

Polite Language for Sensitive Topics

WARM-UP

Which of these topics do you find most awkward to talk about? Rank them from 1 to 5 (1 = most awkward, 5 = least awkward). Then compare with a partner.

- ☐ When someone loses her/his job
- ☐ When someone dies
- ☐ When someone has a medical problem
- ☐ When someone has gained weight
- ☐ How much money people earn



PRE-READING

1. Skim the conversation 1. Match words and phrases 1-9 to their meanings A-I
2. Skim conversation 2 and check your answers

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. between jobs | A. alcohol |
| 2. let go | B. died |
| 3. creative differences | C. fatter |
| 4. passed away | D. fired/terminated |
| 5. over the hill | E. old |
| 6. expecting | F. opposing ideas and disagreements |
| 7. heavier | G. pregnant |
| 8. restroom | H. toilet |
| 9. adult beverages | I. unemployed |

READING

Read the two conversations aloud with a partner and answer the questions:

- Which conversation uses language that sounds more direct?
- Which sounds more indirect? Why might we sometimes use more indirect language?

Conversation 1

Jenn: Hey, have you heard about Lisa? She's been **between jobs** for a while now.

Emily: Oh, really? I had no idea. What happened?

Jenn: Well, she was **let go** last month. Her company's blaming it on budget cuts, but I heard that she and her boss had some **creative differences**.

Emily: What a tough time for her! Did you hear that her uncle **passed away** recently?

Jenn: Yeah, I did. It's so sad. He was **over the hill**, but it's never easy to lose a loved one.

Emily: In other news, did you know that Jane is **expecting** again?

Jenn: No way, really? That's great news for her. I thought she'd been looking a little **heavier** lately.

Emily: Yeah, she's glowing. By the way, I'll be right back; I need to use the **restroom**.

[After Emily returns]

Jenn: Hey! I was thinking, since it's Friday, maybe we could all go out for some **adult beverages** after work.

Emily: That sounds like a great idea. I need to unwind a bit.

Conversation 2

Jenn: Hey, have you heard about Lisa? She's been **unemployed** for a while now.

Emily: Oh, really? I had no idea. What happened?

Jenn: Well, she was **fired** last month. Her company is blaming it on budget cuts, but I heard that she and her boss had some **opposing ideas and disagreements**.

Emily: What a tough time for her! Did you hear that her uncle **died** recently?

Jenn: Yeah, I did. It's so sad. He was **old**, but it's never easy to lose a loved one.

Emily: In other news, did you know that Jane is **pregnant** again?

Jenn: No way, really? That's great news for her. I thought she'd been looking a little **fatter** lately.

Emily: Yeah, she's glowing. By the way, I'll be right back; I need to use the **toilet**.

[After Emily returns]

Jenn: Hey! I was thinking, since it's Friday, maybe we could all go out for some **alcohol** after work.

Emily: That sounds like a great idea. I need to unwind a bit.

PRACTICE

1. Complete the questions below with the highlighted euphemisms from conversation 1.

1. At what age should it be legal to consume _____? Why?
2. How are _____ mothers celebrated in your culture?
3. Why might an employee be _____?
4. Should students ask permission to use the _____ during class? Why?
5. When are professional athletes considered _____? Is this fair?
6. What's the best way to support a friend when a family member has _____?
7. What's the best way to network when **between jobs**?
8. What recipes or activities would you suggest for a friend who's worried that they've gotten too _____?
9. Have you ever had to navigate _____ with a project partner or colleague? How did you handle it?

2. In pairs, ask and answer the questions.

ROLEPLAY

In pairs, choose a situation below. Act out the roleplay using appropriate euphemisms.

1	Speaker A: You are interviewing a new employee. You have some concerns about speaker B's resumé.	Speaker B: You are interviewing for a new job. You have been unemployed for two years.
2	Speaker A: You are at an office holiday party. You know that your friend and workmate, Rachel is pregnant, but she is not ready to announce it to everyone yet. You promised not to tell anyone.	Speaker B: You are at an office holiday party. You notice that your colleague, Rachel looks ill. She has gained weight and is going to the bathroom often. You are worried about her. Discuss your concerns with speaker A.
3	Speaker A: You are the CEO of a financially struggling company. You meet with your general manager to discuss laying off 3-5 employees to save the company money.	Speaker B: You are the general manager of a struggling company. The CEO has asked you to think of 3-5 employees to lay off. Meet with the CEO and share the employees you've chosen to lay off and why.
4	Speaker A: You are a high school counselor. A student comes to your office to discuss some family problems. Listen to speaker B, show sensitivity, and offer some advice.	Speaker B: You are a high school student who is having some family problems. Discuss these sensitive issues with your counselor.

I can understand new words and phrases through context.

I can identify the use of euphemisms in English.

I can politely discuss sensitive or embarrassing topics.

