

**H**ave you ever found yourself struggling to figure out where someone else is coming from? Even when it comes to our loved ones, it can sometimes feel as if we're speaking in tongues – particularly when there are generational divides involved. Approaching our conversations with empathy and understanding is key to forging tight bonds; so we asked the experts to pull apart some common phrases we all hear day-to-day, to better interpret what each other means.



### What does your teenager mean when they say 'OH, YOU'RE SO EMBARRASSING!'?

"Adolescence is a stage when a child takes their first step into adulthood," says couples and family therapist, Şirin Atçeken ([wecure.co.uk](http://wecure.co.uk)). "There is a lot of physical, emotional and psychological change happening around this time and it can be very confusing for a teenager and their family. When a child says 'oh, you're so embarrassing' to the parent, they're not trying to be nasty. What they mean is, 'I'm not you, I am now a different

person'. One of the most important parts in this stage of growing up is differentiation from the parents; the teenager develops their own identity, which is sometimes difficult and creates a lot of conflict. Friendships gain more importance and family relationships are set aside (for a while). Give your teenager enough space to experiment with their identity. Keep an eye from a distance and hold a safe, welcoming place for them to return to."

### What does your partner mean when they say: 'YOU'RE ALWAYS NAGGING ME!'?

"Nagging is a passive-aggressive behaviour and, in the workplace, it bears similarities to micro-managing," says Dr Audrey Tang, a chartered psychologist and author of *The Leader's Guide to Resilience* (published by Pearson, £14.99). "It's the idea that we have delegated a task, but are not willing to let go or allow the person to do it in their own time. If this is a common argument, know that we have a responsibility to make it clear what we are asking and stipulate the time frame. This doesn't have to be a formal agreement, but there is a huge difference in saying 'we need milk' as opposed to, 'would you mind picking up some milk on your way back from work today, please?'. If you feel that making clear the request and time frame isn't enough, then you might wish to add why you would like it done by then. If it's not done, then a discussion of why it should be prioritised tomorrow is appropriate. A relationship is as much of a team as your workplace colleagues, and the same 'rules' apply: you are more effective if you work together."

### What does someone mean when they say: 'YOU LIKE YOUR FOOD, DON'T YOU?'?

"It's never OK for anyone to make comments about other people's eating habits, weight or shape, but that doesn't mean that it won't happen," says Jemma Messon, psychotherapist, and founder of Family Treatment Service ([thefamilytreatmentservice.com](http://thefamilytreatmentservice.com)). "Of course, for some people, saying that they like food could be a simple observation that might not offend, however, for others, it could be very upsetting. This is why it is important to know and recognise your own triggers and responses, as well as how to soothe yourself when you feel distressed. If comments about food and eating are unhelpful and upsetting for you, it may be useful to have a practiced answer that you give in these types of situations. Something like 'I don't find that helpful' or 'I would rather not talk about that' is likely to shut down the conversation quickly and allow it to move onto other things. If you find yourself ruminating or being adversely affected by comments like this, it may be appropriate to think about some individual therapy to consider your own thoughts, feelings and relationship with food, shape and weight."

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### What does a child mean when they say: 'YOU'RE NOT BEING FAIR!'?

"A very common sentence we hear from a teenager is: 'you're not fair'," says Şirin. "To improve on that relationship, ask yourself whether you really are being fair at this moment. Don't just roll your eyes; try to listen to what your teenager means when he/she says that you're being unjust. Understand and show your interest in their point of view, even if it makes little sense to you. Once your child feels

### What does a colleague mean when they say: 'I'M DOING MORE THAN MY FAIR SHARE!'?

"It sounds like your colleague is setting some boundaries around their time and effort in this statement," says business coach Danielle Haig ([daniellehaig.com](http://daniellehaig.com)). "In this instance, your colleague is telling you that they're feeling unrecognised in their efforts and is asking for their workload to be acknowledged. They could be highlighting their boundaries as they feel like they're being crossed, and they could feel unsupported by other members of the team on a project. If they're genuinely over-contributing as other team members are under-delivering, then it's good to confront this. Provide a clear team breakdown and division of work and duties for projects, or with a job-share. This will allow everyone involved to know who needs to do what, removing any confusion or overloading of work on one individual. Work is a team sport, not a single-player game, and this needs to be encouraged."