
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

To keep the wolf from the door



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Li

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak with me Li...

Rob

...and me Rob. I suppose we had better explain an authentic English phrase then.

Li

Oh cheer up Rob – why are you sounding so miserable?

Rob

Well I wasn't going to say anything but... well, I've got problems... financial problems.

Li

I'm sorry to hear that, what's happened?

Rob

I had to get my car fixed, I had to get a plumber round to fix a leaking pipe, I received a huge tax bill and then to add to it all, I lost my wallet yesterday – I'm doing my best to keep the wolf from the door.

Li

A wolf?! You really have got problems if you've got to keep a wolf out of your house!

Rob

Not a real wolf. When people say they're trying to keep the wolf from the door they mean they've only just got enough money to survive.

Li

Oh I see! So you just have enough money to eat and live?

Rob

Yes, it's not a good position to be in. Let's hear more examples of the phrase in action...

Examples

I'm going to have to sell my car if I'm to keep the wolf from the door.

It's tough being a student, I study all day then have to do an evening job just to keep the wolf from the door.

We've only just saved enough money to keep the wolf from the door.

Li

So if you keep the wolf from the door, you just have enough money to survive. OK Rob, I get it... with all your bills to pay you really are struggling to keep the wolf from the door – so what are you going to do?

Rob

I need to ask a good friend to lend me some money.

Li

You want to borrow some money? You'll need to find a really good friend then?

Rob

Yes a *really* good friend – like you Li? I know you have some spare cash.

Li

Sorry Rob, I've just spent that on a *really* nice holiday.

(Sound of wolf knocking at the door)

Rob

Huh! What's that?

Li

It sounds like the wolf is *really* at the door. Go on then, here's ten pounds.

Rob

(disappointed) Oh thanks!

Both

Bye!