



ESL Podcast 211 – Giving Bad News and Condolences

GLOSSARY

How are you holding up? – How are you feeling?, normally asked of someone who is having a difficult time

* I went back to work after my illness and I must have looked tired because my boss asked me, “How are you holding up?”

test results – the results of medical tests that a patient takes

* After being told that his test results came back negative for cancer, Bobby went out and celebrated.

I’m afraid... – I’m sorry to say... or I regret to have to say...; a phrase often used to give bad news

* Because you have had three car accidents this past year, I’m afraid we are going to have to raise your insurance rates.

to deteriorate – to get worse; to slowly become worse or more sick

* He was a great employee but because of personal problems, his work deteriorated over the past few months.

rapidly – quickly; fast

* Our company’s sales have increased rapidly over the past two years.

to prepare for the worst – to get ready for something very bad that is likely to happen in the future

* When we heard that a bad storm was coming, we prepared for the worst.

to recover – to return or go back to a normal condition; to feel better after an illness

* She broke her arm in July, and it took the entire summer for it to recover.

to hope for the best – to believe that a bad situation is going to have a good result in the end

* With fifteen flights already cancelled due to a snowstorm, the ticket agent told her to hope for the best.

to pass away – to die

* She still talks about her dog, the one that passed away three months ago.



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wake – a time to visit or see a dead person’s body before he or she is buried
* Her aunt’s wake is scheduled for 6 o’clock on Tuesday, the day before the burial.

funeral – a ceremony to honor and remember a dead person, usually before he or she is buried
* Many people wear black or dark-colored clothes when going to a funeral.

to console – to comfort or make someone feel a better during sad or bad times
* To console her son after his team lost the baseball game, she took him and his friends out for pizza.

I’m sorry for your loss. / Please accept my condolences. / My thoughts are with you during this difficult time. – phrases to express sympathy or kindness towards someone who was a relative or close friend of the person who died; usually said at a funeral or a wake
* When I saw Evan at the funeral, I said, “Please accept my condolences.”

funeral director – the person in charge of the place where a funeral or burial ceremony is held
* The funeral director was very kind and told us that he would take care of all the arrangements for the funeral.

funeral service – the ceremony, often religious, that usually is held before a dead person is buried
* The funeral service is scheduled for 4 o’clock that afternoon.

eulogy – a speech that remembers good things about a person, given at a funeral service
* Greg’s eulogy for his cousin was so touching that nearly everyone cried.

burial – the time and place for putting a dead person in a grave (in the ground)
* His close friends and family were all at the burial to pay their last respects.

bearable – being able to tolerate unpleasant things or a difficult situation
* Even though it was supposed to be very hot in Phoenix in the summer, the weather turned out to be bearable.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who passed away?
 - a) Wendy
 - b) Wendy's father
 - c) Wendy's doctor

 2. When the doctor tells Wendy to prepare for the worst, he means:
 - a) Her father isn't going to recover.
 - b) Her father is still weak but will be fine.
 - c) Her father wants to see her.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to pass away

The verb “to pass away” in this podcast, means for a person to die: “Before he passed away, he told his children that he loved them and that he was very proud of them.” There are several phrasal verbs that begin with “to pass.” “To pass over” means to leave someone out or to ignore them when they should be getting something good, such as a job: “Dan decided to take a job with another company when he was passed over for manager last month.” Or, “The president passed over a lot of more qualified people to give the position to his friend.” Another phrasal verb, “to pass up,” means to let something go, or to not accept something when you have the option to take it: “How can you pass up tickets to see your favorite singer in concert?” Or, “I’ve decided to pass up the chance to be a working actor so I can have a more secure job in business.”

wake

In this podcast, the word “wake” is a noun that describes the time and place to visit a dead person’s body before he or she is buried: “At my grandmother’s wake, I met relatives I’ve never seen before.” But the word is more commonly used as a verb. “To wake” means to stop sleeping: “He told his friend to make sure to wake up at 5 o’clock so that they could leave on time.” It is also used in the phrase, “to wake up to (something),” which means to realize the importance of something: “At my 30th birthday, I woke up to the fact that I needed to be more responsible in life.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Funerals are sad times, and when a family member or friend dies, people reach out and express their condolences in different ways. In the U.S., when someone dies, it is common to call the family to give them your condolences. Some send sympathy cards to tell the deceased's family that they are sorry for their loss and are thinking about them. It is also acceptable to send flowers to the home of the "deceased," or the person who has died, or to send them to the funeral home for the funeral. If the person is religious and was of the Catholic religion, people may send Mass cards, which are cards that tell the deceased person's family of arrangements or plans for a church "Mass," or Catholic religious ceremony to be said in their memory.

