

## Grown-Ups Say the Darndest Things!

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There are a lot of expressions that get tossed around in daily conversation and nobody gives them a second thought or even considers their origin - but the average child just might. How will you respond to a question like "What do you mean it's raining cats and dogs, Mom?"

Below you'll find a list of ten common phrases and their derivations. With these explanations at hand, you won't be at a loss for words next time a question from an earnest child catches you off guard. You could just learn something too!

**"Raining cats and dogs":** There's a fair amount of debate on this one, but most likely its meaning is rooted in mythology. Sailors held a firm belief that cats could predict the weather and so they'd study their behavior before setting sail. Meanwhile dogs, like wolves, were symbols of the wind in folklore. Animals have been associated with weather for centuries, ie. cats equal rain and dogs equal wind. Offer this explanation to inquisitive kids just in case they're expecting critters to fall out of the sky!

**"Let's play it by ear":** When you want to play it loose and see how things develop in any given situation, your child may be wondering what the heck an ear has to do with it! Tell him it'll be like playing an instrument without sheet music because that's where the expression comes from - just listening and seeing how things turn out.

**"I'm just pulling your leg!":** Next time you tease your child and then amend your words by using this phrase, forgive him for looking a little baffled when physically you're doing nothing of the sort! Just in case you're both wondering, this expression's rather dark origins comes from the Scottish word 'draw (as in, withdraw) a person's leg out from under him in order to trip him and perhaps rob him, or at the very least make him look foolish.

**"At the drop of a hat":** It's what you've come to expect in the company of your children - moods change, activities change, well, at the drop of a hat. Dare say these words aloud however and you'll probably get a couple of quick glances at the top of your head. Before anyone can say "But you aren't wearing a hat, Dad!", explain this expression comes from the days of the American frontier when it was common practice to ask someone to drop a hat as a signal for a fight to begin. Not that you necessarily want that to happen!

**"Pleased as Punch":** No, your happiness has nothing to do with a fruity beverage. Well, okay, maybe it does! - but in actuality this expression derives from a traditional puppet show in the UK (with Italian origins) known as Punch and Judy. The main character Punch performs all sorts of evil deeds in such a self-satisfied and gleeful way that the expression "pleased as Punch" worked its way into the common lexicon.

**"Save for a rainy day":** Allowance time rolls around and you'd do well to offer this bit of advice, especially these days. But your little spenders may look at you quizzically - after all, the mall is open rain or shine. Tell them, as with many expressions, that this one harks back to a time when people lived mostly off the land. If the weather was bad, there was no money to be made, so it was a good idea to set some of your earnings aside to get through inclement times. Help them make the analogy if you have to.

**"The grass is always greener on the other side":** Of course the neighbor kid's bike (swing set, video game set-up, etc.) is bigger and better. The same reasoning is used when one child complains how the other always gets the larger slice of cake! No wonder you find yourself uttering this expression. If the question should come up, the origins of this proverb are rooted in farm life too. Ever observe how grazing animals tend to crane their necks through property fences to nibble grass on the other side even when their own pasture is perfectly green?

**"Scot-Free":** Maybe your attitude is (and rightly so!) that no one should get off scot-free when it comes to household chores. Which may explain why you overhear your children mumbling something about wishing they were born Scottish as they make up their beds. In truth, the expression has nothing to do with the Scots. 'Scot' is actually a Scandinavian word for tax or payment. If you could wrangle a way out of paying up and also escape punishment, you were getting off scot-free!

**"Don't rest on your laurels":** You may find this expression escaping your lips when your child thinks he doesn't have to study for *this* week's test because he did so well on *last* week's. Can't you just hearing him asking "What's a laurel, Dad?" Well, in the ancient Pythian games held at Delphi in Greece (they ranked right up there with the Olympics), the winner was crowned with a wreath of laurels made from the branches and leaves of the bay laurel, an evergreen plant. It was an honor but one was ill-advised to live off one's reputation, or in other words rely on past successes for continued fame and recognition