

CHECKLIST FOR IDENTIFYING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

The Head Start Act requires Head Start programs to identify children and families who are experiencing homelessness, and remove barriers to their enrollment and participation in Head Start.

Have you tried these identification strategies in your Head Start program?

- Provide training and awareness activities on (1) the definition of homelessness and (2) signs of homelessness for program staff, including administrators, bus drivers, family support staff, social workers, teachers, and others.
- Ask about housing status as part of the standard enrollment process. These questions can be very effective in identifying homeless families as they enroll in Head Start. Train program staff in how to follow up on the answers to these questions using sensitivity and discretion.
- Provide outreach materials and posters where there is a frequent influx of families and youth in high-risk situations, including: low-cost motels; campgrounds; laundromats; libraries; social service agencies; hospitals; community health centers; and youth centers.
- Ask the community for help. Contact local agencies to seek their collaboration in identifying and serving homeless children and youth, including: faith-based organizations; food banks; homeless continuum of care; Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs); housing and public health departments and programs; homeless coalitions; shelters; and soup kitchens.
- Ask families for help. Families can share information by word of mouth and by posting outreach materials where their peers will see them.
- Reach out to unaccompanied homeless youth who are pregnant or parenting by collaborating with street outreach teams, drop-in centers, and youth shelters, and by working to build trust with young people.
- Ask school district liaisons for help. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every school district is required to designate a homeless liaison. The McKinney-Vento Act requires liaisons to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies.¹ Contact local school districts to obtain the name of liaisons, or the state homeless education coordinator.
- Avoid using the word “homeless.” Exercise sensitivity when talking with parents and youth, who often are afraid to identify themselves as homeless due to fears of stigma or negative repercussions.

Adapted from the Texas Homeless Education Office

¹ 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)(i).