BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Try it on

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Feifei
Hello and welcome to The English We Speak, where we explain phrases and expressions used by fluent English speakers so that you can use them too. I'm Feifei.

Phil
And I'm Phil.

Feifei
Are you coming to that meeting later?

Phil
No, I'm leaving early. I'm…. erm…. ah…. going to the airport. I'm going on holiday and I need get there early.

Feifei
Wait a minute, you're not going on holiday. I don't believe you. You're just trying it on. That important football match is on this afternoon. You just want to go and watch that.

Phil
Maybe…. Ok, if you promise not to tell anyone else, I'll explain what 'try it on' means here.

Feifei
OK, deal. Everyone knows 'try it on' can be used to talk about clothes. But this is different, isn't it?

Phil
Yes, this is about lying. One meaning of 'try it on' is to try to deceive someone so you don't get in trouble. If someone lies to get out of work early – then they are 'trying it on'.

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Feifei
Yes, it's an expression that we often use to challenge someone. This means we often use it in the negative. I know you're not going to the airport, don't try it on.

Phil
Let's hear some more people using 'try it on' in this way.

Examples
My sister said she's got no money and asked to borrow my credit card to buy some food from the shops but I saw a massive parcel with her name on it. She's just trying it on

So, the waiter in the restaurant I went to last night didn't bring me back any change after I paid. They said that they'd just forgotten, but I think they were trying it on.

My landlord raised my rent by £100 without telling me. They're definitely trying it on.

Feifei
We've been learning the expression 'try it on' to talk about trying to deceive someone.

Phil
Yes. Another meaning of 'try it on' is to behave badly to test someone's limits.

Feifei
So, Phil. You've got teenage children, haven't you?

Phil
Yes, teenagers are notorious for sometimes trying it on to see what their parents will let them do. Like using their phones after we've told them to stop. It means I need to say "Don't try it on! I've told you to put your phone away".

Feifei
OK. That's it for this programme but join us again next time. We really can help you improve your English. We're not just trying it on!

Phil
See you next time!

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Feifei
Bye bye!

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