

THE ENGLISH PROVERBS AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

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Abstract: English idioms and sayings are frequently used not only in written English but also in spoken English. Learning idioms is a way of enriching one's vocabulary, the different meaning connected with them being often surprising. Among English idioms, the idioms and sayings related to feelings and emotions are abundant. A widely-known question in English of the type "How are you?" has either simple answers, like "I am fine", "I am very well, thank you", or more complex, elaborate answers which describe the speaker's mood or his real state of mind. This is why our article is trying to give a list of all these idioms related to feelings and emotions.

Keywords: feeling, emotion, proverb, idiom, origin.

In everyday language people frequently use different proverbs or phraseological expressions whose meanings are not quite fully understood. There are a big number of idioms that people use to describe feelings and emotions.

Our article has tried to give a list, as comprehensible as possible, of these idioms and sayings related to feelings and emotions. The expressions are arranged alphabetically, each one of them is explained and an example is provided. Some of these idioms are grouped by certain themes, others are listed under the general category *Feelings / Strong Emotions*. The themes include the following categories: *Angry / Annoyed / Bad-tempered; Confused; Energy / Health; Happy / Amusing; Sad / Upset; Love; Surprised / Unprepared; Bored / Excited; Scared / Frightened; Worried / Nervous*. Unless a word (or expression) is used in all parts of the English-speaking world, the country of origin or the country in which the word is most prevalent is given between brackets. We have had as a reference book "*Oxford Idioms. Dictionary for Learners of English*"¹.

The category *Feelings / Strong Emotions* comprises a wide range of idioms. Here are some examples:

- *a/that sinking feeling* (familiar speech) = a feeling that something bad has happened / is going to happen; e.g. *Whenever I receive a telegram I get that sinking feeling.*
- *be dying of something* (familiar speech) = have a very strong feeling of something; e.g. *I am dying of thirst.*
- *be engraved on/in your heart/memory/mind* = be something that you will never forget because it affected you so strongly; e.g. *My grandmother's death is still engraved in my heart after 20 years.*
- *beside yourself (with something)* = unable to control yourself because of the strength of emotion you are feeling; e.g. *She was beside herself with grief when she heard the terrible news.*

¹*Oxford Idioms. Dictionary for Learners of English*, Oxford University Press, 2006

- *from the bottom of one's heart* = with deep feeling, very sincerely; e.g. *I love her from the bottom of my heart.*
 - *give voice to something* = express your feelings, worries, etc.; e.g. *All she had to do was give voice to her story.*
 - *have a rush of blood to the head* = because of a strong emotion, suddenly do something foolish or dangerous; e.g. *I just had a rush of blood to the head and revealed my secret to him.*
 - *have mixed feelings (about someone/something)* = have both positive and negative feelings (about someone/something); e.g. *They had mixed feelings about their new manager.*
 - *in your heart of hearts* = in your deepest feelings; e.g. *I know in my heart of hearts that she is right.*
 - *let off steam* = release energy, strong feelings by intense physical activity or noisy behaviour; e.g. *I used to let off steam by going to the gym three times a week.*
 - *open your heart / pour your heart out (to someone)* = tell someone about your feelings; e.g. *I encouraged him to open his heart to me.*
 - *search your heart/soul/conscience* (familiar speech) = think carefully about your feelings or your reasons for doing something; e.g. *Search your heart and tell me if you really love him.*
 - *the milk of human kindness* = kind feelings; e.g. *He is a villain. There's not much of the milk of human kindness in him.*
 - *tug at someone's heartstrings* = make someone feel strong emotions of sadness and pity; e.g. *Sarah wasn't swayed by his attempt to tug at her heartstrings.*
- Whenever we feel *Angry / Annoyed / Bad-tempered*, we make use of certain idiomatic expressions, such as:
- *a black look* = an angry expression on someone's face; e.g. *He gave me a black look when I confessed to him what I had done.*
 - *bad/ill feeling(s)* = anger between people, especially after an argument or a disagreement; e.g. *There were a lot of bad feelings between the two newlyweds.*
 - *be/feel out of sorts* (especially British English) = be/feel ill or bad-tempered; e.g. *I don't know what's happening to John. He looks rather out of sorts these days.*
 - *be/get on your high horse* = be annoyed because you think that someone hasn't treated you with enough respect; e.g. *When he called me stupid I really got on my high horse.*
 - *be/go on the warpath* (familiar speech) = be angry and ready for an argument or a fight about something; e.g. *Watch out! She is on the verge of going on the warpath!*
 - *be in a snit* (American English) = be bad-tempered; e.g. *He has been in a snit since we arrived at the chalet.*
 - *be on somebody's back* (familiar speech) / *get someone's goat* (familiar speech) / *get up someone's nose* (British English, familiar speech) = annoy someone a lot; e.g. *My mother-in-law is on my back all the time / really gets my goat, saying I have to earn more money.*
 - *be sick and tired of something/doing something* = be bored or annoyed with something/doing something; e.g. *I am sick and tired of caring what people think.*
 - *bite/snap someone's head off* (familiar speech) = speak to someone angrily without good reason; e.g. *I was only telling you the truth – there is no need to bite my head off!*

