

# HOW TO RESPOND TO BAD NEWS IN ENGLISH WITH EMPATHY

Okay, first, let's briefly talk about how not to respond to bad news.

Have you ever heard the following?

- *I know how you feel.*
- *Look on the bright side.*
- *Everything happens for a reason.*
- *Better luck next time.*

While the intentions may be in the right place, these phrases don't do much to truly make someone feel heard.

Instead, they take attention away from the person's feelings and may reflect your discomfort with the bad news.

Instead, we can respond to bad news intentionally and empathetically.

To do so, follow these two steps:

1. Acknowledge the news and/or negative feelings.
2. Invite an action.

## Informal ways to respond to bad news in English

Whether you or someone is:

- canceling dinner plans
- working overtime on the weekend
- stressing over a lost cell phone
- spilling ketchup on a new shirt
- getting a cold
- experiencing a bad breakup
- or, taking care of a sick loved one,

These responses are best for close friends, family members, and colleagues when the news is bad or disappointing but not terrible.

### Common Responses:

- *What a bummer!*
- *Hope you feel better soon. (Used when someone isn't feeling well or is getting sick.)*
- *Sorry, that's rough/awful/disappointing.*
- *Oh, I'm SO sorry. What can I do to make you feel better?*
- *That's awful. Do you want to talk about it?*
- *Oh no, that's terrible!*
- *That's horrible. I'm sorry this is happening to you.*
- *That's so unfair! You deserve better!*
- *I can't believe it! What do you need right now?*

### Scenario #1: Canceled Dinner Plans

Imagine your friend cancels dinner plans with you 30 minutes before the reservation. She calls to say that she has to attend to a family matter.

In this situation, you could respond with:

- *Oh no, that's terrible! I hope everything is ok and we can catch up another time.*

In this response, you acknowledge the bad news and express empathy. At the same time, you also leave an open invitation for the person to follow up soon after.

### Scenario #2: A Bad Break-up

Perhaps your sibling recently broke up with their boyfriend/girlfriend. In response to the news, you could say:

- *That's awful! I'm so sorry this happened. What do you need right now?*

Again, in this example, I'm acknowledging the bad news, expressing my sympathies, and following up with an action.

### Formal ways to respond to bad news in English

On the other hand, if the news is work-related or from an acquaintance, these responses may be better for truly bad news.

For example:

- Losing a job
- Losing a beloved pet
- Getting into a car accident
- Losing a big client
- Getting your car stolen
- Getting severely injured
- Missing a major deadline
- Resigning from a job

Common Responses:

- *Please let me know what I can do to help.*
- *I'm very sorry - that must be awful/frustrating/scary/difficult.*
- *That's unfortunate and I hope we can find a way to move forward.*
- *I'm so sorry to hear that!*
- *What awful news! I'm sorry. What can I do to help right now?*
- *I'm sorry to hear such terrible news.*
- *I'm very sorry; I truly don't know what to say.*
- *I'm disappointed to hear that, but I know we can find a way to work through this together.*

Scenario #3: Losing a Job

Imagine your coworker was recently laid off, and they share this news with you. You might respond with:

- *I'm very sorry; I truly don't know what to say. What can I do to help right now?*

This response is appropriate since you acknowledge the terrible situation without making assumptions about your employer. In the same breadth, you also offer a helping hand to a coworker who may need it.

#### Scenario #4: Missing a Major Deadline

Perhaps, you're a manager, and a team member has missed a critical deadline for a project. When they bring this to your attention, it would be appropriate to say:

- *I'm disappointed to hear that we couldn't make this deadline and I'll need to think of how to make up for lost time. What solution do you have in mind?*

In this response, while you do acknowledge the unfortunate turn of events, the focus is on shifting the thinking to finding a solution together. The response is both empathetic and efficient for work.

#### Ways to respond to very sad or shocking news in English

When friends, colleagues, and family members share news of grief, such as the death of someone or a divorce, these expressions are the most appropriate.

##### Common Responses:

- *I wish I had the right words; just know I care deeply. And I'm ready to listen if you want to talk.*
- *I'm truly sorry for your loss. (Used to express sympathy for news of a death.)*
- *Please accept my sincerest condolences/sympathies. (Used to express sympathy for news of a death.)*
- *If you need anything at all, I'm here for you.*
- *My heart hurts for you. I'm very sorry.*

#### Scenario #5: Death of a Loved One

When someone passes away, it would be appropriate to respond with:

- *I'm so sorry for your loss. If you need anything at all, I'm here for you.*

##### *Referencia:*

*Annemarie. (2024) Learn Exactly How to Respond to Bad News in English. Speak Confident English.*

*Recovered from: <https://www.speakconfidentenglish.com/responding-bad-news/>*