BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak
Throw ideas at the wall

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. How are you doing, Feifei?

Feifei
I'm trying to think of a theme for my son's birthday party, but I'm not sure what he'd like.

Phil
How about dinosaurs? Or pirates? Or space? Or football? Or a superhero party?

Feifei
Wait, wait, wait Phil, give me a minute – that's too many ideas.

Phil
Sorry, I was just throwing ideas at the wall, surely something must work?

Feifei
Maybe, but I need to slow down a bit. What we can do is learn that expression 'throwing ideas at the wall'. What do we mean by that?

Phil
OK, if someone throws ideas at the wall – it means they make lots of suggestions, with the hope that one might be OK. It suggests that you haven't thought that much about the ideas you're saying.

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Feifei
Yes, it did sound like you were just saying the first things that came into your head.

Phil
We also talk about throwing ideas at the wall until something sticks. And the idea is that if you make enough suggestions, then eventually you'll get one that's good.

Feifei
Let's hear some other people using 'throwing ideas at the wall'.

Examples
What kind of food should we eat? Indian? Chinese? Italian? Just throwing ideas at the wall.

My parents are decorating their living room at the moment but they're not sure which colour to paint the walls. They're talking about blues, greens, reds. They're just throwing ideas at the wall at this point.

Listen guys, I know you didn't like my idea for the gameshow but I'm just throwing ideas at the wall and seeing what sticks. Sit down, I've got loads more ideas, loads of ideas. Listen.

Feifei
We've been learning the expression 'throw ideas at the wall' to mean 'make lots of suggestions'.

Phil
Yes, it comes from the expression 'if you throw enough mud at the wall then some of it will stick'. And that can mean different things. It can talk about persisting until you succeed, but it can also mean that if you say enough bad things about someone, eventually people will start to believe them.

Feifei
OK. That's it for this programme, but join us next time to learn more English phrases and expressions

Phil
See you then!

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Feifei
Bye!

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