

Talking to Children about Homelessness

We've put this document together to help you start a constructive conversation with your Children about homelessness. We know this can be a tricky & complex topic to discuss, so we'd encourage you to be honest and open.

Overview:

- All kids are different, so take the approach that is best situated to them. You, as the parent, will be the best person to decide on this.
- The younger your children, the simpler the message needs to be. If your child is between 2-6 years old, it will be a different conversation compared to 7-12 years old.
- It's important to speak with empathy and compassion when having a conversation around homelessness.
- Child always have lots of questions, so be prepared to answer their questions. We've included a short Q&A at the bottom of this article.
- Emphasising that there are a variety of reasons as to why people become homeless and, importantly, that it is not a result of failing exams.
- Making it a continual conversation – don't just leave the conversation once it's had, but encouraging and thinking about ways in which they can take action, i.e. donating, volunteering.
- Be clear on what your own feelings are on homelessness – as this could cause confusion for your children if not. We recommend the follow places to find out more about homelessness:
Homeless Link: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness>
UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

What is Homelessness?

In its most simple form – it is someone without a home. People will immediately think of homeless people on the streets, but you can still be homeless if you have a roof over your head. Below are the types of homelessness:

- Street Homeless – Known as sleeping rough, when someone sleeps on the street, this is the most visible form of homelessness, as well as the most harmful
- Hidden Homeless – such as sofa surfing, living in temporary accommodation.

How can it happen?

There is no single reason why someone can end up without a home. Personal circumstances and wider factors both play their part.

You can categorise the reasons into two reasons/area's

1. Social Causes – changes to housing costs, availability of housing and not enough homelessness provision (such as hostels etc) to keep up with demand.
2. Life Events – Leaving Care, escaping domestic abuse, mental/physical health problems, drug or alcohol misuse

Once someone is homeless – mental and physical health problems can be exacerbated so it's very important that people are supported as soon as possible.

Age-Appropriate Themes/Discussion Points

For 2-6 Year Olds – Make sure to keep conversations simple and to the point.

- Describe the problem of homelessness in its simplest form Eg Some people don't have enough money to pay for a home. Avoid bringing up further elements as to why people might have become homeless.
- Reassure your child that there is support for people who are homeless. And that if they ever need help – no matter what it is – they should ask for it. This can be used across a variety of problems
- Encourage conversations around how you can help. E.g. could they sell any toys they no longer want in order to fundraise?

For 7 – 12 Year Olds – At this age group children are more aware of homelessness and as a result they may have more questions.

- Beforehand, or at the start of the conversation, try to ascertain what knowledge your child already has about homelessness.
- Encourage empathy by discussing your own feelings and those of someone who might be homeless. Thinking about the feelings of someone who is homeless could be quite powerful.
- Ask them the question of 'what does home mean to you?' – and why it's important to have one.
- Encourage action if your Child wants to help – now or in the future. Discuss the important role that charities play, which they can support by volunteering or fundraising helping them to give back.
- It can be helpful to talk about your own personal responses to homelessness – as examples of how you can be proactive in supporting homelessness charities

What to avoid

- Don't at any point make any threats that they could become homeless
- Don't avoid questions! Unanswered questions could lead to them being worried/concerned.

Common Questions

How can I support someone sleeping on the streets?

Please use StreetLink to tell services where you've seen someone sleeping rough. StreetLink is the national referral line.

By using the StreetLink app, website or phone line, you can alert Local Authorities and homelessness organisations to people sleeping rough. StreetLink urgently connects people experiencing homelessness with the local support available to them.

<https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

What happens if someone thinks they are going to become homeless?

They should approach their local authority (local council) as it is their duty to secure a home for some groups of people. Every year, tens of thousands of people apply to their local authority for homelessness assistance. To be legally defined as homeless you must either lack a secure place in which you are entitled to live or not reasonably be able to stay.

How can I help someone sleeping on the streets?

Firstly – a homeless person is just another person, as such treat them as one. We suggest not giving them money, but if you wish to give them something then we suggest giving them food.

If you wish to make a monetary contribution, we suggest making a donation to a homeless charity. Ways in which children can fundraise could be to take on a challenge, selling old toys or donating their pocket money. They could also discuss whether their school could support as a whole.

Will I become homeless?

This is a difficult question to answer! But we suggest saying no, so as not to alarm your child. And to explain that if they ever have a problem in their life, no matter how small they should always ask for help.