Attending the wake, funeral service, or the burial is also a way to offer and show support. Most people wear dark and simple clothing to these events and sign the "registry book," a blank book at the funeral, so that the deceased person's family will know that they were there. It is also acceptable to say kind words and make personal comments to remember the good things about the deceased like, "Julianne was always thinking of others before herself," or "She has so many friends." It is normally acceptable for people who attend the funeral service to go with the family to the cemetery for the burial. All of these are ways to honor or "pay respects" to the deceased and his or her family, and to tell them that you are also affected by the death of the person.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 211, “Giving Bad News and Condolences.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 211. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com. We have some new features that we think you will enjoy. You can download the Learning Guide for this episode, where you will find all of the vocabulary, definitions, additional words that we don't talk about on the podcast and a complete transcript of this episode.

We're talking today about how to give some bad news to someone and to offer condolences. Let's get started.

[Start of story]

I was at the hospital at with my friend, Wendy. Her father was in an accident and she was waiting to talk to the doctor.

Doctor: Hello, I'm Dr. Johnson. How are you holding up?

Wendy: Oh, I'm fine. Is there any news?

Doctor: Yes. I have examined your father's test results and I'm afraid the news isn't good. His condition has deteriorated rapidly, and I want you to prepare for the worst.

Wendy: You're not saying that he won't recover, are you?

Doctor: We can hope for the best, but your father may only have a few days. I'm very sorry.

Wendy: Can I see my father?

Doctor: Yes, of course.

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The worst did happen and Wendy's father passed away the following week. At both the wake and the funeral, we all tried to console Wendy by saying things like, "I'm sorry for your loss," "Please accept my condolences," and "My thoughts are with you during this difficult time."

The funeral director made sure that the funeral service went smoothly. The eulogy was short and I went with Wendy to the burial. It was a difficult time for Wendy but hopefully, having her family and friends with her made it more bearable.

[End of story]

Today's podcast is called "Giving Bad News and Condolences."

We usually use the verb offer with the noun condolences. What are condolences, "condolences?" Condolences are when someone dies and you want to say something nice to them. That is offering your condolences. Be sure to look at today's Learning Guide for more information, cultural information about funerals, what happens when people die in the United States.

Our happy story begins, we're at the hospital and I'm with my friend, Wendy. Her father was in some sort of accident - something happened to him, perhaps a car accident - and Wendy was waiting to talk to the doctor. The doctor comes and says, "Hello, I'm Dr. Johnson." He introduces himself, and he asks Wendy, "How are you holding up?" "How are you holding up?" is a question you would ask to someone who is having a very difficult time, someone who is usually the friend or the family of someone who is sick, or perhaps someone who is dying. "How are you holding up?" means how are you feeling, how are you doing under these very difficult situations or difficult circumstances

Wendy says, "Oh, I'm fine," and asks the doctor if there is "any news," is there anything new to tell her. The doctor says, "Yes," that he has examined, or he's looked at, Wendy's "father's test results." Test results, in a hospital, would be when you have your blood analyzed or other parts of your body, other things that the laboratory looks at. They use the expression, "to run some tests," means to conduct or to do some tests on you. Well, the doctor has looked at the test results. He says, "I'm afraid the news isn't good." The expression "I'm afraid" is one that we use when you are going to give someone some bad news. Your girlfriend may say to you, "I'm afraid I just want to be your friend, not your



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girlfriend.” That is the very bad news that many men receive, and sometimes, if the woman is nice, she'll say, “I'm afraid,” meaning I'm going to tell you some bad news and I'm sorry to have to tell you.

The doctor says that Wendy's father's “condition has deteriorated rapidly.” To deteriorate, “deteriorate,” means to get worse. So, when the doctor says his “condition has deteriorated rapidly,” or quickly, he means that he has gotten much worse. The doctor says, “I want you to prepare for the worst.” To prepare for the worst, “worst,” means that she should prepare herself for the worst thing that could happen to her father, in this case, her father could die. So, he says, “prepare for the worst” - get yourself mentally, psychologically ready for this possibility.

