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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The English We Speak

### Tone Deaf



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*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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#### **Feifei**

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

#### **Roy**

And I'm Roy! Hey, Feifei, do you fancy doing some karaoke tonight with me and Rob?

#### **Feifei**

No, I do not. The last time we went out with Rob, you two managed to upset everyone. Everyone left. He is tone deaf!

#### **Roy**

His singing is not that bad! His mum says he's got a lovely voice!

#### **Feifei**

No, Roy. While tone deaf can relate to someone who can't hear notes and has difficulty singing - like you - it can also mean someone who is unaware or insensitive to a situation.

#### **Roy**

Ahhh – so you mean that fact that Rob said that he prefers cats during the annual dog welfare meeting. Yes, that was a bit off.

#### **Feifei**

He always says the wrong things at the wrong time! He really is tone deaf. Let's listen to these examples.

#### **Examples**

People who say they've enjoyed lockdown can sound a bit tone deaf. So many people have lost their jobs.

We've all been working so hard - the boss seemed tone deaf when he rejected our pay rise.

I can't believe Sarah said she doesn't believe in global warming to those activists. She's tone deaf.

**Feifei**

This is The English We Speak from BBC Learning English, and we're talking about the expression 'tone deaf'. It can be used to describe someone who can't sing, but also has a secondary meaning that refers to someone who can't understand the sensitive nature of a situation.

**Roy**

Yes. It's an interesting development of the meaning. So, 'deaf' refers to someone who can't hear, while 'tone deaf' describes someone who can't hear different tones or sounds.

**Feifei**

Yes, that's right. And the new meaning is for someone who says the wrong thing at the wrong time – like Rob.

**Roy**

Yes – it sometimes gets used to refer to authority figures who say something that seems to be out-of-touch with a certain situation.

**Feifei**

That's right! And, Roy, please don't sing tonight. You really are tone deaf when it comes to singing. Your singing makes dogs bark.

**Roy**

Yeah, maybe that's for the best. But then I think the dogs just want to be in the same band as me. I could create a new band called 'Roy and the Dogs'.

**Feifei**

I can't believe you just said that! I just formed a band called 'Feifei and the Cats' – your comment was tone deaf. Bye, Roy.

**Roy**

Bye!