Your English Toolbox

VOCABULARY · EPISODE 251

Clear the Air: 4 Idioms About Conflict

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries · 4 idioms

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

add fuel to the fire

DEF

to make an argument, a conflict or a problem worse, often by saying or doing something unhelpful

Usually about a comment or an action that makes people angrier; it is not about starting the problem. It often appears in advice: 'Don't add fuel to the fire.'

Don't joke about his mistake now, you'll only add fuel to the fire.

The newspaper article added fuel to the fire between the two neighbours.

2

clear the air

DEF

to remove tension or a misunderstanding between people by talking openly about it

It happens after tension has built up, and it needs honest conversation. We often say 'We need to clear the air' or 'a clear-the-air talk'.

Let's have a coffee and clear the air before the meeting.

She sent a short message to clear the air after the misunderstanding.

3

meet someone halfway

DEF

to accept a compromise so that both people give up something

to move toward someone's position instead of waiting for them to move

The idea is a fair compromise: you take half of the distance, and the other person takes the other half. The person changes: 'I'll meet you halfway', 'She met him halfway'.

I can't pay your price, but I'm happy to meet you halfway.

Both teams agreed to meet halfway on the schedule.

4

bury the hatchet

DEF

to end a disagreement or an old quarrel and make peace

It usually describes people who were angry with each other for some time, and it suggests a decision to stop fighting and move on. The hatchet is an old image of a war weapon.

After a year without speaking, the two cousins finally buried the hatchet.

It's time to bury the hatchet and work together again.

5

tension

DEF

a feeling of stress or unfriendliness between people who disagree or do not trust each other
a situation in which people are close to open conflict

In this sense it is usually uncountable: 'there was a lot of tension'. The plural 'tensions' is common for political or social problems. Useful partners: ease, reduce or release the tension; a tense atmosphere.

You could feel the tension in the room after the argument.

A joke helped to ease the tension.

6

compromise

DEF

(noun) an agreement in which each side gives up something it wanted
(verb) to accept less than you wanted in order to reach an agreement

In this sense it is positive. Common phrases: reach a compromise, make a compromise, be willing to compromise. As a verb it can also mean 'to put something at risk' (compromise your safety).

After hours of talking, they reached a compromise on the price.

We have to compromise: you choose the film and I choose the restaurant.

7

misunderstanding

DEF

a failure to understand something correctly
a small disagreement caused by this

It can be a simple mistake about what someone meant; the verb is misunderstand (misunderstood).

There was a misunderstanding about the time of the meeting.

It was just a misunderstanding, and we laughed about it later.

8

sarcastic

DEF

saying the opposite of what you mean in order to criticise or make fun of someone
(of a remark or tone) showing this kind of mocking meaning

A sarcastic comment often sounds positive but means the opposite, like 'Great day!' when everything goes wrong. Tone of voice matters. The noun is sarcasm, and a sarcastic joke can easily add fuel to the fire.

'Oh, great, another meeting,' he said in a sarcastic voice.

She made a sarcastic comment about the weather.