

Lesson 41 – Idioms for Feelings

Angela and Nancy are coworkers. Listen to them chat about their weekends and pay special attention to the phrases in blue.

Angela: Hey Nancy! How was your weekend?

Nancy: Could've been better. I took the twins to the museum, and they were **bored to tears**. Then I took them to get ice cream afterwards, and one of my sons **had a fit** when he got chocolate sauce on his shirt. By the time we got home, I was **at my wits' end**.

Angela: Yeah, kids definitely make you want to **tear your hair out** sometimes. One time my youngest son **got all bent out of shape** because he wanted soda and I wouldn't let him have any. He **threw a temper tantrum** right there in the restaurant.

Nancy: The problem is that on days like that, even when I manage to avoid **flying off the handle** and screaming at my kids... if my husband does something the slightest bit annoying, I **lose my cool** and nearly **bite his head off**!

Angela: Everyone has bad days – it's normal when your kids are little. Now that mine are older, they don't **try my patience** nearly as much.

Nancy: You guys went to the amusement park on Saturday, didn't you? How was that?

Angela: Oh, it was fantastic! My girls were awake at 6 AM, **raring to go**. They **had the time of their lives** – by the end of the day, they were **smiling ear to ear**.

Nancy: That's great! We're going to go to the circus next month – we went last year and **loved every minute of it**. Actually I think my kids are most looking forward to eating all the sweets – give them some cotton candy and they're **on cloud nine**.

Angela: How's your daughter doing in school? You had mentioned she was having a few problems making friends.

Nancy: Yes, she was, but now that she's joined the gymnastics club she's starting to **come out of her shell**. They have practice three times a week after school, and she

always comes home **in high spirits**. Actually, she just qualified for the state competition – when she found out, she was **jumping for joy**!

Angela: Wonderful! Well, I wish her luck.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

What do all the expressions in blue have in common? They're idiomatic expressions. Idioms are small phrases that often have a different meaning than their individual words.

Although idioms are not usually used in more formal written English, they are extremely common in spoken English – and we have a number of idioms to describe feelings and emotions – these can be more interesting and descriptive than simply saying “happy,” “sad,” “excited” or “angry.”

Take a moment to read over the conversation again and try to identify the emotion in each expression. Then continue reading the lesson to learn these phrases and many others.

Idioms for Positive Emotions

Happiness & Cheerfulness

- **“She’s in seventh heaven.” / “She’s on cloud nine.” / “She’s walking on air.”**
- **“He’s on top of the world.” / “He’s over the moon.” / “He’s jumping for joy.”**

All of these idioms mean that someone is VERY happy! These typically describe a temporary state of extreme happiness because something wonderful has happened (not someone who has a happy personality in general).

- **“I’m tickled pink.” / “I’m thrilled to bits.”**

These idioms mean that you are pleased; some event has given you a feeling of pleasure. These are not as strong as the previous idioms.

- **“He was smiling ear to ear.” / “He was all smiles.”**

These expressions describe the happy expression on someone’s face.

- **“She’s in high spirits.”**

This expression describes someone who is in a good mood.

Excitement & Enjoyment

- **“My kids were raring to go.”**

The expression “raring to go” means very excited to do something. It does not necessarily mean going somewhere – you can arrive at a dance lesson “raring to go” – meaning you are very excited and eager to start.

- **“I’m pumped!” / “I’m psyched!” / “I can’t wait!”**

All of these expressions mean you are excited about something in the future. With **pumped/psyched**, you can use the prepositions **for/to** to continue the sentence: “I’m pumped for the concert! / I’m pumped to go to the concert!” With “I can’t wait,” you can use **for, to, or until**: “I can’t wait for summer vacation!” “I can’t wait until Christmas!” “I can’t wait to tell you about my trip!”

- **“We’re having a ball/blast.” / “We’re having the time of our lives.”**

These idioms are used for enjoying an experience or activity.

- **“I loved every minute of it.”**

This expression is also used for an experience that was so good, every minute was enjoyable; there were no bad moments.

Other Good Feelings

- **“That’s a huge load/weight off my mind.”**

This idiom is used for relief – when something that was worrying you is resolved.

