

HOMELESS AND DISPLACED FAMILIES AND THE SCHOOL:

1. Every school district in Pennsylvania has a homeless liaison designated by the superintendent. Visit <http://homeless.center-school.org/homelessdirectory> for contact information. At this link you will also find a statewide listing of shelters/housing resources for children/families and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.
2. Speak with your district's homeless liaison, and review the BEC (42 U.S.C. A. § 11431) relating to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness so that you are in a position to explain it to other school staff as needed.
3. Study and develop guidelines for the sensitive issue of abuse and domestic violence, and how to handle telephone and in-person communication with the parent/s. Be aware of any restrictions with parent access to a child (e.g. protection from abuse orders).
4. Look for possible warning signs of homelessness by observing a combination of absence patterns, clothing needs, hygiene issues, homework performance, and behavioral changes.
5. Distribute information such as posters and brochures (available from your Homeless regional/site coordinator) to teachers and office staff and arrange for in-service for school personnel on the subject of students experiencing homelessness.
6. Be aware that the condition of homelessness is not a first choice for families and children.

WHAT THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAP) PROFESSIONALS CAN DO TO HELP STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

1. As you work with the student, assist to remove barriers when possible to lessen the many burdens on these families/children by providing as stable a school environment and experience as possible. This area can be incorporated into the intervention plan so it's regularly monitored.
2. The student's SAP case manager should work closely with the school counselor and school nurse when behavioral and medical needs are observed, as homelessness can negatively impact the emotional/mental and physical health of the child/ren. Review the child's need for counseling or other supportive services offered by school counselors or through referral.
3. Continue to include SAP, IST, SWPBIS and PBIS team members in communications and issues, as appropriate, related to any serious conditions of the student, to ensure teamwork and information sharing.
4. Utilize your district's homeless liaison as a resource in order to provide comprehensive services.

ADDITIONAL AREAS TO KEEP IN MIND AND REVIEW AS SAP TEAMS AND SCHOOLS ASSIST STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

1. If families are doubled or tripled up (living with related or un-related individuals in the same residence), be aware of the potential impact on the children who were residing in the home before others moved in.
2. Contact the parent and shelter personnel if a child is absent for three or more days to find out if assistance is needed. The parent may not be motivated or equipped to ensure regular attendance if the family is not in a supervised shelter setting.
3. Do not bring any special attention to the fact that the child/ren is/are homeless in front of their classmates.
4. Ensure that appropriate school staff are aware of the child's situation.
5. Provide school supplies and other items they might need without undue attention.
6. Ensure that all needs and services are documented, as the child's stay in your school may be time-limited and their next school will need that information to determine appropriate placement and current needs.
7. When the student is ill and must be sent "home," remember that the place he or she is living in may not be stable or quiet. A parent may not be at home in the shelter during the day, so contact the shelter staff and/or district homeless liaison to ensure appropriate arrangements for the student.
8. Be aware that living in noisy, crowded conditions, such as those in a shelter, can result in difficulty completing homework, tuning others out, and difficulty in listening and responding to important information.
9. Avoid taking away the student's possessions as a disciplinary measure, as the item/s may be the only thing they can really call their own (e.g. hat, stuffed animal, toy).
10. Ensure that the children can participate in field trips, school-wide activities and class projects even if they do not have transportation or necessary fees.
11. Avoid using the child's recess or Physical Education period as a make-up or detention period as they may not have the opportunity for exercise in the shelter or motel where they are staying.
12. Be aware that some classroom assignments/projects may be embarrassing and difficult for a student experiencing homelessness – activities involving a house, family, or neighborhood may be nearly impossible for the child to explain or address.
13. Be aware that involvement in fundraisers, or getting permission slips or other papers signed and returned, may also be difficult for these children.
14. Discuss privately with the student what accommodations exist for doing homework and make necessary arrangements. Tutoring and after-school programming can provide an opportunity for academic enrichment.

15. Offer emotional support and reassurance that homelessness is a temporary condition. Reassure the child that this situation is not his or her fault.
16. Always inform and involve your district's homeless liaison of these situations.

Contact your Homeless regional or site coordinator (visit <http://homeless.center-school.org> for the contact information) or call the PDE homeless education coordinator at 717-783-6466 if you have further questions.