

Tips for Supporting Homeless Children and Youths  
Information obtained from U.S. Department of Education

*All school staff have the opportunity and the charge to support homeless students and families.*

While every LEA must have a McKinney-Vento liaison, the number of homeless students and the scope of their needs may be challenging for just one person to address. That is what makes the role of teachers (including early childhood educators), school leaders, counselors, and other staff so critical. Though homeless children and youths may face great challenges, a caring adult who can ensure that a student's rights are upheld and can connect him or her to other supports can make a world of difference. Below are tips for how to help homeless students in your school or district.

**Create a welcoming climate and build trust with all students.** Many homeless students hesitate to identify themselves as homeless due to shame, fear of stigma, and concern about possible consequences of this identification. By not being identified, however, these students miss out on critical supports. Building a safe and supportive environment in your school or classroom can benefit all students and alleviate these concerns for homeless students.

**Help to identify and support homeless students.** While it is important to avoid jumping to conclusions about students due to their appearance or performance, there are often warning signs that a child or youth is experiencing homelessness. For example, a child may fall asleep repeatedly in class, wear the same clothes multiple days in a row, have poor hygiene, fail to complete homework, or be regularly late or absent. Instead of punishing a student for these behaviors, it would be beneficial to get to the root cause and find out what supports you may be able to provide.

**Be sensitive and understanding.** Many homeless youths experience trauma even before they become homeless, and the experience of homelessness can expose youths to violence, abuse, trafficking, and other traumatic experiences (including hunger and illness). Teachers and other school staff who deal directly with children should always employ sensitivity and understanding in conversations with homeless students. School leaders can help by ensuring that all staff members are trained in trauma-informed care.

**Ensure that school and classroom policies and procedures, such as disciplinary policies, are fair to homeless students and do not negatively impact them because of their homelessness.** Consider providing extra time or other accommodations for homeless students on homework and projects, or extra resources that may be needed, such as access to printers, computers, and school supplies. Review attendance policies to ensure that they do not disproportionately punish homeless students, who may face difficulty arriving on time to school.

**Learn more about the McKinney-Vento Act and connect with your local liaison.** Read the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) updated EHCY program guidance, visit your SEA website for a list of McKinney-Vento liaisons and their contact information, and help homeless students and parents know about their rights.

**Connect homeless students and families to services and housing assistance in your community, including through non-profit and faith-based organizations.** For more information and resources on homeless students, please call the National Center for Homeless Education helpline toll-free at (800) 308-2145 or visit their website, the ED homeless initiatives webpage, or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's education webpage.