- **“I feel like a million dollars/bucks.”**

This means you feel great, physically – you feel healthy and full of energy.

- **“This means the world to me.”**
This expression means something was very meaningful – important emotionally – for you.
- **“She’s starting to come out of her shell.”**
This means that a shy or timid person is starting to become more sociable.
- **“It’s okay. No hard feelings.”**
This phrase is used to forgive someone and tell them you aren’t angry or annoyed.

Idioms for Negative Emotions

Annoyance and Anger

- **“He flew off the handle.” / “He lost his cool.”**
These expressions describe the moment when someone “explodes” with anger and loses control.
- **“He jumped down my throat.” / “He bit my head off.”**
These idioms describe when someone yells or speaks strong, angry words to you.
- **“She had a fit.” / “My daughter threw a temper tantrum.”**
Use these phrases when someone becomes very upset. The second one is usually used for children... or an adult who is acting like a child!
- **“He got bent out of shape.”**
This expression means the person got irritated or annoyed.
- **“It rubbed me the wrong way.”**
This means something irritated or annoyed you; it gave you a bad impression.
- **“She has a chip on her shoulder.”**
This idiom describes someone who, in general, is easily annoyed or offended.
- **“Working with him really tries my patience.”**
If something “tries your patience,” it means it annoys you and makes it difficult for you to stay calm and patient.

Boredom, Frustration & Desperation

- **“I was bored to death/tears.”**
These are expressions to exaggerate the fact that you were VERY bored.

- **“I was climbing the walls.”**

This idiom also means you were so bored, that you were desperate to escape the situation.

- **“I was tearing my hair out.”**

Use this phrase to describe intense frustration.

- **“I was at my wits’ end.” / “I was at the end of my rope.”**

These expressions mean that you were SO frustrated, that you were desperate – you were at the end of your patience and felt like you had no good options.

Fear, Embarrassment, Worry

- **“It scared the living daylights out of me.”**

This is a way to exaggerate how much something scared/frightened you.

- **“That old house gives me the creeps/willies.”**

This means it makes you feel uncomfortable and a little bit scared.

- **“I felt like a fish out of water.”**

This idiom means you felt uncomfortable in a particular social situation

- **“I couldn’t look him in the eye.”**

This expression means you are so embarrassed or ashamed, you couldn’t make eye contact.

- **“I had butterflies in my stomach.” / “My legs turned to jelly.”**

Both of these idioms are creative ways to describe nervousness. “My legs turned to jelly” can also be used for fear.

Sadness

- **“He’s really down in the dumps.”**

This means somebody is very sad, very depressed.

- **“He’s feeling a little blue.”**

This means someone is a little bit sad.

- **“She’s crying her eyes out.”**

This is a way to say someone is crying a lot, or crying very intensely.

- **“My heart sank.”**

This expression describes the moment when you start to become sad – like when you receive a piece of bad news.

- **"I got a lump in my throat."**

This describes the heavy feeling you get in your throat when you might start to cry.

Those were a lot of idioms! Today's exercise is to practice the expressions with the worksheet below – use it to write your own sentences with the phrases. You can then [send it to me](#) for comments and corrections.

Lesson 41 Worksheet

Complete the sentences with your own experiences! For example: "The last time I was walking on air was... when I got a raise in my salary because of my excellent work."

Want corrections? E-mail me your answers at homework@espressoenglish.net

The last time I was **walking on air** was...

The last time I was **tickled pink** was...

Right now, **I'm pumped** for/to...

The last time I was **having a blast** was...

Something that **meant the world to me** was...

The last thing that **took a huge weight off my mind** was...

The last time I **flew off the handle** was...

The last time someone else **bit my head off** was...

The last time one of my kids (or friends' kids) **threw a temper tantrum** was...

Something that **rubs me the wrong way** is...

One thing that really **tries my patience** is...

The last time I was **bored to death** was...

The last time I was **at my wits' end** was...

One thing that **gives me the creeps** is...

One time I **felt like a fish out of water** is...

The last time I had **butterflies in my stomach** was...

One time I was **down in the dumps** was...

The last time I **cried my eyes** out was...

One time when **my heart sank** was...

One time when I **got a lump in my throat** was...