
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Can you keep a secret?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth. Can you keep a secret, Neil? Or are you someone who **spills the beans**? That's an idiom meaning to tell people a secret.

Neil

I'm pretty good at keeping secrets, Beth, unless it's giving away the ending of a movie – I'm always doing that!

Beth

Whether you find it hard to keep secrets, or take them with you to the grave, keeping secrets is often considered something bad. But what if some secrets could actually make your life better?

Neil

Now, psychological studies are uncovering a more positive side to secrets, suggesting that keeping good news to yourself can actually make you feel more alive, especially if you plan to share your secret with someone later. In this programme, we'll be discussing the advantages of keeping secrets, and, as usual, we'll be learning some useful new vocabulary as well.

Beth

But first, I have a question for you, Neil. One very famous secret is the recipe for the world's favourite soft drink, Coca-Cola. While travelling in Indonesia, BBC TV

presenter, Joanna Lumley, believes she discovered the unknown secret ingredient. So, is Coca-Cola's secret spice:

- a) cinnamon?
- b) nutmeg? or,
- c) ginger?

Neil

Well, I don't know so I'm going to guess it's nutmeg.

Beth

OK, I'll reveal the secret at the end of the programme. This year, a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* introduced a new term to the discussion: positive secrets. Here, the study's author, Dr Michael Slepian of Columbia University, discusses positive secrets with BBC World Service programme, *Newsday*:

Dr Michael Slepian

Yeah, so, what's interesting about the idea of positive secrets is, you know, there's a set of them where the plan is to never reveal them... you know, we might say a **guilty pleasure** is something we enjoy but don't want to tell other people about. And then there's other secrets that **the whole point of** keeping them secret is to reveal them, you know, the surprising **marriage proposal**, the pregnancy announcement, unwrapping a gift that you've that you've wrapped...

Neil

Dr Slepian distinguishes between positive and negative secrets. Negative secrets hurt people and damage relationships. They're like a **guilty pleasure**, an activity you really enjoy doing, but which also gives you a feeling of guilt or shame for doing it.

Beth

Positive secrets, on the other hand, include things like **marriage proposals**, the act of asking someone to marry you. Revealing positive secrets lets us share and celebrate those things with others. In fact, **the whole point** of positive secrets is

to reveal them. Here, the phrase **the whole point** is used to mean the most important reason or purpose for something.

Neil

Because positive secrets give us the feeling we are in control of our emotions, they energise us. However, Dr Slepian's research comes from the United States. Would the results be the same in other cultures and countries? Here's Dr Slepian again, talking with BBC World Service programme, Newsday:

Devina Gupta

In some cultures, it is said that if it's good news, especially around pregnancy, don't share it till the time, you know, it's safe, because they feel that it may lead to some negative vibes... **evil eye** as many people call it. Is that also a part of what you found why people keep secrets? Are there any kind of cultural influences when they keep the good secrets and the positive secrets?

Dr Michael Slepian

Yeah, it's interesting you bring this example 'cause we're studying it right now. We have this intuition that pregnancy and secrets around pregnancy in earlier periods, that it looks more like a **burdensome** secret, and when it's later and, you know, people feel comfortable discussing it more like positive secrets.

Beth

In some cultures, secrets about pregnancy are related to the **evil eye**, a superstition in which someone causes injury or bad luck through a look. It could be bad luck to reveal a pregnancy too early, and Dr Slepian calls these secrets **burdensome**, meaning worrying, troublesome or distressing.

Neil

It seems secrets do vary from culture to culture... but what everyone wants to know is the missing ingredient in Coca-Cola, so come on, Beth, tell us the secret answer to your question!

Beth

OK. I asked about TV presenter, Joanna Lumley, who thinks she's found out Coca-Cola's secret spicy ingredient.

Neil

Well, I guessed that it was nutmeg...

Beth

Which was... the correct answer! Good guess, Neil! Travelling in Indonesia, Joanna noticed lots of nutmeg being grown and asked who was buying it, only to be told, Coca-Cola! OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned from this programme starting with the idiom **spill the beans** meaning to reveal a secret.

Neil

A **guilty pleasure** is something you really enjoy doing but which also gives you a feeling of guilt or shame.

Beth

A **marriage proposal** is the act of asking someone to marry you.

Neil

The phrase **the whole point of** something describes the most important reason or purpose for it.

Beth

The **evil eye** is a superstition in which someone causes injury or bad luck through a look.

Neil

And finally, the adjective **burdensome** means worrying, troublesome or distressing. Once again, our six minutes are up but I'll tell you a secret – you can join us again next time for more topical vocabulary, here at 6 Minute English. Goodbye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

spill the beans

(idiom) tell people secret information

guilty pleasure

activity that you really enjoy, but which also gives you a feeling of guilt or shame for liking it

marriage proposal

asking someone to marry you

the whole point of (something)

the most important reason or purpose for something

evil eye

superstition in which someone causes injury or bad luck through a look

burdensome

worrying, troublesome, distressing