Wendy then says you aren't “saying that he won't recover, are you?” To recover, “recover,” means to get better. So, Wendy says are you saying that my father won't get better? And the doctor said, “We can hope for the best.” To hope for the best means to hope that the best possible result or best possible situation happens. Notice that the expression “prepare for the worst,” “hope for the best” are sort of opposites. The worst is the superlative. We say something is bad, something is worse, something is worst. Worst would be the most negative thing that could happen, and the opposite would be good, better and best, best being the most positive thing that could happen. Wendy asks if she can see her father, and the doctor says, “of course.”

Our story continues, and we learn that Wendy's “father passed away the following,” or the next “week.” To pass, “pass,” away, “away,” means to die. It's a nice way of saying to die. So, you would say to your friend, “I'm sorry to hear that your father has passed away.” You would say that instead of saying, “I'm sorry to hear he died.” Passed away just sounds better. It sounds nicer somehow.

Don't confuse pass away with pass over or pass up. These are different verbs. There are many different types of these two word verbs in English. In today's Learning Guide we explain the difference between some of these verbs that use the word pass.

Well, “At the wake and the funeral, we all tried to console Wendy.” The wake, “wake,” is a small gathering when the friends of the person who has died, and the family, come together, usually in a place called a funeral home. A funeral home



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is a place where you take the body before it gets put into the ground. And, people can come and see the body, and in some religious traditions people pray for the person who died. That's called a wake, and usually in the United States it's the night before the day the person is going to be put into the ground, the person is going to be buried. So, if you're having someone buried on Thursday, the wake would be Wednesday evening. That's the use of the word wake as a noun. As a verb, wake means something very different, and you'll want to look at today's Learning Guide to see that explanation.

The funeral, “funeral,” is the actual ceremony, the actual service. Usually in the United States it's a religious service, but it could just be people getting together and talking about the person. It's common at these funerals to have someone stand up and talk about the person who died. We call that talk, or that speech, a eulogy, “eulogy.”

Well, at the funeral and the wake, we “tried to console Wendy.” To console, “console,” is to try to make someone feel better, or feel happier after something terrible has happened, like a death. We often use this verb when someone dies and you try to console the wife or console the children. You try to make them feel better. And normally, you do this by telling them things, by saying things, and we hear three possible ways of consoling, or offering your condolences. One is, “I'm sorry for your loss” - I'm sorry that you have lost your husband. We use that verb, to lose, when we talk about someone who dies. So, if a woman says, “I lost my husband,” she doesn't mean her husband couldn't find his way back home, she means that her husband died, her husband passed away. So, you can say to someone, “I'm sorry for your loss.”

You can also say, “Please accept my condolences.” Please accept, “accept,” my condolences. You offer someone your condolences, and that person accepts your condolences. When you say, “Please accept my condolences,” you're saying the same thing as, “I'm sorry for your loss.”

The third expression you can use is “My thoughts are with you during this difficult time.” “My thoughts are with you during this difficult time,” meaning I'm thinking about you. I haven't forgotten about you. In certain religious families, you might say, “My prayers are with you,” or “You are in our prayers,” meaning I'm praying for you. I'm praying for the person who died. But a more general expression would be, “My thoughts are with you.”



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The story ends by saying that “The funeral director” - the person who is the head of the funeral home, the place that takes care of the body before it is buried into the ground - “The funeral director made sure that the funeral service went smoothly. The funeral service is the same as the funeral. It's the ceremony that you have, when people talk and perhaps say prayers for the person who died.

“The eulogy,” the speech about the person who died, “was short.” “I went with Wendy to the burial.” The burial, “burial,” is when you put the body into the ground. Of course, you don't put the body into the ground just by itself, you put it in a box, and that box is called a coffin, “coffin.”

I end the story by saying that with Wendy “having her friends and family” close to her, we hope that it “made it more bearable.” To be bearable, “bearable,” means that it was not as difficult. It was not as sad. Something that is bearable is something that you can...you can experience, even though it's painful it...it is better than the worst possible situation.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

[Start of story]

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[End of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

If you have a question or comment about today's podcast, email us at eslpod@eslpod.com. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. As always, we'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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