



**ESL Podcast 437 – Having a Best Friend**

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**GLOSSARY**

**to grow up together** – to spend a lot of time with someone from the time when one is a child until the time when one is an adult

\* Akiko and her brother grew up together in a small apartment.

**to be joined at the hip** – to be with another person most or all of the time; to be inseparable; to always spend a lot of time with another person

\* Bryan and his girlfriend are joined at the hip! I never see them apart from each other.

**blood brother** – best friend; a boy or man who has a very strong friendship with another boy or man, traditionally created when each person cuts his finger and they put their fingers together to share the blood

\* William is my blood brother and I'm closer to him than I am to my real brothers.

**confidant** – a person whom one can share one's secrets with; a person to whom one can say anything

\* She tells things to her confidant that she would never tell to anyone else.

**to have (someone's) back** – to defend someone; to help someone; to look out for someone's best interests

\* Irma is a great friend who has always has my back, even in the most difficult situations.

**to count on (someone)** – to trust someone; to believe that someone will do something

\* We're counting on you to help us move the piano next weekend.

**to give it to (someone) straight** – to tell someone the truth, even if it is unpleasant

\* Give it to me straight, doctor. Do I have a serious illness?

**hard to come by** – difficult to find or get; rare; uncommon

\* It's hard to come by a home for less than \$300,000 in this neighborhood.

**close** – with a tight, comfortable relationship, especially between friends; liking or loving someone very much

\* She has a lot of acquaintances, but none of them are close friends.



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**to keep up with (something)** – to be informed about the current status of something that is changing over time

\* Do you read the newspaper, watch the news, or listen to the radio to keep up with the news?

**to break the news** – to announce something or to tell someone about something, especially if it is unpleasant and unexpected

\* When Chantrelle and her husband decided to get a divorce, they had a hard time breaking the news to their kids.

**face-to-face** – in person; in a situation where two people can see each other and speak to each other directly; not over the phone or by email

\* Some things are too important to talk about over the phone. We need to sit down and talk face-to-face.

**maid of honor** – an important woman, usually the best friend of the woman who is getting married, who participates officially in a wedding

\* She asked her sister to be her maid of honor at the wedding.

**to pick (something) out** – to choose something; to select something

\* Which sweater did you pick out? The blue one or the green one?

**to break up (something)** – to end or ruin a relationship, friendship, or romance

\* I can't believe they broke up their marriage after 25 years of living together.



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**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

1. What would you count on a confidant to do?
  - a) To not share your secrets with other people.
  - b) To wash your back when you can't.
  - c) To always tell you the truth.
  
2. What does Lucy mean when she says, "it's hard to keep up with what's happening in each other's lives"?
  - a) It's hard to do all the things that her friend is doing in life.
  - b) It's hard to go up north often enough to visit her friend.
  - c) It's hard to know what's happening in her friend's life.

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**WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?**

**close**

The word "close," in this podcast, means with a tight, comfortable relationship, especially between friends: "Even though they just met last week, they already feel surprisingly close to each other." The phrase "close but no cigar" means that one has said or done something that was almost successful or right, but not quite: "I needed to get 60/100 points to pass the test, but I only got 58. Close but no cigar." The phrase "too close for comfort" is used to talk about something that happens nearby, making one frightened or uncomfortable: "That lightning storm is too close for comfort! I think we should go inside." Finally, the phrase "a close call" is used to talk about something bad that almost happened: "That car almost hit you! That was a close call!"

**to pick (something) out**

In this podcast, the phrase "to pick (something) out" means to choose or select something: "Please go to the video store and pick out a DVD to watch tonight." The phrase "to pick (something) to pieces" means to criticize something too much: "The professor picked her paper to pieces, and when he gave it back to her, it was covered in red writing." The phrase "to pick a winner" means to pick something or someone that is very good: "You really picked a winner when you hired that employee. She is very good at her job!" Finally, the phrase "to pick (something) clean" means to eat all of the meat off of a bone so that nothing is left: "He picked the chicken leg clean and there was no meat left to give to the dog."



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**CULTURE NOTE**

American children and teenagers, and especially girls, often do special things to show “the rest of the world” (other people) who they are friends with. Many children pick one person to be their “best friend,” or their most important, closest friend. They often call this person a “BFF,” which means “best friend forever,” or the idea that the two people will always be friends, no matter what else changes in their lives.

