



All Ears English Episode 177:

When and How Do You Talk About Age in English

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 177: “When and How Do You Talk About Age in English.”

[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: Lindsay, how old are you?

Lindsay: Gabby, stop asking me how old I am. It’s so rude.

Guys, in today’s episode, you’ll learn to talk about age and a common mistake you’re making with grammar when you talk about how old you are.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Gabby, is it true that you’re leaving me here in Boston and you’re moving to Japan?



Gabby: It's true Lindsay. But it's okay. We're going to continue the All Ears English podcast as normal. And, for you listeners who are in Tokyo, I want you to come join me in person, in Tokyo, at a live, monthly meetup event. The only way that you can find out the time, the day, the location, is to get on our signup list at AllEarsEnglish.com/Japan. And if you want to come from outside Tokyo, that's cool too. Just come sign up and I'll give you the information.

Lindsay: And if you're not in Japan, don't worry, you're still going to get Lindsay and Gabby four mornings a week on your podcast.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby.

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay. How are you?

Lindsay: Gabby, how old are you?

Gabby: Whoa, that's kind of a personal question. I'm not sure if I want to tell you.

Lindsay: What! Well, (I mean), what's wrong with asking how old you are? What's the problem?

Gabby: Well, it's just, (you know), (I mean), I'm not sure if I wanna (want to) have everybody who's listening to know how old I am.

Lindsay: Why? I have to know.

Gabby: (Uh), don't we say never ask a woman her age or her weight? Don't we say that in American culture?

Lindsay: I think you're right. That does sound vaguely familiar. Where did my manners go?

Gabby: I don't know. Where have you been?

Lindsay: I've been in Asia.

Gabby: Oh!



Lindsay: I've been traveling.

Gabby: Oh! Okay. Cool.

Lindsay: So, I've noticed...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...when I've talked to some of my students especially from Korea...

Gabby: Yes.

Lindsay: ... and maybe Japan, but I think...

Gabby: Maybe China.

Lindsay: Yeah, China...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...that often it's really important to find out how old people are.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Even if they seem to be a, a very similar age.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: Well, yeah, especially if you're of a similar age. I've experienced my friends from those countries – (you know), they'll ask me very quickly how old I am and to me, (you know), coming from an American culture, it seems a little bit – I don't want to say inappropriate...

Lindsay: Young.

Gabby: ...but...

Lindsay: It seems a little young. That's a question...

Gabby: Yeah.



Lindsay: ...someone would ask in middle school.

Gabby: That's a good point, (like), when you're young, when you're between the ages of (like) six and sixteen...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...you tend to ask how old are you.

Lindsay: Right. Or...

Gabby: (Mm).

Lindsay: Yeah. Or when...

Gabby: Maybe...

Both: Yeah.

Gabby: It's just, it's more common, (you know), to find out how old, (uh), your friends are in high school or, or middle school...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...but once you pass that age, once you're over 16, I don't know, it's a little bit more personal.

Lindsay: And it's kind of irrelevant.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Because, I think – well, if we talk about how we're (kind of) treated or, (um), [crosstalk].

Gabby: We treat each other more equally.

Lindsay: Right. If we're working in a big corporation, a company...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...it doesn't really matter as much how old you are. It does, but...



Gabby: When your position is maybe more important than your age...

Lindsay: Right, and – but how do...

Gabby: But...

Lindsay: ...you get your position? It's not...

Gabby: It's not...

Lindsay: ...necessarily based on age.

Gabby: That's right.

Lindsay: It's based on what – value...

Gabby: And...

Lindsay: ...that you add to your company.

Gabby: ...(you know), I-I almost want to take that back because your position – it gives you, (you know), (uh), it gives you influence, it gives you power, but you can still talk to someone who's the CEO of your company...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...and there's more equality there.

Lindsay: Right. But, at the same time we still – yeah. I think – and this is (sort of) a bigger topic about how we treat our elders...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: ...and how we treat people older than us.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: There's still some amount of (respect-), respect. We're not saying, (you know), disrespect people who are older. Please don't, please respect them, please. But it's just not the same. It's not embedded in our language the same way it is in Korean.



Gabby: Well, I think that we can see...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Gabby: ...from physical appearance when someone is much older...

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...or much younger, but we don't look for a specific age...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: So, we can see, "Oh, okay, this person is, (um), much older. (You know) I wanna (want to) show more respect..."

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: (Um), that's common.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: But we don't ask how old you are. Also, because, (um), of course, I think most people would like to look young.

Lindsay: Right, right.

Gabby: Can we make that assumption? They don't want to look old. So they don't want to say how old they are because – well, two reasons actually. (You know), they don't want you to think that they actually look older than they are.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Gabby: (Like), how embarrassing would that be if you thought I was 40, and then I tell you I'm 30.

Lindsay: That would be terrible.

Gabby: They're like, "Wow, Gabby, I thought you were ten years older." That would feel awful.

Lindsay: That would be terrible.



Gabby: (Um), and then on the other hand, I think that we actually have what's called age discrimination.

Lindsay: (Mm-hm).

Gabby: Especially in the workplace. (Um), this is another interesting fact when you're applying to a job in the US, you do not say or write on your resume, how old you are.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: Because it's illegal to hire or not hire someone based on their age.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: So you don't want the employer or the interviewer to know how old you are because they could discriminate against you based on if you're perceived to be too young or too old for the position.

Lindsay: Right, because if it looks like you're close to retirement...

Gabby: (Uh-hm).

Lindsay: ...then they might be responsible for paying for your pension...

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: ...if that still exists anymore; that's another issue.

