

A Tough Cookie: 4 Idioms to Describe Character

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

have a heart of gold

DEF

To be extremely kind, caring and generous.

A warm, strongly positive idiom. It often contrasts a person's kind nature with a serious appearance, direct manner or difficult circumstances.

Maya has a heart of gold and always helps people who are struggling.

Our neighbour has a heart of gold and checks on everyone during winter.

2

a tough cookie

DEF

A strong, resilient person who handles difficulty well.

Informal and usually approving. It can describe physical toughness, determination or emotional strength; context decides the exact emphasis.

After everything she has experienced, she is still a tough cookie.

You need to be a tough cookie in that demanding job.

3

an open book

DEF

A person whose thoughts and feelings are easy to understand.

It suggests emotional transparency, not that the person reveals every private detail. The common pattern is be an open book; a face can also be an open book.

Ask me anything; I am an open book.

His face is an open book, so I knew he was disappointed.

4

a dark horse

DEF

A person with unexpected abilities or an unexpected chance of success.

Common in competitions, elections and group projects. It focuses on hidden or underestimated potential, not necessarily secrecy or dishonesty.

Nobody expected her to reach the final, but she became the dark horse of the tournament.

Amir was the dark horse of the team and designed the best poster.



5

resilient

DEF

Able to recover, adapt and continue after difficulty or stress.

Stronger than simply strong: resilient highlights recovery and adaptation after pressure, failure or change.

Daniel stayed resilient when the outdoor event went wrong.

She is resilient enough to rebuild after a difficult year.

6

determined

DEF

Firmly decided to achieve something and unwilling to give up.

Determined describes purposeful persistence. It is usually positive, while stubborn suggests refusing to change even when change would be sensible.

He remained determined throughout his difficult recovery.

She is determined to finish the project before Friday.

7

easy to read

DEF

Easy to understand from someone's expression, behaviour or emotional reactions.

With people, read means interpret rather than literally read words. It often refers to emotions that are visible on someone's face.

Eva is easy to read because her face shows every emotion.

He tries to hide his disappointment, but he is easy to read.

8

unexpected potential

DEF

Abilities or future possibilities that other people did not know about or predict.

Potential points to what someone may be able to achieve, not only what they have already done. Unexpected highlights surprise rather than luck.

The competition revealed her unexpected potential as a designer.

A dark horse often succeeds because other people overlook their unexpected potential.