- *blow a fuse / blow someone's top* (familiar speech) *have a pink/blue fit* (British English, familiar speech) / *flip one's lid / go through the roof* (familiar speech) / *go spare* (British English, familiar speech) = get very angry; e.g. *Hearing people telling lies always makes him blow a fuse.*
- *browed off (with somebody/something)* = unhappy and annoyed; e.g. *Susan and her husband were getting browed off with the delay of the plane.*
- *do a slow burn* (American English, familiar speech) = slowly get angry; e.g. *While I was talking I noticed he did a slow burn and left the room.*
- *fed up to the back teeth with someone/something / sick to the back teeth of someone/something* (familiar speech) = annoyed by someone/something; e.g. *I am fed up to the back teeth with repeating the same thing over and over.*
- *foam at the mouth / have hysterics* (familiar speech) = be extremely angry; e.g. *She nervously stood there, foaming at the mouth.*
- *get bent out of shape (about /over something)* (American English, familiar speech) = become angry or upset; e.g. *I get bent out of shape whenever my children do not keep the house clean.*
- *get the hump* (British English, familiar speech) = become annoyed, angry; e.g. *I get the hump every time someone yells at me.*
- *get out of bed on the wrong side* (British English) / *get up on the wrong side of the bed* (American English) = be bad-tempered from the moment you get up; e.g. *Why are you so nervous? Did you get out of bed on the wrong side again?*
- *get/put someone's back up / get on someone's wick* (British English, familiar speech) / *tread on someone's toes* (especially British English) = make someone annoyed; e.g. *His rude behaviour always puts my back up.*
- *gnash your teeth* = feel very angry and upset about something, especially because you cannot get what you want; e.g. *She will be gnashing her teeth when she hears you've been promoted.*
- *go ape* (American English, familiar speech) / *ballistic / mental* (British English, slang) / *postal* (American English, familiar speech) / *burst a blood vessel* (familiar speech) / *have/throw a fit* (familiar speech) = become extremely angry or excited; e.g. *She went ape when her husband announced her he was filing for divorce.*
- *go bananas* (slang) = become angry, crazy or silly; e.g. *If she lies to me again I think I'll go bananas.*
- *have a cow* (American English, slang) / *go off the deep end / fly into a rage/temper / fly off the handle / hit the roof/ceiling* (familiar speech) / *see red* (familiar speech) / *throw a tantrum/wobbly* (familiar speech) = suddenly become very excited or angry; e.g. *When I told him about the amount of money I had spent on clothes, he had a cow.*
- *have a quick temper* = become angry easily; e.g. *My father has got a very quick temper.*
- *have someone's guts for garters* (British English, familiar speech) = be very angry with someone and punish them severely for something they have done; e.g. *Sam would have my guts for garters if he found out I had lost all the money gambling.*
- *in high dudgeon* = in an angry mood; e.g. *She went off in high dudgeon after her project had been rejected.*

