

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Neil

One area of technology which has been in the news a lot recently is robotics – the design and building of robots. **Humanoid** robots, meaning robots which appear and behave like humans, are being built to help us do everything from washing the dishes to babysitting the kids.

Beth

But not everyone feels comfortable with the idea of inviting a human-like robot into their home. Neil, how would you feel about living with a robot?

Neil

I really don't want to live with a robot. I have enough people in my house.

Beth

With advances in AI, robots are becoming smart enough to develop meaningful relationships with humans. There are reports of people telling their secrets to robot therapists and even falling in love with their robot friend! In this episode, we'll meet a home companion robot called Abi, who's making friends with the elderly residents of Melbourne in Australia. And as usual, we'll learn some useful new vocabulary, all of which you'll find over on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

First, I have a question for you, Beth. Because it's important people feel safe around robots, engineers design them to look like the friendly characters seen in animated movies by studios like Pixar and DreamWorks. So, what is the name of

Pixar's friendly robot who picks up garbage on an uninhabited planet Earth in the year 2805? Is it:

- a) Roz,
- b) Wall-E, or
- c) R2D2?

Beth

I am pretty certain that the answer is b) Wall-E.

Neil

Well, we'll find out the answer later in the programme. For five months during the Covid pandemic, Australian engineer Grace Brown had no human contact. She used this time to build a home companion robot, Abi, with the idea it would provide companionship to other people suffering loneliness. Now, Grace runs her own company, Andromeda, building robots specially designed as company for elderly residents in care homes who don't get many visitors. Here, she explains more about Abi to BBC World Service programme, The Conversation:

Grace Brown

Abi, who's the **humanoid** robot that we build at Andromeda – people don't expect **humanoid** robots to have, like, so much personality. She's very, very **sassy**. She's very inquisitive and curious. And I think when people meet her, they're always, kind of, **taken aback** by... "Oh, she's, like, got **a mind of her own**."

Beth

When people meet Abi, they are surprised by her **sassy** personality. The adjective **sassy** means bold, confident and cheeky.

Neil

Some people **are taken aback** – meaning they are shocked or surprised by the things Abi says. She really seems to be interested and to take care of the people she meets. Abi can also express opinions, and Grace says she **has a mind of her own** – a phrase used when a non-living object, like a robot, seems to be behaving or acting independently of human control.

Beth

Unlike the unpredictable and violent robots which are sometimes portrayed in sci-fi movies, Abi is much more approachable and friendly, even funny – she can blow bubbles from her hand! Her softer design was a conscious decision by Grace, who

wanted children and elderly people to interact with Abi naturally and without fear, as she explained to BBC World Service's The Conversation.

Grace Brown

I originally modelled her off the size of, like, a young child – so, like a six, seven-year-old child – so she's about 110cm tall. She's got a whole **splash of different colours**. She's got, you know, large, **expressive** eyes. So, that was – I was very much trying to replicate the kind of approachableness and the endearingsness of, like, these different, like, Pixar characters that you'd watch in all of these films.

Neil

Abi looks like a friendly character from a Pixar film. She's the size of a six or seven-year-old child and decorated with **a splash of colour** – a phrase used when a bit of colour is added to brighten up something which is dull or unexciting.

Beth

Abi also has large, **expressive** eyes. If you describe something as **expressive**, you mean it shows what someone thinks or feels.

Neil

Elderly residents who regularly chat with Abi say the robot companion brings them joy and a sense of community.

Beth

Ah, well, it's good to hear the positive side of a technology which can still seem a bit strange or frightening. And I would like to see Abi blowing bubbles from her hand! Now, isn't it time you revealed the answer to your question, Neil?

Neil

I asked you for the name of Pixar's friendly robot, who picks up garbage on an uninhabited planet Earth in the year 2805.

Beth

And I said it was Wall-E.

Neil

And you were... correct.

Beth

Yes!

Neil

That is the right answer. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **humanoid** – an adjective meaning to have the appearance and behaviour of a human.

Beth

Someone who is **sassy** is bold, confident and cheeky.

Neil

If you **are taken aback** by something, you are shocked or surprised by it.

Beth

If you say an object **has a mind of its own**, you mean that it seems to be acting independently, without human control.

Neil

The phrase **a splash of colour** is used when a bit of colour is added to brighten something which is dull or unexciting.

Beth

And finally, the adjective **expressive** means showing what someone thinks or feels. Once again, our six minutes are up. If you've enjoyed this episode then head over to our website, bbclearningenglish.com, where you'll find a quiz and worksheet to practise the vocabulary you've learnt. See you again soon. But, for now, it's goodbye.

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

humanoid

having the appearance and behaviour of a human

sassy

bold, confident and cheeky

be taken aback

be surprised or shocked by something

has a mind of its own

seems to be controlling the way it behaves or moves independently, without human control

a splash of colour

a bit of colour added to brighten up something which is dull or unexciting

expressive

showing what someone thinks or feels