



American Expression E2433 Keep the wolf from the door

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"Keep the wolf from the door" is an idiomatic expression meaning to fend off hunger, poverty, or other serious threats, particularly those involving financial hardship. Originating from a time when wolves symbolized danger and the struggle for survival, the phrase reflects an urgent need to protect oneself from adversity, often associated with maintaining a bare minimum of security or sustenance. Used primarily in English-speaking countries, it conjures an image of wolves circling outside a home, embodying a looming threat that must be kept at bay to ensure safety and stability.

The phrase usually describes efforts to meet essential needs, such as food, shelter, or basic financial security. For someone barely scraping by, "keeping the wolf from the door" might mean working just enough to cover rent or buy groceries without any room for luxuries or savings. The metaphor emphasizes survival, where one has to do whatever is necessary to avoid destitution or homelessness. It often surfaces in discussions about the working class or individuals facing financial insecurity, particularly those caught in the cycle of living paycheck to paycheck. Here, "keeping the wolf from the door" becomes synonymous with the everyday struggle to stay afloat amid rising costs and limited income.

In literature and popular culture, the expression serves as a reminder of human resilience in the face of adversity. It highlights the determination and resourcefulness of people who, despite limited means, manage to endure and keep going. For instance, characters in novels who work menial jobs or take on multiple roles to support their families are often portrayed as "keeping the wolf from the door." This phrase underscores the underlying strength of those who face challenging circumstances yet refuse to succumb to them.

The expression also carries a broader, metaphorical warning about complacency. It suggests that one must be vigilant and proactive to keep problems at bay, as even a small lapse could allow "the wolf" to close in. Whether it's a financial crisis, an unexpected health issue, or another form of misfortune, the "wolf" can represent any challenge that threatens stability. This idea resonates especially in unpredictable economic climates, where many strive to create a financial buffer or emergency fund to keep potential dangers at a distance.

In conclusion, "keeping the wolf from the door" reflects the timeless struggle for survival and security. Beyond the literal implications of fending off hunger or poverty, it symbolizes resilience, vigilance, and the relentless effort to protect oneself and one's loved ones from hardship. The phrase remains relevant today, reminding us of the ongoing challenges faced by those striving to secure the basics in a world where stability can feel precarious. Through this lens, it conveys both a sense of caution and an admiration for the strength required to hold adversity at bay.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the phrase "keep the wolf from the door" highlight the struggles faced by those living paycheck to paycheck?
2. What does "the wolf" represent in modern society, and how do people typically fend it off today?
3. In what ways does "keeping the wolf from the door" illustrate resilience and resourcefulness in challenging times?
4. How might this phrase apply differently in various economic or social contexts around the world?
5. Can "keeping the wolf from the door" also signify a sense of vulnerability, and how does that affect one's outlook on life and financial planning?