



All Ears English Episode 131:

The Hug or The Handshake: How to Greet in American Culture

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 131: “The Hug or The Handshake: How to Greet in American Culture.”

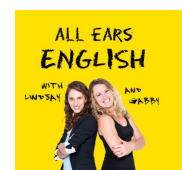
[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel,’ from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Join us, Lindsay and Gabby for the “Key to Connecting with Americans”. A three part event that helps you go deeper into real English conversation. You guys have told us that you want to feel confident and not awkward at your next professional event in English. So we’re here to help. We’re going to help you to avoid cultural mistakes you don’t know you’re making and give you practical phrases that we use every day in professional situations. So reserve your spot now at www.AllEarsEnglish.com/Key. That’s k-e-y. Join us for the live events on June 17th, 24th, and July 1st, or register before July 1st and you can still receive the recordings of each event. See you there.

[Instrumental]



Lindsay: In this episode, you'll learn how to stop sweating when you greet Americans. You're gonna (going to) learn how to avoid embarrassing situations when you're not sure whether to hug, handshake, or wave.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay. What's up?

Lindsay: Not much, and you?

Gabby: I'm doing great. You guys can't see right now, but Lindsay and I are hugging.

Lindsay: Not quite, but... we're smiling.

Gabby: We're smiling. Well, we're not shaking hands. We already...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...know each other, right?

Lindsay: No, we've already met.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: We don't need to shake hands.

Gabby: Yeah. In, in today's episode, we want to answer a question that (uh) we got from one of our listeners about greetings, (uh), with Americans in English. When, when do you have to hug? When do you have to kiss? When do you shake hands?

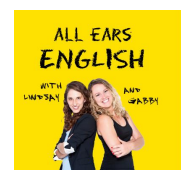
Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Maybe, you can, you can talk...

Lindsay: Describe.

Gabby: ...a little bit more about, (uh), yeah describe the question.

Lindsay: Yeah, so I was speaking by phone to a student in, from China who's studying in New York and her question was this. She wanted to know what



to do, especially when she was introduced to a man, a guy, (who knows), maybe a 20, 30-year-old guy. The guy sometimes would tend to hug her as a greeting and that is a greeting that we do use sometimes in the US...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...more and more now. It's kind of a young thing, a hip thing, I guess.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: (Um), but she couldn't hug him because of cultural differences.

Gabby: (Mm-hm).

Lindsay: Understandable. So she didn't know what to do. Should she put her hand out and shake his hand, should she step back. (I mean), it just felt very awkward and she felt embarrassed and the guy felt embarrassed; it was just bad.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So we wanna (want to) help you guys to avoid getting into these situations.

Gabby: It's tricky.

Lindsay: Okay.

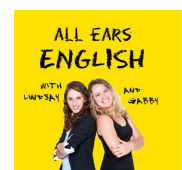
Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So...

Gabby: I never know what to do when I'm, (uh), introduced to (like) someone from South America or Europe. I'm like how many kisses and where?

Lindsay: Oh, I know. I know. It, it reminds me, I, I started a Capoeira class a few weeks ago and a guy from France came up, introduced himself and he (kind of) (like) went in for a hug real quick and I (sort of) moved back...

Gabby: Oh, awkward.



Lindsay: ...because I thought that was too direct and then he said, "Oh, I don't know what to do. I'm from France," and he felt really bad and I felt bad for him, right?

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So it's, this is a, this is a tough situation.

Gabby: It is. It is.

Lindsay: (Uh)...

Gabby: But we can help with how to greet Americans. I'm not sure...

Lindsay: Yeah, yeah.

Gabby: We're the experts on how to greet in France, but...

Lindsay: No.

Gabby: So for, for American greeting, (uh), (I mean), it depends on where you are, who you are, who you are greeting. (Uh), anything else if -- you've met before.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Yeah.

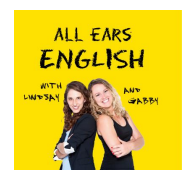
Lindsay: How close you are.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So in general, I don't -- well, I don't really hug people when I meet them the first time, do you?

Gabby: No. No. Although, (uh), let's say it's a situation where you're with friends. (Uh), this -- let me give a concrete example. (Um), on Monday night, I met up with two friends for, (um), some appetizers and drinks. And I knew both of them, but they did not know each other. Okay.

Lindsay: Okay.



Gabby: So it's the first time they met. So when they met for the first time at the beginning of the evening, they shook hands. Okay. Then we talked and they got comfortable with each other, and at the end of the evening, they could hug good-bye. And, and it was (kind of) like, "Oh, what should we do? Oh, I don't know." But, (um), the, the man, there was one, one, (um), male friend and one female friend and the man (kind of), (you know), extended his arms and, (um), went for the hug. And so my female friend was fine with that and so after you get to know someone, they may reach out to give you a hug and that's normal. They're not trying to take advantage of you.

