



# **How To Talk To Your Children About Homelessness**

**Guided Conversations With  
Children of Different Ages**

## Introduction

As children grow, their curiosity naturally grows with them. They start to question situations and circumstances that are foreign to them, and sometimes, those questions are harder to tackle than, “What’s for dinner?” or “Are we there yet?” Watching them wonder at the world and its many intricacies and complications can be beautiful and terrifying, and it’s important to encourage their curiosity without overwhelming them with an answer they might not be able to understand.

The following conversations are short templates you can reference if your child asks about homelessness and you are unsure how to approach the topic. Try to steer your conversation towards empathy and action; this way, your child’s understanding of homelessness is accompanied by a desire to help and support those in need. Feel free to personalize each response so that it feels natural and personal to you.

We hope this guide helps you have an open and honest conversation with your child. At the end, you'll find a list of other resources, as well as volunteer opportunities you and your child can do through SEARCH.



# **HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HOMELESSNESS**

**Ages 5 - 9**

**A Guided Conversation  
Between You and Your Child**

## **Q: Why is that person sleeping on the sidewalk?**

A: You know how you have a nice, comfy bed to sleep in at night? Some people don't have a bed to sleep in.

## **Q: Why don't they have a bed to sleep in?**

A: When we go to the store, we pay for our food with money, right? Well, houses also cost money, and there are people who don't have enough money to own a bed or a house like ours.

## **Q: We have nice beds and a nice house. Can they stay in our house with us?**

A: Unfortunately, they can't stay with us, but we can help them in other ways.

## **Q: How can we help them?**

A: We can give them water and food, and smile and say hello to them. It's important to be kind to people who are less fortunate than us. They are our neighbors too.



# **HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HOMELESSNESS**

**Ages 10 - 14**

**A Guided Conversation  
Between You and Your Child**



## **Q: How do people become homeless?**

A: There are many reasons why someone can fall into homelessness. Some people lose their jobs and can't afford a place to live. Others suffer from physical or mental health issues and don't have access to the help they need. Each person's story is different.

## **Q: Why can't they just get a job?**

A: Getting a job can be more complicated than you might think, and sometimes there are other circumstances that prevent someone from finding one that is right for them. They might have a disability; they might have young children they can't leave at home; they might have committed a crime in their past; or they might not have access to transportation. Not everyone is given the same opportunities as you or me.

## **Q: Can we give them money when they ask for it?**

A: If we give them money, it only helps them temporarily. It's better to donate your time and/or money to organizations that are working to help them move back into homes. When you donate to these organizations, you know your money will directly help those in need with a long term solution.

## **Q: What else can we do besides give money?**

A: We can make manna bags, which are small bags filled with food, water, toiletries, and other necessities. We can also donate any of our outgrown clothes or toys to homeless shelters around the city.



# **HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HOMELESSNESS**

**Ages 15 - 18**

**A Guided Conversation  
Between You and Your Child**



## **Q: Why are so many people homeless?**

A: There are many different reasons why people fall into homelessness, but one of the primary issues is the lack of affordable housing. Unfortunately, it's becoming even harder to afford mortgage or rent payments in America, especially for those who work minimum wage jobs or are unemployed.

## **Q: How do people who become homeless find housing again?**

A: There are a few different ways. Sometimes, homeless families or individuals stay with family or friends until they can get back on their feet. Others find affordable rental housing through public housing programs with help from government subsidies. There are also organizations that help homeless individuals and families find stable housing.

## **Q: If homelessness can happen to anyone, could it happen to us?**

A: Life can be unpredictable at times, and unexpected things can happen. However, we have a home, and we are taking steps and precautions to make sure we still have one in the future. If something unexpected does happen, we'll figure it out together.

## **Q: I'm just one person. What can I do to help when the problem is so big?**

A: We can't solve the issue ourselves, but there are ways we can help. We can donate a portion of our paycheck or allowance to charity, and we can volunteer with local nonprofit organizations who are serving those who are homeless. One of the most important things we can do is to educate ourselves and spread awareness to others. One person can make a difference!



# SEARCH Volunteer Opportunities For You and Your Child

- **Snack Pack and Hurricane Kit Assembly**
  - This is a great way for you and your child to get involved, without having to leave the house! It's also a great activity for a child of any age. Our Mobile Outreach team members distribute snack packs as they meet individuals who are experiencing homelessness, and our case managers also distribute them to their clients.
- **Grocery Bags for SEARCH Food Pantry**
  - SEARCH is always looking for grocery bags for clients shopping in our food pantry! Clients can visit with their case managers and select 15-20 items as they prepare to move into their new homes. We invite children to decorate simple paper grocery sacks or reusable totes donated by a local store or their personal network and to include encouraging notes in those bags.
- **Tablecloths for SEARCH's House of Tiny Treasures**
  - At HTT, SEARCH's preschool for children impacted by homelessness, the students eat breakfast and lunch daily using reusable tablecloths, plates, and cutlery. We run through tablecloths fairly quickly and would love it if your children would like to make some.

- **Pottery Project**

- Volunteers can purchase and paint mugs to donate to newly housed SEARCH clients. We say mugs because most of our clients love coffee!

- **Keychain Project**

- Newly housed clients need a place for the keys to their new apartments! We welcome volunteer help creating simple keychains that SEARCH can include in the “Welcome Home” gifts clients receive.

**For more details about these projects or if you have any questions about how to get involved, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Molly Martin at [mmartin@searchhomeless.org](mailto:mmartin@searchhomeless.org)**



## Other Resources

- **SEARCH's website:** [www.SEARCHHomeless.org](http://www.SEARCHHomeless.org)
- **SEARCH's "Get Involved" Page:**  
<https://www.SEARCHHomeless.org/get-involved/>
- **Volunteer Opportunities Through United Way:**  
<https://www.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer#>
- **"14 Ways To Effectively Explain Homelessness and Poverty To Your Child":**  
<https://wellspringfs.org/blog/14-ways-effectively-explain-homelessness-and-poverty-your-child>