- *like a bear with a sore head* (familiar speech) = very bad-tempered; e.g. *He is like a bear with a sore head on Monday mornings.*
- *look daggers at someone / give someone a dirty look* (familiar speech) = look at someone very angrily but not say anything; e.g. *She looked daggers at him when he mentioned her love affair.*
- *lose your cool / rag* (British English) / *get hot under the collar* (familiar speech) = get angry, annoyed or excited; e.g. *Whenever she is around him, she loses her cool.*
- *make someone's blood boil / make someone's hackles rise / get on somebody's nerves* (familiar speech) = make someone very angry; e.g. *Seeing that man beating a dog made my blood boil.*
- *put someone's nose out of joint* (familiar speech) = upset or annoy someone, especially by not giving them enough attention; e.g. *He really put my nose out of joint when he deliberately ignored me.*
- *up in arms (about / over something)* (familiar speech) = very angry and protesting very strongly; e.g. *The workers from the factory are up in arms over wage cuts.*
- *your / someone's blood is up* (British English) = someone feels angry and aggressive; e.g. *When my blood is up, I may say a lot of things I don't mean.*

There are many idioms related to being *Confused*, as for example:

- *all, completely at sea* = confused; not organized; e.g. *He was completely at sea trying to solve that difficult Math problem.*
- *be/get in/into a tizzy/tizz (about something)* (familiar speech) = become excited, nervous or confused, especially about something that is not important; e.g. *Sarah was in such a tizz about her homework.*
- *in a fog* (familiar speech) = uncertain and confused; e.g. *She is still in a fog over what happened to her parents.*
- *in a whirl* = confused and excited; e.g. *A little kiss is enough to put him in a whirl.*
- *it beats me* (familiar speech) = I cannot understand; e.g. *It beats me why he got married.*
- *tie someone (up) in knots* = become or make someone very confused; e.g. *She tied herself up in knots when she was asked about her love affair.*

Energy / Health is a category comprising the following idiomatic expressions:

- *as fit as a fiddle / as right as rain* (familiar speech) = very healthy and active; e.g. *After our trip to the mountains, I came back feeling as fit as a fiddle.*
- *as sick as a dog* (familiar speech) = feeling very ill; vomiting a lot; e.g. *He was as sick as a dog the day before yesterday.*
- *be bouncing off the walls* (familiar speech) = be so full of energy that you cannot keep still; e.g. *She was bouncing off the walls, so she went out for a jog.*
- *be burnt/worn to a frazzle* (familiar speech) = be extremely tired; e.g. *After working on the report all weekend, Jane was worn to a frazzle.*
- *burn the candle at both ends* = make yourself very tired by doing too much work and having too little sleep; e.g. *She looks very tired. I think she has been burning the candle at both ends lately.*
- *dead on your feet / done in / fit/ready to drop* (familiar speech) = extremely tired; e.g. *I have been working in the garden all morning and I am dead on my feet now.*

- *firing/working on all cylinders* (familiar speech) = using all your energy to do something; e.g. *He has just been released from the hospital, so he is not yet firing on all cylinders.*
- *full of beans* = very lively, active and healthy; e.g. *Sarah is full of beans again after her illness.*
- *in fine/good fettle* (old-fashioned, familiar speech) / *in the pink* (old-fashioned, familiar speech) = healthy and cheerful; e.g. *After a good night's sleep, I was in fine fettle.*
- *like death warmed up* (British English) / *like death warmed over* (American English) = very ill or tired; e.g. *He feels like death warmed up after a 24-hour flight.*
- *like fury* (familiar speech) / *like gangbusters* (American English, familiar speech) = with great energy, speed; e.g. *Sleeping well the other night made him work like fury today.*
- *off colour* (British English, familiar speech) = looking or feeling ill; e.g. *He is feeling a bit off colour these days.*
- *your heart and soul* = with a lot of energy and enthusiasm; e.g. *He puts his heart and soul into his job.*

There are also a wide variety of idioms related to being *Happy / Amusing*:

- *a barrel/bundle of laughs* (familiar speech) = very amusing; e.g. *The Smith family reunions might be a real barrel of laughs.*
- *be all smiles* = be very happy and smiling, especially after feeling sad or worried about something; e.g. *She was really depressed last year, but she is all smiles now.*
- *beam/grin/smile from ear to ear* = be smiling a lot because you are very pleased about something; e.g. *She has been smiling from ear to ear all the way to the airport.*
- *be tickled pink* (familiar speech) = be very pleased or amused; e.g. *She will be tickled pink when she hears about their engagement.*
- *bust a gut* (American English, familiar speech) / *fall about laughing/with laughter / kill oneself (laughing) / rolling in the aisles / in stitches* (familiar speech) = laugh(ing) a lot; e.g. *My cousin is hilarious. I bust a gut every time he tells a joke.*
- *float/walk on air* (familiar speech) / *be like a dog with two tails / be over the moon* (especially British English, familiar speech) / *be the picture of happiness* = be very happy and excited about something; e.g. *Every time she calls on him it seems like he is walking on air.*
- *full of the joys of spring* = very happy and lively; e.g. *Tom looks full of the joys of spring these days.*
- *have the time of your life* (familiar speech) = be very happy or excited; e.g. *The couple had the time of their lives during their honeymoon.*
- *in good heart* (British English) / *in high spirits / on top of the world* = happy and cheerful; e.g. *I was in good heart when I heard the good news.*
- *laugh your head off / laugh like a drain* (British English) / *split your sides (laughing/with laughter)* = laugh very loudly; e.g. *He always laughs his head off at Sandra's jokes.*
- *make someone's day* (familiar speech) / *do someone's heart good* = make someone very happy; e.g. *My surprise birthday party really made my day.*

- *(be) on cloud nine* (familiar speech) / *be in (your) seventh heaven* / *as happy as the day is long/as a clam/as Larry* (familiar speech) = (be) extremely happy; e.g. *He has been on cloud nine ever since he got engaged.*

Several idioms refer to being *Sad / Upset*:

- *be/feel sick at heart* (formal language) = be very unhappy or disappointed; e.g. *I felt sick at heart the moment I got the telegram.*

- *come unglued* (American English, familiar speech) = become very upset; e.g. *There are people who come unglued when they do not achieve immediate results out of an activity.*

- *crocodile tears* = an insincere show of sadness; e.g. *Save the crocodile tears for someone who believes you!*

- *down in the dumps / down in the mouth* (familiar speech) = depressed, miserable; e.g. *He's been feeling a bit down in the dumps lately.*

- *eat your heart out (for someone/something)* (especially British English) = be very unhappy because you want someone/something that you cannot have; e.g. *He is eating his heart out for Susan.*

- *go (all) to pieces* (familiar speech) = become so upset or nervous that you can no longer lead your life normally; e.g. *After he had lost his wife in a car accident he just seemed to go to pieces.*

- *like a whipped dog* = ashamed, embarrassed or unhappy because you have been defeated or punished; e.g. *He ran from here like a whipped dog.*

- *sob one's heart out* = cry noisily for a long time because of sadness; e.g. *After the funeral she spent the evening sobbing her heart out.*

- *take something to heart* = be very upset or offended by someone's criticism; e.g. *She was very mean to you. Don't take all the things she said so much to heart.*

- *your face falls* = you suddenly look disappointed or upset; e.g. *His face fell when I told him how much the furniture cost.*

- *your heart sinks* = you suddenly feel sad or depressed about something; e.g. *My heart sank when she told me about her car accident.*

There are also many sayings and idiomatic expressions about *Love*, such as:

- *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* (saying) = used to say that when you are away from someone that you love, you love them even more; e.g. *Whoever said "absence makes the heart grow fonder" obviously hasn't met the two of you.*

- *be all over somebody* (familiar speech) = show a lot of affection for or enthusiasm about someone; e.g. *When I entered the room, Jane was all over Sam.*

- *break someone's heart* = make someone feel extremely unhappy; e.g. *She broke his heart when she split up with him.*

- *carry a torch for someone* = be in love with someone, especially someone who does not love you in return; e.g. *Mary has been carrying a torch for Sam for years.*

- *cupboard love* (British English) = affection that someone shows towards someone else in order to get something; e.g. *In spite of his tender gestures and declarations of love, I know this is just cupboard love.*

- *have got it bad* (familiar speech) = be very much in love; e.g. *All Susan ever talks about is Jim – she has got it bad!*

