming in for a teeth whitening procedure for people who maybe smoke cigarettes or drink lots of coffee or wine. You know, over the years teeth can go from white to yellow or brown and there are these procedures that dentists can do to whiten teeth again, make them nice and shiny and bright. And the dentist recommended this procedure because it's covered by Brian's insurance. She said, "It's **covered by your insurance** and would **go a long way to brighten up your smile**." So I'm wondering if you could break this down for us, Kassy. What does it mean if something is **covered by your insurance**?

Kassy: So in the US, and possibly Canada?

Andrew: Canada as well, for dental, yes.

Kassy: Yes, dental insurance is privatized. So that means if you want dental insurance, you have to sign up for it and pay for it yourself. And each dental plan is going to be different depending on who you are, who you signed up with. So, a lot of times, the people going to the dentist, the customers at the dentist, they don't know necessarily exactly what is **covered by insurance**, what insurance will pay for and what insurance won't pay for. So that's kind of the dentist's job to check which procedures are **covered under insurance** and which aren't. And then let her patient know if it's a good option to go through with the procedure or not and how costly it will be.

Andrew: And sometimes if something is **covered by your insurance**, then the dentist will recommend it to you because it's like, hey, you're already paying for the insurance or sometimes we get insurance from our employer, as well. So it could be free, but everybody's in a different situation. So it's hard to say, in general. But if your **insurance covers** something, it means that you don't have to pay for it, it's an option for you. And sometimes you're allowed a certain amount of procedures per year. So like maybe with Brian's insurance, he's allowed one teeth whitening procedure per year.

And if it's getting close to like the end of the year or something, the dentist might say, "Hey, you should do this before your insurance runs out for this year, it's kind of free for you, it's included in your insurance." So it's just a good idea to be aware of that the dentist might tell you about these kinds of things. But it really depends on where you visit the dentist. At least in Canada and the USA, where dental insurance is privatized, then you might hear things like this said by your dentist. But, really, every country is different and you'll have to play it by ear, depending on where you are in the world.

Kassy: Well, I think that brings us to the end of this episode. But before we go, let's summarize what we covered today.

Andrew: All right, so today we learned about some expressions that you'll need to know when visiting the dentist.

Kassy: Exactly. For example, the dentist will tell you to do many things. And they'll use expressions like, "**Why don't you** sit down in this chair for me?" Or "**I'll just get you to** open your mouth nice and wide." Or "**If you could just** rinse in the sink."

Andrew: That's right. And we also learned about the names of teeth, **molars**, **canines**, and **incisors**. Plus, we learned about what a cavity is and what a filling is.

Kassy: And, finally, we talked about insurance and what it means if a treatment or procedure is **covered by insurance** or not **covered by insurance**.

Andrew: Thanks for listening, everyone. We hope you learned a lot with us today.

Kassy: Our website is Culips.com. If you want to get the study guide, including the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, be sure to check out the website to download it.

Andrew: Becoming a Culips member is an awesome way to support us. But it's not the only way. You could also support Culips by leaving us a five-star rating and a nice review on your favourite podcast app, telling your friends about Culips, or following us on social media.

Kassy: Yes. And stay up to date with Culips by following us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter.

Our email address is contact@Culips.com and if you'd like to send us a message, feel free to do that. We love to hear from you. And we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode. Talk to you then.

Andrew: Bye, everyone.

Kassy: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

Why don't you Phrase

In this episode, Andrew and Kassy talk about three expressions a dentist might use to get you to do something. The first is **why don't you**. **Why don't you** begins a question. A doctor will ask this of you in a polite manner, as opposed to commanding that you do something.

Here's one more example with **why don't you**:

Winnie: Hello. I'd like to have a checkup with the doctor.

Receptionist: Are you new to this clinic?

Winnie: Yes, I am. I hope that's all right.

Receptionist: No problem. **Why don't you** go ahead and fill out this patient information sheet while I look for the next availability in the doctor's schedule?

Tenderness Noun

In the example dialogue, the dentist asks her patient if he has any gum **tenderness**. In this situation, **tenderness** is a kind of soreness or irritation. It is not a strong pain. You can use **tenderness** to talk about your muscle, bones, skin, or nerves. As an adjective, you can say your arm is a little tender.

Here's one more example with **tenderness**:

Doctor: Hello. So, Mr. Smith, can you tell me what the issue is?

Steve: I'm not sure how to describe it, but I've been having some **tenderness** in my right shoulder these days.

Doctor: I see. Did you do something to injure your shoulder?

Steve: No. It's just a little sore, but I'd like you to take a look at it.

I'll just get you to Phrase

The second expression the dentist uses to communicate with Brian is **I'll just get you to**. The dentist says this when he wants Brian to rinse out his mouth. While **I'll just get you to** might sound strange, it is a polite and accepted way to ask someone to do something, especially in the service industry. You wouldn't use this expression if you're asking your partner to please get you a glass of water, for example.

Here's one more example with **I'll just get you to**:

Salesman: The total will be \$50.42.

Whitney: Here's my card.

Salesman: Thank you. OK. **I'll just get you to** sign down here, and we're done.

Whitney: Great. Thanks!

If you could just Phrase

The third main expression of this episode is **if you could just**. The dentist says this when she wants Brian to follow her assistant. **If you could just** is actually the beginning of a full sentence. A more correct way of using this expression is to say, "**If you could just** send it to me by mail, that would be great." However, when talking, people usually leave out the second part.

