



Why is it important to talk to your child about homelessness?

Children are interested in the world around them and have the capacity for a deeper understanding about homelessness and poverty. They are likely to have more complex questions and may even want to really get involved in helping people. This is an opportunity to build empathy and critical thinking in your child through conversations about something they are seeing all around them: homelessness.

This set of tips could help you talk to your child about friends of theirs who are experiencing homelessness.

What are some effective ways to have these conversations?

- **Use inclusive language.** Explain to your child that people experience homelessness, rather than referring to anyone as a homeless person. Talking about homelessness as a temporary state enforces humanity, and acknowledges the many reasons that people experience it. Using the right language around homelessness ensures that the person, figuratively and literally, comes first, and the temporary condition of homelessness does not define them.
 - **Answer questions based on your child's developmental level.** Your child may ask you why people are sleeping outside or in their cars, and depending on your child's age, you can give a simple explanation or begin to open up a larger conversation about the reasons people might not live in a house.
 - **Housing costs.** Houses are getting more expensive to buy and people aren't earning enough at their jobs to keep up. Most of the people who are without a home in the next 10 years are going to be there because they can't afford one.
 - **Mental illness, disability, addiction.** Some people are sick, and because people are sick they don't always have or can't afford the proper treatment and help for that. Sometimes if you see someone on the street who's acting strangely, it's because they're sick and need help.
 - **Domestic violence.** Sometimes people are on the streets because they don't have anywhere else to go. They may have a very bad situation that makes it safer for them to leave their home, even though living outside is also a scary place to be.
 - **Bad luck.** Sometimes people just have bad luck. If someone only makes enough money to pay their bills and not enough to save money, if they lose their job, they may not have enough money to pay for their house anymore. It's important to remember that if you have a bad day or bad luck, that doesn't mean you are a bad person. It is fixable.
 - **Express empathy for people experiencing homelessness.** It's totally natural to feel sad when you see people living on the street. It is sad. Affirm these feelings in your child and explain that the sad and hard things that people who don't have homes experience is exactly why it's so important to always be nice to people, to offer things when you can, and to remember that you can help them.
 - **Model how to interact with people experiencing homelessness.** Be aware that your physical cues are as important as your verbal ones. Your child will pick up on the mindset you convey each time you encounter a person experiencing homelessness. Explain that eye contact and smiling are important when you greet people, and that everyone living around you is a neighbor, no matter where they sleep at night.
 - **Talk to your child about how they can help.** Ask your child how they want to help, and be open to their suggestions. Encouraging action will foster a generous spirit in your child and will give them a way to channel their feelings of sadness and empathy into action.
 - **Donate food, items, or clothing with your child.** Help your child select their own gently used toys or clothes to give to a local charitable organization, or help them donate to a food drive. The United Way's Everyone In campaign hosts several events for children and youth throughout the year across L.A. These events are designed to help children learn more about how they can make a difference in their community.
 - **Volunteer with your child.** Volunteering together or as a family is an excellent way to continue the conversation and help your child develop a lifelong habit of giving back. They will get real joy from helping people and the experiences will make them better advocates down the road. Volunteering helps children engage with people who are experiencing homelessness in an area that's safe and positive. People ask what to do when kid points out someone on the street, but that shouldn't be the only time your child notices or engages with people experiencing homelessness, volunteering allows kids to engage with people experiencing homelessness in a variety of different contexts, such as:
 - Serving a meal
 - Tutor or working on homework with children living in a shelter (Schools on Wheels)
 - Holding a donation drive
 - Attending an informational event
- For more information on how to volunteer or take action with your child, visit everyoneinla.org/getinvolved**