
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

To keep a lid on it



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. I'm Feifei.

Neil

And hello, I'm Neil. Phwa! What is that smell?

Feifei

Rob's homemade cooking.

Neil

Rob cooks?!

Feifei

Yes, he does. But it doesn't taste very nice.

Neil

So why do you have to eat it – and why do have to make the studio stink of it?

Feifei

Well, I don't want to offend him. He keeps giving me his homemade food and asking me for some honest feedback. And I just tell him 'it's interesting, unique, special'.

Neil

Oh Feifei, you need to keep a lid on it.

Feifei

Well, if you think that'll stop the smell, I will.

Neil

That's not what I meant, although it's a good idea. If you 'keep a lid on something' it means to keep something under control – to stop the situation getting worse.

Feifei

OK, Neil!

Neil

Here are some examples of this phrase in action.

Examples

I couldn't keep a lid on my feelings about the rota so I shouted at the boss!

With rising food prices, it's hard to keep a lid on how much I spend at the supermarket.

Feifei

This is The English We Speak from BBC Learning English and we're looking at the phrase 'to keep a lid on something' which means to keep something under control and to stop the situation from getting worse. But this isn't the only meaning, is it?

Neil

No. If you keep a lid on something, it can also mean you keep something secret. Like this...

Example

I've heard that Daisy is expecting a baby – but keep a lid on it until it's official!

Feifei

OK Neil, you're telling me to keep a lid on things by telling Rob to stop giving me his homemade food?

Neil

Yes – unless his cooking is amazing.

Feifei

It's not.

Neil

Right, well tell him you're on a diet or you've become vegan and that should stop him. And I will keep your little lie a secret.

Feifei

You mean, you'll keep a lid on it?

Neil

Exactly. But in the meantime, could you actually keep a lid on that box of food please? It stinks!

Feifei

OK. Right, I'm off to speak to Rob. Bye.

Neil

Remember to be firm and say what you mean.

Rob

Hi, Neil. Feifei doesn't seem to want this delicious food I made. Would you like it?

Neil

Err... go on then. Looks lovely. Bye.