Here's one more example with **if you could just**:

Nurse: You will need to wear this vest to take the X-ray.

Gina: OK. It's my first time. I'm a little concerned.

Nurse: There's no need to be. However, **if you could just** stay still for the next 10 seconds.

Gina: Oh. I understand. I'm nervous. That's why I'm fidgeting a little.

Molar, canine, incisor

Nouns

As mentioned in this episode, it is good to know the words for the different kinds of teeth in your mouth. You have both **molars** and premolars, which are the grinding teeth near the back of your mouth. You have four **canines** near the front of your mouth. Those are the pointy vampire-like or dog-like teeth. And you have eight **incisors** at the front of your mouth, four on top and four on the bottom.

Here's one more example with **molar, canine, incisor**:

Dentist: Looking at this X-ray, I can see you take good care of your **incisors** and **canines**.

Eddie: I have a feeling that you're going to say the opposite about the rest.

Dentist: You're correct. You have several cavities in your **molars**. As I've told you many times, your rear **molars** are the hardest teeth to brush. You need to pay special attention to them.

To fill a cavity

Phrase

One of the services a dentist offers is **to fill cavities**. **To fill a cavity** is when the dentist cleans out the decay from your tooth and fills in the hole with some kind of metal, porcelain, or composite. The material put in the cavity is called a **filling**.

Here's one more example with **to fill a cavity**:

Kathy: I think I should go to the dentist.

Laura: What do you say that? Is there something wrong?

Kathy: Yeah. I have a couple of **fillings** that feel a little loose. I might have to get them replaced.

Laura: Oh. I hate when that happens.

Kathy: Yeah. But what's worse is that every time I set foot in a dentist's office, they always find something else. So I'm expecting them **to fill in more cavities** while I'm there.

To be covered by insurance

Phrase

In many countries, dental procedures are expensive. People will often buy dental insurance to help pay for the work they get done. However, your insurance might not cover every procedure, so you will need to check what is **covered by your insurance**. **To be covered by insurance** means the insurance company will either fully or partially refund you the money you paid,.

Here's one more example with **to be covered by insurance**:

Ahmed: Honey, do you know if dental implants are **covered by our insurance**?

Sarah: I'm not sure. Why do you ask?

Ahmed: I keep having problems with this one tooth. I think it would be better to simply replace it.

Sarah: OK. When I go into the office on Monday, I'll check our coverage.

To go a long way

Idiom

At the end of their conversation, Dr. Fairfield tells Brian that teeth whitening will **go a long way** to giving him a brighter smile. **To go a long way** means to have a big impact on something. A common construction is **to say a little [something] goes a long way**. That means just a small amount of something can have a big impact later on.

Here's one more example with **to go a long way**:

Yuki: You really should take better care of your teeth.

Ron: What do you mean? My teeth are fine.

Yuki: For now. But trust me, good dental habits will **go a long way** in keeping those teeth nice. The older you get, the more your bad habits will catch up to you.

Ron: I guess. I'm not there yet.

To brighten up [one's] smile

Idiom

In the example dialogue, the dentist suggests teeth whitening **to brighten up Brian's smile**. **To brighten up [one's] smile** not only means to make it whiter, but also to make it a happier and nicer smile. This is similar to saying to brighten up [one's] day, which means to make someone's day more pleasant.

Here's one more example with **to brighten up [one's] smile**:

Fiona: Did you see Vera's teeth?

Chuck: I did. There's something different about them.

Fiona: She had them whitened. It really **brightens up her smile**.

Chuck: Oh, that's it. It looks good. I should get that done as well.

Two-way street

Noun

When talking about the importance of communicating with your doctor, Andrew describes it as a **two-way street**. Informally, a **two-way street** is a situation where there is mutual understanding. A **two-way street** can also mean that the two people involved are doing things for the benefit or detriment of the other.

Here's one more example with **two-way street**:

Victor: I'm nervous about getting married. Do you have any advice for me?

Franz: In my experience, the number one thing you need to remember is that marriage is a **two-way street**.

Victor: What does that mean?

Franz: That means you will really need to communicate with each other. Sometimes you'll be right, and sometimes she'll be right, but you'll always have to find that middle ground.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is a polite way to get someone to follow you?

- a) get behind me
- b) I'll just get you to follow me
- c) I won't ask you to follow me
- d) follow me right now

2. Which of the following is a good example of tenderness?

- a) your ankle is so sore that you can't walk
- b) your knee is a little sore from hiking

3. What does it mean if something is covered by insurance?

- a) the insurance company will refund you
- b) the insurance company will offer you a free cover
- c) the insurance company will not give you any money
- d) the insurance company will deny your request

4. True or false? To brighten up [one's] smile refers only to its colour.

- a) true
- b) false

5. Which of the following is NOT a type of tooth?

- a) molar
- b) gums
- c) canine
- d) incisor

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How comfortable are you at the dentist's office?
2. Some companies offer dental insurance as a benefit for working there. How important is dental or health insurance to you when looking for a job?
3. What do you think of teeth whitening procedures?
4. Did you know you can brush your teeth too much? It's called over-brushing. What do you think is the ideal amount of time someone should brush their teeth?
5. What would you do if you realized the relationship you're in or a friendship you have with someone isn't a two-way street?

Quiz Answers

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

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