



Tips for School Social Workers and Counselors

Immediate Assistance

- Be familiar with the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Recognize the common characteristics of homeless children.
- Possible signs of homelessness may include a history of attending many schools, erratic attendance and tardiness, consistent lack of preparation for class, sleeping in class, hostility and anger or extremes in behavior [shyness, withdrawal, nervousness, depression], needy behavior (attention-seeking) or withdrawn behavior, poor hygiene and grooming, inadequate or inappropriate clothing for the weather, hunger and/or hoarding food, resistance to parting with personal possessions (i.e., not wanting to put coat in a locker). These signs could indicate other problems. It is worth further exploration and discussion.
- As your school's homeless contact person, sign off on homeless students' lunch forms to ensure they receive free meals without the necessity of additional paperwork.
- Work with breakfast program staff to ensure that children who arrive late to school (due to transportation route) get fed.
- If the family can access your school's transportation given their current location, contact your school's transportation coordinator to set up transportation. If the family resides outside of your school's transportation boundaries, contact the Title I Homeless Program to access alternate transportation for the family. Arranging transportation may take 2-3 days.
- Communicate with the students' prior school(s) to obtain records and to ensure continuation of services. The law requires that homeless students be admitted regardless of their ability to provide prior school records.
- Ensure that homeless students are afforded every opportunity that non-homeless students have. Assist in the waiving of fees or securing of materials necessary for activities.
- With the parent/guardian's permission, talk to the student's teacher(s) to inform them of the current living situation and how this may affect the student's ability to perform academically. For example, the student may not have access to the necessary materials to complete assignments such as computers, reference books, etc.
- If possible, inform shelters and/or the Title I Homeless Program Home-School Liaison of changes in school schedules (early release days) and special events (Family Nights, special programs, conferences etc.).

- Advocate for alternative consequences for poor behavior- i.e., don't withhold recess because it may be the only time the children who are homeless get to play and/or play outdoors.

Continuing Care

- Arrange daily or weekly check-in times with the student(s).
- Emphasize that education is a vital component for a child's success and development. Remember, homeless parents are focusing on meeting immediate daily needs for food and shelter; their child's education may be a secondary concern.
- Communicate with the parents about the student's performance at school including behavior always including positive statements, attendance, etc.
- Educate parents about their children's educational rights.
- Build a trusting and "safe" relationship with homeless students that do not focus on their current living situation.
- Be assertive in accessing academic assistance for homeless students. Many homeless children have gaps of non-attendance and will require extra help to "catch up."

Outreach

- Know the local community resources so that you may make referrals for such things as food, housing, transportation and counseling.