

# You Can't Ask That!

People & Society

**Kickoff:** Read the following text and discuss the questions that follow.

Social norms shape our conversations and dictate what questions are deemed appropriate or inappropriate. This is dependent on various factors including culture, relationship between the speakers, and the context. What might be considered an innocuous inquiry in one culture could be seen as a gross invasion of privacy in another.

1. Can you think of a question that is considered rude in your culture?
2. Can you think of a question that might be seen as inappropriate in a certain context but acceptable in another?
3. How does the relationship between the speakers affect the appropriateness of a question?
4. Can you recall a situation where someone asked an inappropriate question?
5. Why do you think people ask questions that might be considered inappropriate?
6. If you want to ask a question but you think it might be inappropriate, what do you think is the right thing to do?

**Vocabulary:** Learn phrases to talk about appropriateness in conversation.

Copy the following table onto a piece of paper leaving plenty of space beside each.

Once you have done this, read the sentences below and decide which group they belong to. For example, if you see "Ask away!" it means "Yes, you can ask that." so you can put it in [Category 1](#).

When you have grouped all the sentences, identify which phrases are idiomatic expressions and discuss their meanings.

1. "Yes, you can ask that." (generally appropriate)	2. "Be careful asking that." (sometimes appropriate)	3. "No, you can't ask that." (generally inappropriate)

- That's over the line! · I don't see why not. · That's none of your business. · That can be a touchy subject. ·
- Don't go there. · That's too personal. · That's a no-go area. · That's definitely off-limits. · No need to hold back. ·
- I'd be wary of that one. · I wouldn't. · I'd think twice before asking that. · Not everyone would be okay with that. ·
- That one's risky. · Fire away! · That one's frowned upon in some cases. · That could open a can of worms. ·

**Speaking I:** Take a look at the questions on the next page and discuss the points below.

You will see a number of questions. You don't need to answer them. Instead, decide whether each question would be appropriate to ask someone who you have just met. Use the expressions from the previous exercise to help you.

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1. What's your first name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. What do you do for a living?
5. How much do you earn?
6. Are you single or married?
7. Have you ever been in a fight?
8. Do you have kids?
9. Do you have any enemies?
10. Are you religious?
11. How much do you pay for this house?
12. Do you own this house or do you rent it?



13. Do you do much sport?
14. How much do you weigh?
15. How much did your jacket cost?
16. Do you eat healthily?

### Speaking II: **Learn the meanings of the underlined words and then talk together to discuss each of the questions.**

1. Intrusive: When someone keeps asking you personal questions, it can feel intrusive. Can you think of a situation where you found someone's questions too intrusive, and how did you handle it?
2. Tactful: Being tactful is about asking sensitive questions in a polite and careful way. Can you describe a time when you had to be tactful when asking someone a question?
3. Awkward: Sometimes, a conversation can become awkward when an inappropriate question is asked. Can you recall an awkward conversation you've had because of an inappropriate question?
4. Oversensitive: Some people might find certain questions offensive even when they're not meant to be. Do you think people are sometimes oversensitive? Can you provide an example?
5. Taboo: A taboo is a subject that is avoided because it's considered too sensitive or offensive. Do you think there are more taboos in conversation now than in the past, or fewer?
6. Trivial: A trivial issue is one that is unimportant and doesn't need to be worried about. Do you think people sometimes get upset about trivial questions? Can you give an example?