
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Hot potato



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. I'm Neil.

Helen

Hello everyone. I'm Helen.

Neil

Oh what's the matter, Helen? You look really tired.

Helen

Is it that bad?

Neil

You've got very dark shadows under your eyes.

Helen

Oh dear. Well, I've been pushed into a role and I don't really want it.

Neil

What is it?

Helen

To be the treasurer for the school's parents association and you know I am hopeless with numbers.

Neil

Sounds like it could turn into a hot potato for you.

Helen

Hot potato? Do you mean a jacket potato? No I am not hungry, I am nervous.

Neil

I'm not talking about food. I am talking about this job. I can see it's going to be a problem for you.

Helen

I'm thinking the same.

Neil

You need to think about it very carefully before it becomes a hot potato. When something becomes a 'hot potato', it becomes a problem and difficult to handle.

Helen

I see. You can't hold a hot potato in your hand. It would burn you.

Neil

Exactly, you've got it. A hot potato is a phrase we use to refer to difficult or tricky situations, or even people. Here are a few examples:

Examples

The shortage of housing supply is fast becoming a hot potato for the council.

The pay rise issue is a hot potato for management; I don't know how they are going to sort this one out between the staff, the union and the shareholders.

Neil

Helen, my word of advice is...

Helen

Please, I'm listening.

Neil

Just tell the school you can't do it. Drop it before it becomes a real hot potato for you.

Helen

You are right. That's what I will do. Thanks

Neil

You're welcome.