



American Expression E0218 Don't hold your breath

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"Don't hold your breath" is a common idiom that conveys the idea of not expecting something to happen or not anticipating a particular outcome. The phrase originates from the literal act of holding one's breath, which is often done in situations where one is anxious or eagerly awaiting something.

When someone tells you "Don't hold your breath," they are essentially advising you not to hold onto false hope or expect immediate results. It suggests that the desired outcome or anticipated event is unlikely to occur or will take a considerable amount of time. It serves as a cautionary reminder to manage your expectations and not rely too heavily on something happening in the near future.

This expression is often used in a variety of contexts. For instance, if you are waiting for a response from someone and it has been a long time without any communication, someone might say, "Don't hold your breath for a reply." In this case, they are suggesting that it's unlikely you will receive a response or that it might take an extended period before you hear back.

Similarly, the phrase can be used when referring to the likelihood of a challenging or improbable event happening. For example, if you're waiting for your favorite team, which has been performing poorly, to win a championship, someone might say, "Don't hold your breath for that victory." Here, the expression implies that the team's chances of winning are slim, and it's not advisable to keep your hopes up.

The underlying meaning of "Don't hold your breath" is often to temper expectations and avoid disappointment. It advises against relying on a specific outcome and encourages a more realistic perspective. By urging individuals not to hold their breath, it implies that patience and a level-headed approach are necessary, as the desired result may take a significant amount of time, if it materializes at all.

Overall, the idiom "Don't hold your breath" serves as a reminder to maintain a realistic outlook, avoid unrealistic expectations, and be prepared for outcomes that may differ from what we hope for. It encourages us to navigate situations with patience and a healthy dose of skepticism, recognizing that not everything we desire will come to fruition quickly or at all.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some common situations in which the phrase "Don't hold your breath" might be used, and why is it important to manage expectations in those instances?
 2. Have you ever experienced a situation where you were advised not to hold your breath? How did it feel, and what was the outcome? How did managing your expectations impact your perspective?
 3. How can the phrase "Don't hold your breath" be applied in personal or professional settings to avoid disappointment and maintain a realistic outlook? Can you provide some examples from your own life or observations?
 4. In what ways can holding onto false hope or unrealistic expectations be detrimental to our well-being or decision-making processes? Can you think of any personal experiences or examples from history or popular culture that illustrate this?
 5. Is there a fine line between being optimistic and holding unrealistic expectations? How can we strike a balance between maintaining a positive mindset and managing our expectations appropriately? Can you share any strategies or tips based on your own experiences?
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