Lindsay: Right. So the question is what do you do if that feels (kind of) against your culture if that feels not okay.

Gabby: Yeah, I know some of my friends, (um), particularly from Asia, will just do a very light, (like), like a 'hug light.' So, what that means is just, you (kind of) tap the person with your hands on their back and you don't actually touch bodies because I think I'm assuming the part that feels awkward is the intimacy of having your chest so close to the other person's chest. It's like you're embracing, (you know).

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: (Um), so there's different levels of hugs and I would suggest a hug light, which is where you're not really touching bodies, you're just (kind of like) touching arms.

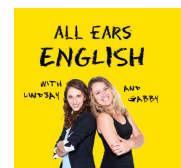
Lindsay: Okay, that's a good suggestion.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: But if you're okay with hugging, let the other person lead and just if they want to hug, just hug them. Just give them a hug. It's not a big deal.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: It doesn't mean anything. It's not romantic.



Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: (Um), it's something that I see a lot in people in their 20s and 30s in urban areas, in Boston, New York.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Lindsay: I don't know about outside of urban areas, I, I don't know. This is what I experience here in Boston...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...for people my age, our age.

Gabby: Yeah, I can agree with that. (Um), so it depends on the situation too. If I saw my same friends that I mentioned from Monday night, if I saw them at work, let's say they came to visit me at work, (um) -- I don't know. If I was (uh) in a -- it depends what situation. I'm trying, what I'm trying to say is in a very formal situation, I don't know if I would hug.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Perhaps, perhaps not.

Lindsay: Yeah. So context is key.

Gabby: Yeah, context is key. I don't tend to hug colleagues or...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...co-workers.

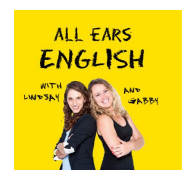
Lindsay: Obviously, yeah.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Clients? No.

Gabby: No.

Gabby: Students?



Both: No.

Lindsay: So, it's very nuanced and obviously in a professional space maybe not. (Um), when you're out with friends, maybe yes.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: But just, I think the point is don't get, don't tighten up around this, just relax a little bit. Loosen up.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: And don't take it so seriously, (I mean)...

Gabby: Yeah. And, (you know) if you're really uncomfortable with hugs and you really don't want someone to go in for the hug, then you need to take action and you need to stick your hand out first and go for the handshake...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...and make it clear.

Lindsay: And early enough, so it doesn't end up stabbing them.

Gabby: Yeah, you don't want to (like) punch them in a stomach. But you have to take that action because if you wait for the other person, then it's gonna (going to) be more awkward.

Lindsay: Absolutely.

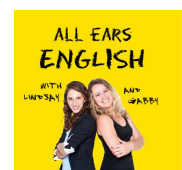
Gabby: If they go in for the hug and you don't want the hug.

Lindsay: And it is okay. (I mean), we do also shake hands at parties. (Like) I know I've...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: I've done that before.

Gabby: Yeah.



Lindsay: You shake someone's hand when you're introduced. That's also okay. That is okay.

Gabby: Absolutely. Yeah.

Lindsay: Or you could also wave, (I mean)...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: So sometimes when -- if we're (like) a few arms-length apart...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...'cause (because) like, "Hey," (you know), stick your hand out. I'm doing...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: ...it right now. You can't see me 'cause (because) this is a podcast, but...

Gabby: Lindsay is waving.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Yeah, absolutely. So you have that option too if you don't want to shake hands. (Um), and some people will avoid shaking hands when they're sick or under the weather. They'll say, "Oh, (you know), I'm, I'm under the weather. I have a cold. I, I shouldn't shake your hands," (you know)...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

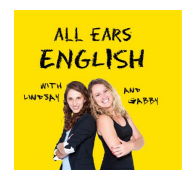
Gabby: ...because they're trying not to get you sick. So...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...that might be an excuse, it might be for real, they're just...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Gabby: ...being nice, but, (you know), that's something you could say, if you don't want to shake hands for some reason.



Lindsay: Definitely, definitely and, (uh), the art of the handshake is another podcast.

Gabby: Oh, that's a whole nother podcast.

Lindsay: A bunch of other podcasts...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...that we'll cover eventually, I'm sure.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Lindsay: If you stick, stick to All Ears English.

Gabby: That's right.

Lindsay: And (um) great. So, hopefully that was, was helpful for you guys.

Gabby: Yeah. Thanks guys.

Lindsay: Thanks.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

