

IDENTIFICATION:



Identifying all students experiencing homelessness is critical as it allows liaisons to help students who may have difficulty with enrollment, allows liaisons to connect students to educational support and community services, and increases the likelihood that homeless students will overcome the extra educational challenges they face.

The McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act provides a definition of homeless children and youth to be used by state and local educational agencies (LEAs) in 42 U.S.C. § 11434(a)(2). It defines homeless children and youth to be those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under the larger umbrella of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, the law also provides several examples of situations that meet the definition. The examples include children and youth:

- sharing housing due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to a lack of alternative, adequate housing;
- abandoned in hospitals;
- living in a public or private place not designated for, or normally used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places;
- living in one of the above circumstances and who are migratory according to the definition in Section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

When considering if a student meets the criteria in the definition provided by the law, it is important to remember that the list provided is a guide and more situations may exist that meet the criteria than are actually listed. However, liaisons must always rely on the criteria outlined in the law of lacking fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as the ultimate test of whether a student's housing meets the definition.

STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFICATION:

- **STANDARD FORMS:** Use a standard enrollment form that asks about the family's or youth's living situation to gather initial information. You can find links to sample forms in this toolkit. If the form indicates that the student may be homeless, ask questions to get a better sense of the family's or youth's circumstances.
- **AVOID STIGMAS:** Avoid using the word "homeless" as the stigma associated with the word may lead parents or youth to insist they are not homeless, even though their living situation would fit the McKinney-Vento definition. Tell them the purpose of the questions is to determine if they are eligible for extra services like transportation, clothing, school supplies, and/or tutoring.
- **PRACTICE PRIVACY:** Do not contact persons or agencies outside the school system to obtain information about the student's living situation; this would likely violate the family's or youth's privacy and dignity as well as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For example, do not contact landlords, public housing agencies, or law enforcement to verify living situations. See sample questions to assist with gathering information directly from parents, guardians, or youth regarding their living situation.
- **PROVIDE SPACE:** Respect the family's or youth's privacy by talking to them in a private space where other students and faculty members cannot overhear the conversation.
- **BE INFORMATIVE:** Share information on the rights and services available under the McKinney-Vento Act for eligible children and youth, and ask the parent/guardian or youth to provide the information you need to make the determination of eligibility. Understand that families or youth may be hesitant to answer questions for various reasons that include a desire for privacy, concerns related to domestic violence, or fear of losing their children or housing; however, in most cases you will have enough information to make a determination.