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Get a life!

Professor David Crystal

This familiar old noun 'life', now used widely in the phrase 'get a life!', usually in a derogatory tone of voice like that – 'Get a life, why don't you!' Well, it's said to somebody who the speaker feels is leading an unfulfilling existence, your life is empty, dull, there's more to life than what you're doing, start living!

It can be serious, but it's usually jocular. It can be used for instance to a workaholic, or for anybody obsessed with something like a television programme, always watching a particular soap, shall we say. That person might be told to 'get a life'.

The phrase goes back a couple of decades. It was US slang in California, years and years ago, and then it became the name of a US television show. And then it became all sorts of usages around radio, television, novels, short stories – don't take things too seriously! Chill out! Get a life!

It happens to the best of us... people who pity my obsession with linguistics often tell me to 'get a life'!



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