- *head over heels (in love)* = completely in love; e.g. *Sam is head over heels in love with Jane.*
- *lose your heart to (someone, something)* (formal language) = fall in love (with someone, something); e.g. *I've lost my heart to that handsome man.*
- *love at first sight* = falling in love with someone the first time you meet them; e.g. *When I met my husband it was love at first sight.*
- *Love is blind (saying)* = when you are in love with someone, you cannot see their faults; e.g. *They say love is blind, but that's not my case.*
- *only have eyes for somebody* = be interested in, or in love with a particular person; e.g. *I told my mother over and over again I only had eyes for Mary.*
- *steal/win someone's heart* = make someone fall in love with you; e.g. *You are the one who stole her heart.*
- *sweep someone off their feet* = attract someone very strongly because you are exciting, charming, etc.; e.g. *I was swept off my feet by his charming personality.*
- *wear your heart on your sleeve* = show other people your emotions, especially love; e.g. *Jane isn't the type that would wear her heart on her sleeves.*

When we get to experience surprised reactions or when we do not know what to say, we make use of the following idioms related to the *Surprised / Unprepared* category:

- *be taken aback (by somebody/something)* = be shocked or surprised by someone/something; e.g. *I was totally taken aback by his behaviour.*
- *not believe your eyes / ears* (usually used with *can't* or *couldn't*) = think that something you see/hear is very surprising; e.g. *I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw her at the party.*
- *off base* (American English, familiar speech) = unprepared; e.g. *The question caught me off base.*
- *take someone's breath away* = surprise or amaze someone; e.g. *Winning the lottery took my breath away.*
- *words fail me* = I cannot express how I feel (because I am too surprised); e.g. *Words fail me to express my amazement.*

Many idiomatic expressions are related to being *Bored / Excited*:

- *a shiver runs/goes down someone's spine / send a shiver up/down someone's spine* = make someone feel excitement or anxiety; e.g. *This movie sends a shiver down my spine every time I watch it.*
- *at fever pitch* = in a state of great excitement; e.g. *They are working at fever pitch to finish their wedding preparations.*
- *be climbing the walls* (familiar speech) = be extremely bored; e.g. *It has been raining with cats and dogs for two days now, so the kids are climbing the walls with boredom.*
- *blow someone's mind* (familiar speech) = make someone feel extreme pleasure or excitement; e.g. *I know for sure this activity will blow his mind.*
- *come alive (of a person)* = show interest in something and become excited about it; e.g. *Susan came alive as she was talking about her new boyfriend.*
- *get a kick from/out of something* (familiar speech) / *go overboard about/for someone/something* (familiar speech) = get a feeling of excitement out of something; e.g. *He got a real kick from seeing her at the party.*

- *have a field day* = enjoy a time of great excitement or activity; e.g. *When Jim and Sarah celebrated their silver wedding, they both had a field day.*

- *have ants in your pants* (familiar speech) = be unable to stand still because you are anxious or excited about something; e.g. *Don't worry, you will pass the entrance exam. You shouldn't have ants in your pants about it!*

Fear and *anxiety*, which are included in the *Scared / Frightened* category, have, more often than not, specific physical feelings and reactions associated with them:

- *a chill runs/goes down someone's spine* = feel, or make someone feel, horror and fear; e.g. *When I saw that horror movie, a chill ran down my spine.*

- *as white as a sheet/ghost* (familiar speech) = very pale in the face, because of fear or shock; e.g. *There was a man in front of our house, looking as white as a sheet.*

- *be frightened/nervous/scared of your own shadow* = be very easily frightened; e.g. *Ever since he was robbed he has been scared of his own shadow.*

- *(be) quaking/shaking in your boots/shoes / be in a sweat* = be very worried or frightened; e.g. *Climbing that slope had everyone shaking in their boots.*

- *be scared witless* (familiar speech) = be extremely frightened; e.g. *He admits having been scared witless when he first arrived in Los Angeles.*

- *frighten/scare the life out of somebody / frighten/scare somebody out of their wits* = frighten somebody very much; e.g. *Take off that horrible mask! You scare the life out of me!*

- *give somebody a turn* (old-fashioned) = frighten or shock somebody; e.g. *She gave me quite a turn when she showed up at my door wearing a horrible mask.*

- *in fear and trembling (of someone/something)* = feeling very frightened or anxious; e.g. *They have lived in fear and trembling of being caught by the police over the past five years.*

- *make someone's blood run cold / make someone's blood freeze / chill someone to the bone/marrow / give someone the shivers/willies/creeps* (familiar speech) / *put the fear of God into someone* (familiar speech) = make someone feel horror or extreme fear; e.g. *Hearing footsteps at the doorway last night made my blood run cold.*