Some BFFs like to “dress alike” (wear the same clothes) or wear the same jewelry. They might “borrow” each other’s clothes, or wear each other’s clothes for a short period of time. There are some special pieces of jewelry that have two parts. When they are put together, they have the shape of a heart, and often the words “best friends forever” written across one side. Each friend wears one piece of the heart, and when they are together they can put the two pieces next to each other to see the whole heart shape and message.

Other children make friendship “bracelets” (jewelry worn around the wrist, or the part of the body that connects one’s arm and hand) out of colored pieces of string. They give the bracelets to their best friend, and as long as the people are friends the bracelet should not be taken off.

As children grow older, they tend to develop new interests and new friendships, and sometimes they move away from each other. But they usually remember their best friends “fondly” (very pleasantly) and sometimes “stay in touch” (continue to communicate) for many years.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 437: Having a Best Friend.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 437. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com). Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode, an 8 to 10 page guide that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Having a Best Friend." It's a dialogue between Lucy and her friend Buddy. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Lucy: I'm so excited! My friend, Marlene, is coming to town for a visit.

Buddy: Have I met Marlene?

Lucy: No, I don't think so. We grew up together and we were always joined at the hip.

Buddy: When I was little, I had a friend like that. We were blood brothers.

Lucy: Yeah, Marlene and I did everything together and she was my confidant about everything.

Buddy: She sounds like a great friend.

Lucy: Yeah, she always had my back and I could always count on her to give it to me straight.

Buddy: A friend like that is hard to come by. Are you still close?

Lucy: Not as close as I'd like. We live in different cities and it's hard to keep up with what's happening in each other's lives.



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Buddy: I can see that. Does she know you're getting married?

Lucy: No, I wanted to break the news to her face-to-face.

Buddy: Why? I would have thought you'd want to tell her the good news right away.

Lucy: Well, I want her to be my maid of honor and I'm not sure how she'll react to the dress she'll have to wear.

Buddy: Is it that bad?

Lucy: My future mother-in-law picked it out and I can't say "no." Here's a picture of it.

Buddy: Well, I'm glad she's such a good friend, because if anything can break up a friendship, it's that dress.

[end of dialogue]

Lucy begins by says, "I'm so excited! My friend, Marlene, is coming to town for a visit." She's going to be coming to the city or town where Lucy lives. Lucy is talking to her friend Buddy; Buddy is his name. "Buddy" is also a general term to describe a friend. This is a term that children will often use, especially boys. They'll say, "He's my buddy" – he's my friend. But here, Buddy is his name.

Buddy says, "Have I met Marlene?" Lucy says, "No, I don't think so. We grew up together and we were always joined at the hip." "To grow up" means to get older, from childhood to adulthood. It's that period between when you're born and when you become an adult at 18 or 19. "To grow up together," then, means to have lived in the same area, to have gone to the same schools perhaps, and so forth.

Lucy says that she and Marlene were always joined at the hip. The "hip" (hip) is the part of your body that's in the center where your waist is, that is, where your legs meet the rest of your body. The expression "to be joined at the hip" means to very close to someone else, in fact, you're always with that person; you are inseparable; you spend a lot of time with that person. "To be joined" means, here, to be connected. So it is as if your bodies were connected.



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Buddy says, “When I was little, I had a friend like that. We were blood brothers.” Your “blood brother” is a boy or a man with whom you have a very strong friendship. Again, it’s something that would happen between boys or between men. It’s your best friend, you say “he’s my blood brother” – he’s my best friend. You don’t mean your actual brother, the son of your mother and father; it’s your best friend.

Lucy says, “Yeah, Marlene and I did everything together and she was my confidant about everything.” “Confidant” is a person with whom you can share your secrets, a person to whom you can say anything. Someone you can trust – your confidant.

Lucy says that Marlene was her confidant. Buddy says, “She sounds like a great friend.” Lucy says, “Yeah, she always had my back and I could always count on her to give it to me straight.” “To have someone’s back” means to defend someone, to help someone. More generally, to look out for someone’s interests, to make sure that nothing bad happens to them. You may be in a meeting, and your coworker is giving a presentation and he gets a lot of difficult questions. You decide to help him by answering some of the tough questions. After the meeting, he says to you, “Thanks for having my back” – thanks for defending and helping me. Lucy also says that she can count on Marlene. “To count on” someone is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to trust someone, to believe that someone will do something. Your boss may say, “I’m counting on you to do a good job” – I’m relying on you; I am trusting you to do a good job.

