

Talking to Children about Homelessness

We've created this guide to help you start a constructive, compassionate conversation with your children about homelessness. We know it can be a tricky and complex topic, so the most important thing is to approach it with honesty and openness.

Overview

- Every child is different, so tailor your approach to what works best for them — you know your child better than anyone.
- Keep things simple for younger children.
- Speak with empathy and compassion.
- Children are naturally curious, so be ready for questions. You'll find a short Q&A at the end of this guide to help you prepare.
- Emphasise that there are many different reasons why someone might become homeless — and that it's never because of something like failing exams or making one mistake.
- Make it an ongoing conversation. Encourage your children to think about ways they can make a difference — for example, through donating, volunteering, or raising awareness.
- Be clear about your own views. If your feelings seem uncertain, it can cause confusion for your child.

For more background on homelessness, visit:

- [Homeless Link](#)
- [UK Government](#)

What is Homelessness?

In simple terms, homelessness means not having a safe, secure place to live.

While people often think of those sleeping on the streets, you can still be homeless even if you have a roof over your head.

Common types of homelessness include:

- Street homelessness (rough sleeping): When someone is sleeping outside, often the most visible and harmful form.

- Hidden homelessness: When someone is staying temporarily with friends or family (known as 'sofa surfing') or living in temporary accommodation.

How Can It Happen?

There isn't one single reason why someone becomes homeless. It's usually the result of a mix of personal circumstances and wider social factors.

These causes can be grouped into two areas:

1. Social causes: Such as rising housing costs, a lack of affordable homes, and not enough emergency accommodation or support services to meet demand.
2. Life events: Such as leaving care, escaping domestic abuse, facing mental or physical health problems, or struggling with addiction.

Once someone becomes homeless, their mental and physical health can quickly worsen — which is why early support is so important.

Age-Appropriate Conversation Starters

For 2–6-year-olds

Keep conversations short and simple.

- Explain that some people don't have enough money to pay for a home. Avoid going into too much detail about the reasons why.
- Reassure them that there are people and organisations who help those without a home — and that if *they* ever need help, they can always ask for it.
- Encourage kindness and action: could they donate toys they no longer use or take part in a small fundraising activity?

For 7–12-year-olds

At this age, children are more aware of homelessness and may already have questions.

- Begin by finding out what they already know or have seen.
- Encourage empathy by talking about how someone who is homeless might feel — and sharing your own thoughts too.

- Ask questions such as “What does home mean to you?” to help them think about why having a safe place matters.
- Talk about the ways charities help, and how your child can get involved — now or in the future.
- Share examples of how you’ve supported homelessness charities yourself to show what small actions can achieve.

What to Avoid

- Don’t use homelessness as a threat (“You’ll end up homeless if...”).
- Don’t avoid questions — unanswered worries can lead to fear or misunderstanding.

Common Questions

How can I support someone sleeping on the streets?

You can use [StreetLink](#) to alert local services about someone sleeping rough. StreetLink connects people experiencing homelessness with nearby support as quickly as possible.

What happens if someone thinks they’re going to become homeless?

They should contact their local council. Councils have a duty to help certain groups of people secure housing. Each year, thousands of people reach out for support — and being ‘legally homeless’ doesn’t always mean living on the streets.

Should I give money to someone who’s homeless?

Treat everyone with respect — they’re people first. Rather than giving cash, you could offer food or drink. If you’d like to contribute financially, donating to a homelessness charity is a great way to help.

Children might like to:

- Donate a portion of their pocket money.
- Fundraise by selling toys or completing a challenge.
- Encourage their school to support a homelessness charity.

Could I become homeless?

Reassure your child that they are safe. Explain that while some people do face difficult times, there’s always help available — and that they can always ask for support, no matter how small their problem might seem.