- *make your flesh creep/crawl* = make you feel afraid or full of disgust; e.g. *The way Jim looked at me made my flesh creep.*

- *shake like a jelly/leaf* (familiar speech) = shake with fear; e.g. *Before my job interview I was shaking like a jelly.*

- *the fright of your life* = an experience that makes you feel great fear; e.g. *I got the fright of my life when I saw my dead husband standing by the window.*

- *your hair stands on end* (familiar speech) = you feel very frightened, nervous or angry; e.g. *When I first saw that movie, my hair stood on end.*

- *your heart is in your mouth* (familiar speech) = you feel very anxious or afraid; e.g. *Her heart was in her mouth as she waited for the exam results.*

When feeling *Worried / Nervous*, we make use of the following idiomatic expressions:

- *a bag/bundle of nerves* (familiar speech) = a person who is very worried or nervous about something; e.g. *She is a bundle of nerves. She should relax more.*

- *(all) hot and bothered* (familiar speech) = worried and upset; e.g. *People are getting all hot and bothered about job losses and wage cuts.*

- *be at your wits' end* = be so confused or worried that you do not know what you should do; e.g. *At this point I am completely at my wits' end.*
- *be/feel like jelly (of legs or knees)* = feel weak because you are nervous or frightened; e.g. *She was terribly scared and her legs felt like jelly.*
- *be/get carried away* = be/get very excited or lose control of your feelings; e.g. *I was angry and I got carried away.*
- *be in a state/get into a state / a stew* (familiar speech) = be/get worried, nervous or upset; e.g. *She got into a state over her job interview.*
- *be in/get into a flap / lather* (familiar speech) = be in/get into a state of worry or excitement; e.g. *Jim is getting into a real flap about his graduation examination.*
- *be on edge/on tenterhooks* = be very tense, excited or anxious about what might happen; e.g. *They were kept on tenterhooks until the teacher gave them their test results.*
- *be worried sick* = be extremely worried; e.g. *I am worried sick about him. I haven't received any news from him for three weeks.*
- *bite your nails/fingernails* = feel very excited or nervous; e.g. *I bite my nails whenever I take an exam.*
- *get a charge out of something* (American English) = get a strong feeling of excitement from something; e.g. *If you are passionate about paragliding, then you will get a charge out of this bounce.*
- *get/have butterflies in one's stomach* (familiar speech) = get/have a nervous feeling in one's stomach before doing something; e.g. *I always get butterflies in my stomach before an exam.*
- *get/have the jitters* (familiar speech) = feel anxious and nervous, especially before an important event; e.g. *She always has jitters before holding a public speech.*
- *hang over someone's head / prey on someone's mind* = worry someone very much; e.g. *She is very troubled about all the problems hanging over her head.*
- *have kittens* (British English, familiar speech) = be nervous and anxious, especially when you are waiting for news of something; e.g. *She shouldn't have kittens every time Sam doesn't return her calls.*
- *have something on your mind* = be worried about something; e.g. *I don't know what's happening with him. I think he has something on his mind.*
- *hold your breath* = be anxious while you are waiting for something that you are worried about; e.g. *I am holding my breath until I get my test results.*
- *ill at ease* = nervous; e.g. *She always feels ill at ease when someone interrupts her speech.*
- *like a cat on hot bricks* (British English) / *like a cat on a hot tin roof* (American English) = very nervous; e.g. *Every time she gets near him she is like a cat on hot bricks.*
- *tear your hair out* (familiar speech) = be very worried or angry; e.g. *I've been tearing my hair out wondering where they were!*
- *weigh on your mind* = make you feel worried and anxious about something; e.g. *His departure was weighing on her mind.*

It is common knowledge that emotions and feelings play a major role in our lives. When communicating with others, one may notice that people reveal their emotions in many different ways; they share a bit of their emotions and feelings.

It is said that emotions do not need to be expressed in words but, in most cases, when we are overwhelmed by our thrills, we have a tendency to share these particular emotions with those around us. During the act of speech the speaker makes use of different idiomatic expressions, being influenced by certain feelings and emotions. The idioms are used for expressing various feelings, emotions or moods, such as anger, confusion, happiness, sadness, love, surprise, excitement, boredom, fear or worry.

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