
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

The last straw/final straw



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Helen

Hello, I'm Helen. Neil, can I ask you about something?

Neil

Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?

Helen

Well, Theodora and Alma are my best friends, but they are not talking to each other because of a straw.

Neil

They are not getting on because of a straw? Are you sure you heard it right?

Helen

Yes, Alma said to me when Theodora didn't come to her party, it was the last straw. I don't understand. What could a straw do?

Neil

Oh, Alma was just using an expression. What she really meant was, things were not going well between them because of things that had happened in the past.

Helen

Well, Theodora did miss quite a few of our gatherings.

Neil

When Theodora didn't come to Alma's party, that was the final thing that made Alma really angry, giving up on their friendship.

Helen

Oh, I see, so the last straw means the last thing or event that caused the total melt down.

Neil

That's right, we often hear the phrase 'the last straw', when people are talking about repeated problems or issues that aren't getting better, then the smallest thing happens, people finally lose their composure and explode.

Helen

I see.

Neil

Let's hear how it's used.

Examples

A: I've never seen you so angry.

B: I have had such a bad day. I woke up late and rushed out of the house, then missed my bus by seconds, got in to work and was told there would be no pay rise this year. When the dinner lady said I put too much salad on my plate, it was the last straw.

The paper factory has struggled to stay open in the last few years; the new tax charge was the last straw, forcing it to shut down after 30 years in business.

Neil

Just so you know. Some people also say 'the final straw', and it means the same as 'the last straw'.

Helen

Thanks for the clarification. I do hope my friends can resolve their differences. Friendship is worth saving.

Neil

Absolutely.

Both

Bye.