So, Lucy can count on Marlene “to give it to me straight.” “To give it to someone straight” means to tell someone the truth, even if it isn’t pleasant, even if it is difficult. If someone asks you, “Tell me what you think of this shirt, give it to me straight,” that means they want your honest opinion even if it is not a good one.

So, Lucy’s friend always gives it to her straight. Buddy says, “A friend like that is hard to come by.” “To be hard to come by” means to be difficult to find or get; to be uncommon – not common. Things that are hard to come by are rare. There was a famous short story in English by the Southern writer Flannery O’Connor: [A Good Man is Hard to Find](#). We could say “a good man is hard to come by.”

Buddy says, “Are you still close?” meaning are you and Marlene still close. “Close,” here, means do you have a comfortable, tight relationship, especially between friends. You may say, “Oh, I grew up with Steve but we’re not close anymore” – we’re not that connected, we don’t talk to each other very often, and



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so forth. “Close” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Lucy responds by saying, “Not as close as I’d like. We live in different cities and it’s hard to keep up with what’s happening in each other’s lives.” “To keep up with something” means to be informed about something, to know what is happening, what changes are happening with something. Someone says, “I don’t keep up with the news,” or “I don’t keep up with the news about the economy.” What they’re saying is they don’t know the latest, they don’t understand or they don’t know about what has changed or happened in that particular area.

Lucy is saying it’s hard for her to keep up with what is happening in Marlene’s life, to know the changes that are taking place, because they live in different cities. Buddy says, “I can see that (meaning I understand). Does she know you’re getting married?” Lucy says, “No, I wanted to break the news to her face-to-face.” “To break the news” means to announce something or to tell someone something usually, but not always, unpleasant or unexpected. It could be just a surprise. Sometimes if it’s bad news, the person will say, “Well, I hate to break the news to you, but...” and then they’ll tell you. That expression, “I hate to break the news,” can also be used as a joke, meaning what you are telling them is something that is obvious: “I hate to break the news to you, but this is 2008.” Of course, it’s obvious that it’s 2008, so the person is making a joke. Lucy is not making a joke; she’s going to give this surprise news to her friend face-to-face. “Face-to-face” just means in person, in a situation where the two people are next to each other; they can see each other, not by phone or email. “Face-to-face” means that you are physically present in the same place – the same room – as the other person.

Buddy says, “Why? I would have thought you’d want to tell her the good news right away.” Buddy is saying: “I thought you would want to tell her right away.” Lucy says, “I want her to be my maid of honor and I’m not sure how she’ll react to the dress she’ll have to wear.” The “maid of honor” is usually the best friend of a woman who is getting married, and is part of what we call the “wedding party,” the group of people who are witnesses – supporters of the person getting married. Usually, the maid of honor has to wear a dress that the bride will typically pick out for her – will select for her. Lucy says she’s afraid how Marlene will react to the dress she has to wear. Buddy says, “Is it that bad (is it very bad)?” Lucy says, “My future mother-in-law picked it out and I can’t say ‘no.’” “To pick it out” means to select it, to choose it. The expression has a couple of





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different meanings; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

So, her future “mother-in-law,” the mother of the man she’s going to marry, selected the dress. She shows buddy a picture of it, and Buddy says, “Well, I’m glad she’s such a good friend, because if anything can break up a friendship, it’s that dress.” In other words, the dress is really ugly and Buddy is saying: “Well, I’m glad you are good friends because if you were not, asking someone to wear that dress would break up their friendship.” “To break up a friendship” or “to break up a marriage” means to end it, to ruin it. “To break up” can also mean to separate from someone, especially two people who are dating. They’re not married yet, they are boyfriend and girlfriend, and then they decide to break up. They separate; they go and find new boyfriends and new girlfriends. Or, they go home and drink and watch baseball!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Buddy: Well, I'm glad she's such a good friend, because if anything can break up a friendship, it's that dress.

[end of dialogue]

You can always count on our scriptwriter for writing good, interesting scripts. Her name is, of course, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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