Gabby: Well, my mother told me a story about when she was looking for a job, (you know), 30 or 40 years ago and these laws weren't as, maybe as strict, and (um), (you know), she was probably like 20-something and her interviewer said, "Well, you must be getting really close to settling down and having children," right.

Lindsay: So, that's another issue. Yeah, right.

Gabby: Yeah, for, for a woman who's in her 20s, right.

Lindsay: Definitely. (Mm-hm).



Gabby: And so, I remember my mom telling me she felt like that was an unfair question.

Lindsay: Right, totally. Right. So the boss would want to ask that because he'll also need to pay for maternity leave.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: And she might be away for maternity leave. That would affect the business.

Lindsay: Right. So, it's irrelevant. Don't mention your age. Don't let anyone ask your – (I mean)...

Gabby: Well, I kind of disagree. I think you can mention your age...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Gabby: Maybe not in an interview situation, but I mean just talking...

L: Yeah.

G: ...amongst kids.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: I was just on a bus. I just came back from New York City to Boston, (um), this morning...

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Gabby: ...and I was sitting next to, (uh), a nice person. I was talking to, to, (um), this guy named Vincent and he (wa-), he'd just came out, he told me, (you know), within the first ten minutes of talking, he said, "I'm 26," and, (you know), that's fine. He told me his age. There's, there's nothing, (you know), wrong with that.

Lindsay: Why did he tell you that? It's sort of weird if it's just out of context.



Gabby: Well, we were – well, he didn't just blurt out. There was a context. (Um), he was telling me about how he was going hiking.

Lindsay: Okay.

Gabby: He was on the bus, going all the way up to Maine, and I said, "Oh, why do you like hiking?" And he said, "Because for the last six years, I've worked at camps, where I take kids hiking." So he said, "Oh, the last... it was – how long has it been? Oh, I'm 26 now, so it's been six years, yes, since I was 20." So he was doing...

Lindsay: Oh, I see.

Gabby: ...some math in his head.

Lindsay: Okay, so it's contextual.

Gabby: It's contextual.

Lindsay: You wouldn't just say it.

Gabby: No.

Lindsay: But...

Gabby: I don't think so.

Lindsay: ...in other countries we might, right.

Gabby: You might.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Or you might ask someone.

Lindsay: For example, I wonder – I don't know of the answer to this, but we work together, (right), we're...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...we're colleagues.



Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: We're completely 50/50 even.

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: (Um), but I'm a couple years older than you, right?

Gabby: Yes.

Lindsay: So if we were living in Korea or Japan, I wonder...

Gabby: I'd have to respect you a lot more. No, I...

Lindsay: You should go – I should go...

Gabby: No, I do respect Lindsay guys. I do. I'm just joking, but...

Lindsay: No joke. I hope it's a joke.

Gabby: It is, it is. Yeah, I wonder.

Lindsay: Yeah, that's an...

Gabby: Maybe you guys could comment on this, because, (you know), Lindsay and I are Americans and (um), we don't know what it's like to work or grow up in Korea, China, Japan, so could you comment, especially if you have experience living in those countries. (Um), could you comment on this episode, (you know), how do you feel about saying your age, how you feel about asking for someone's age.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: (Um), so yeah, you can go to AllEarsEnglish.com/177.

Lindsay: Right. But let's go back. So why are we even talking about age?

Gabby: Oh!

Lindsay: Oh!

Gabby: We have...



Lindsay: This is a Tuesday.

Gabby: This is 'Teaching Tuesday'. So we've noticed that even advanced English speakers will make this little mistake that you really need to fix. It-it's easy.

Lindsay: (Mm-hm).

Gabby: So is it *to have* 30 years old? Or, *to be* 30 years old?

Lindsay: So, there's some parts of the world where you're translating, (right), directly...

Gabby: I think from Spanish or Portuguese...

Lindsay: Spain, France, Portuguese. Yeah, so, maybe Italian [indiscernible 09:37].

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: So don't translate, that's the moral of the story.

Gabby: Right. You have to learn phrases like, "I *am* 30." You have to learn these in English just – you have to associate the meaning with the English. Don't translate from your native language – let's say French, "I *have* 30 years old." No, it doesn't work in English, I'm sorry. And we know that you know this, we think you know this. But sometimes you forget, you might go back to translating as a habit. So we think that if you take out translating, if you just stop translating...

Lindsay: And replace it with conversation, so...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...go and find a Native speaker NOW, today, and have this question, have this conversation with them. Ask them about American culture...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...about ages. And how people of different ages are treated...

Gabby: Right.



Lindsay: ...within the US.

Gabby: Well, another thing...

Lindsay: Or Australia, or England.

Gabby: If you have a conversation partner, it's a little more friendly, and I think in a friendly context, you can talk about age more openly. In a professional context, I don't think, personally, it's that appropriate to talk about age.

Lindsay: Yeah, I would agree with that too.

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: Yeah, so this is (um), Number 12 in our series...

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...of the TOP 15 FIXES. So remember, guys, we use the verb 'to have'.

Gabby: Yeah. Are you...

Lindsay: Or, 'to be'. Sorry.

Gabby: You're just trying to trick us. Yeah, okay, so, (uh), "How old *are* you?"

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: ...is a question.

Lindsay: Or, "When I *was* 13, I da, da, da, da, da."

Gabby: Right.

Lindsay: Past tense.

Gabby: Exactly. Good point. All right. So we hope that's clear, grammar-wise. But, again, leave a comment, AllEarsEnglish.com/177 if you'd like to. Let us know what it's like to talk about age in your language and culture.

Lindsay: There we go.



Gabby: See ya' (you).

[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.

