

Homeless Family Staff Training Lesson Plan



Preparation Checklist

- Modify PowerPoint as needed (edit or delete slides)
- Computer and projector set up and tested
- Handouts copied
- Seating arranged
- Arrange for attendance of homeless liaison, if possible
- Review the Q & A section in the *Teachers Homeless Student Action Center*

Slide Show Talking Points

Slide 1: Introduction

Today I'm going to discuss issues surrounding homeless students, as well as our responsibilities and resources. We'll go through some background knowledge, and then answer any questions you have and provide a handout.

(If applicable) Today I have (name) from the district homeless liaison office joining me.

Slide 2: Facts

The total number of homeless people in the United States is difficult to calculate, but the number is currently estimated to be in excess of 1 million. Economic hardship has driven this number sharply upward in recent years.

Most disturbingly, from the perspective of education: the homeless family is well represented within the homeless population. 40%...approximately 400,000...of the homeless people in America are families with school-age children.

If we expand the definition of homelessness to that required by law to include those in non-permanent or transitory situations, some estimates place the number of homeless students at one million.

Slide 3: Laws

For a homeless family with kids in school, the federal law that started it all was the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*. This law was first passed in 1987 and was reauthorized with the passage of *No Child Left Behind*.

McKinney-Vento governs our entire national approach to homeless student education.

Slide 4: Laws, continued

Federal law states that schools and school systems are responsible for keeping homeless children from falling behind their peers academically. The law touches quite a broad range of services, including:

- Transportation (more on this below)
- Free meals
- Clothing
- Uniforms
- Immunizations
- Family services

Many of the items that assist homeless families are based upon other federal programs (such as Title 1 or Medicaid), and schools and districts are required to engage with and coordinate these resources for the benefit of homeless students.

Slide 5: Liaison

Every state and every district is required to have a liaison...a person who is charged with identifying the children of a homeless family and coordinating the required services.

Slide 6: Transportation

As we know, stability and continuity is extremely important to a student's success. Therefore, the law specifies that a student must be able to continue in their school of origin if the homeless family chooses...even if they move out of the attendance area.

The school district must provide transportation to make that happen.

Slide 7: Official homeless definition

Perhaps the most significant aspect of McKinney-Vento is to define what "homeless" means in the context of students. Very few kids are actually sleeping on the streets or under bridges, as can so often happen with homeless adults.

Since homelessness can take so many different forms, prior to the passage of this law it was perhaps too easy to dismiss some living situations as not requiring any special consideration or assistance.

The law states that a homeless student is: "Any individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence."

Slide 8: Homeless situation examples

This can include the following scenarios:

- Living in shelters
- Sleeping in cars
- Doubled up with other families
- Living in trailers
- Living in substandard housing units or unsafe buildings
- Awaiting foster care placement

With elementary students, the kids will almost always be living with at least one of their parents, who will be suffering these hardships along with their child.

With middle or high school students, the young adult may be completely on their own with no daily parental support... "couch surfing" at the homes of friends and acquaintances.

Slide 9: Recognition (K-6)...delete slide or skip if addressing middle or high school staff

Younger students are much less able to "hide" things than older students since they aren't aware enough of the clues they provide to keep anything secret for very long.

Look for these things:

- Backpacks very full since they have no place to keep their stuff
- Clothes not consistently clean
- Hygiene may be an issue if they have no access to regular bathing
- Food hoarding (e.g. keeping extra field trip lunches)
- Diminished personal grooming (e.g. not getting haircuts)
- Medical and dental issues (even significant ones) not addressed
- Frequent or extended absences
- A long list of schools they have attended

Slide 10: Recognition, continued (K-6)...delete or skip if addressing middle or high school staff

You may hear the children say things:

- Discussions of living locations change, sometimes frequently: relatives, friends, or moving rental houses ("jumping rent" when their lack-of-payment grace period expires).
- Stories or comments about living arrangements don't ring true or are inconsistent (homeless children may have been instructed to lie about what is going on).
- Discussions of home involve the fact of two, three or more families sharing a residence. Be aware of cultural differences in this area; not everyone has been raised to regard extensive personal space as a standard.

Slide 11: Recognition (middle and high school)...delete or skip if addressing elementary staff

Attendance is a really big part of tracking at this level. Be aware if a student is consistently missing from your class; follow up, because they may be missing from others. Frequent extended absences are the most problematic.

Also look for these things:

- Lack of cleanliness. Being more socially aware, older kids may make more effort on showering, but the condition of clothing can be a giveaway.
- Medical and dental issues (even significant ones) are not addressed.
- School work taking a turn for the worse with no particular explanatory occurrence.

Slide 12: Recognition, continued (middle and high school)...delete or skip if addressing elementary staff

- An open and approachable atmosphere may create the necessary space for someone to share that a particular student is having homeless family issues.
- Really notice details when talking to a youth about anything in the classroom; hints can still spill out in spite of their possible desire to remain "under the radar."
- Listen to conversations between students; they may reveal that one of their friends is in need.

Slide 13: Recognition, continued (all grades) - parent interaction

Listening to parents can provide clues that something is not quite right.

- They may call to advise of long absences, often tied to "visiting relatives" when in reality they don't have transportation
- listen for explanations for absences or homework lapses that don't quite make sense, etc.

Slide 14: Reporting

- Have a casual conversation asking how they are doing and how things are at home. Let them know you are aware things might be tough, but that you have resources to help out.
- Ask if their family needs food, clothes or maybe help with transportation. The student may be unwilling to talk about it, but let them know that you can help if/when they need it.
- NOTE: If you ask the student if they, themselves need help, they will often say no. But if they can get help for family members, they may be more open.
- You should bring your concerns to your school counselor, office staff and administration. This is best done in person with a follow-up email.

Slide 15: Raising awareness with parents

Many parents don't understand that they have options when they become homeless. We can let them know by:

- Handing out open house fliers
- Sending fliers home
- Including article or inserts in our newsletters
- Including information on our class web pages

The flier I'll be handing out has free online resources that you can download for all of these items.

Slide 16: Summary

Teachers provide the stability students need to be successful. We can help break the cycle of poverty and homelessness...if we can keep the kids in school.

Slide 17: Summary

This website, which is noted on the handout, has all the information I have presented today, as well as free downloads for spreading awareness.

Introduce the district homeless liaison if present

Ask for questions

Review the Q & A section in the Teachers Homeless Student Action Center before the meeting

Ask if anyone has a homeless family experience or insight to share

Pass out staff handout

Follow up: Put up an awareness flier in the staff room

See the sample in the *Teachers Homeless Student Action Center*