



Episode 45: Social Norms

Hi! If this is your first time listening to our podcast, this is an opportunity for upper-level English learners to practice listening skills and learn new vocabulary by listening to authentic conversations.

In today's episode Donielle and Khrystyna discuss differences in social norms across cultures. Here are a few other examples of common American social norms that were not mentioned in the episode:

Using first names quickly	Americans often use first names soon after meeting someone, even in professional settings.
Addressing teachers or supervisors with polite but relaxed language	Titles may be used, but communication is often less formal than in some cultures.
Maintaining eye contact while speaking	Eye contact is usually seen as a sign of confidence and honesty.
Saying "excuse me" or "sorry" for small inconveniences	People often apologize for small situations or inconveniences, such as lightly bumping into someone or even realizing they are in someone's way in a store.
Calling or texting before visiting someone	Showing up unannounced can be seen as rude in many situations.
Respecting privacy about personal topics	In American culture, questions about salary, age, finances, or family planning are often considered too personal for casual conversation. For example, asking someone why they do not have children or when they plan to have them may be seen as intrusive or inappropriate.
Waiting your turn in line	Standing in an organized line and not cutting ahead is very important socially.
Bringing your own food to share at gatherings ("potluck")	Guests may be expected to contribute a dish rather than the host providing everything.
Splitting the bill at restaurants	Friends often pay only for what they ordered rather than one person paying for everyone.

You can also read the [transcript](#) for this episode.

See the following pages for vocabulary and language focus from this episode.



Vocabulary: Words and Phrases Used in the Conversation

loopy	Feeling tired or a little silly, often causing unusual or funny behavior. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>After a long day, they felt a bit <u>loopy</u> and couldn't stop laughing.</i>
giggly	In a mood where you laugh easily, often for no serious reason. (from giggle: a light, high-pitched type of laugh)
goofy	Silly in a playful or slightly ridiculous way. <i>When she's tired, she starts acting <u>goofy</u> and making jokes.</i>
hold it against [someone]	continue to feel upset with someone because of something they did. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>She joked that she would try not to <u>hold it against</u> her friend for not visiting.</i>
social norms	unspoken rules about how people usually behave in a society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Smiling at strangers is a common <u>social norm</u> in the United States.</i>
handle	deal with or manage something <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The character in the show couldn't <u>handle</u> social norms very well.</i>
you see where this is going	expression used when the result of a situation/story ending is becoming clear <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I thought they hated me because they wouldn't smile—<u>you see where this is going</u>.</i>
cheesing	slang: smiling in a big, exaggerated way (from “say cheese” – an expression used to get someone to smile for a camera) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Her husband was <u>cheesing</u> at everyone because he was trying to be friendly.</i>
take it easy	In this case, it's used to tell someone to stop doing something so intensely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i><u>Take it easy</u> with all the smiling</i>
come out of one's shell	become more open, friendly, or confident <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People often <u>come out of their shell</u> when they are with friends and family.</i>
it never dawned on [someone]	expresses a sudden understanding or awareness of something for the first time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i><u>It never dawned on me</u> that saying “thank you” could seem strange in another culture.</i>
crickets	an expression for awkward silence or no response, based on quiet nights when the only sound is crickets chirping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The teacher asked the class who had read the chapter. <u>Crickets</u>.</i>
pet peeve	something small that annoys a person a lot (discussed in Episode 14) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Being asked by the cashier “Did you find everything alright?” is one of my <u>pet peeves</u>.</i>
scowl	look at someone with an angry or unhappy expression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The customer <u>scowled</u> at the long line and crossed his arms impatiently.</i>
run into [someone]	meet a person by chance or unexpectedly, rather than by plan, especially in a public place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Guess who I <u>ran into</u> at the store? Our old neighbor.</i>
strike up a conversation	start talking casually with someone, usually a stranger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I <u>struck up a conversation</u> with someone while waiting in line, and we discovered we had a friend in common.</i>

Cultural Note: Social Norms on Screen

In this episode, the show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* was mentioned as an inspiration for discussion about social norms. It is a comedy series that follows an exaggerated version of Larry David (comedian and sitcom creator), a man who often questions or ignores everyday social norms that he finds unnecessary, illogical, or inconvenient.

In one episode, he calls a friend at 10 p.m. and is surprised when the friend's wife answers and is upset with him because "everyone knows" there is an unspoken cutoff time for phone calls.

In another episode, Larry learns that a friend's father has passed away and remembers that they had season tickets to a sold-out baseball game. Wanting to attend the game, Larry awkwardly tries to find a way to ask his grieving friend if he can use the father's ticket, completely ignoring the emotional situation and basic expectations of sympathy.

Moments like this show how Larry's refusal to follow basic social expectations regularly leads to awkward situations, misunderstandings, and trouble in his relationships.

Question: What do you think about the character's behavior in the two examples above?

Join the Conversation

- Discuss some of the social norms in your culture vs. American (or another) culture regarding:
 - Greetings
 - Privacy
 - Small talk
 - Promptness
 - Personal space
 - Visiting someone's home
- What are the social norms in your culture for gift giving? Do people open gifts in front of others? Are there certain items that you should or shouldn't give in specific situations? Are there any situations where giving a gift might be considered inappropriate?
- What are the expectations for young adults in your culture? Do they usually live with their parents or move out by a certain age?
- Are multi-generational households common in your culture? What are the advantages or challenges?
- What are some examples of social norms in your culture that might be surprising to an outsider?
- Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding or an awkward situation because of different social norms?

Thanks for checking out our podcast!

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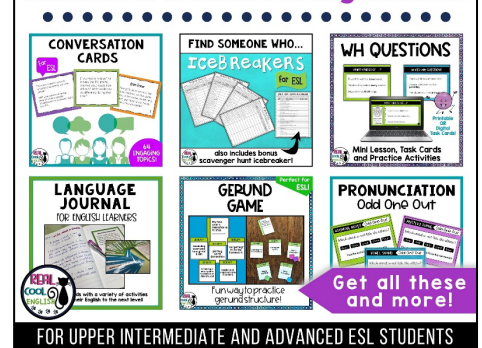
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