



GUIDE TO USING SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES’ RESOURCES ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*For the entire guide, visit:

<http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/guide-to-using-sesame-street-in-communities-resources-on-family-homelessness>

More than one million American children under the age of six experience the trauma of losing their homes. Public schools have identified 1.3 million children experiencing homelessness in grades K-12.

If you are an educator or a parent, it is very probable that you work with children experiencing homelessness or that your own child goes to school with children who have experienced or currently are experiencing homelessness—but it also is probable that housed children are unaware of their classmates’ living situations. Here, we provide some tips for talking about child and family homelessness with children, encouraging empathy, and showing children how they can support and be sensitive to other children experiencing homelessness.

1. Talk to your child about the concept of “home” by watching the [“Home Is” video](#) with her and following the conversation prompts provided by Sesame Workshop. Ask your child if she feels the same way as any of the children in the video. What does “home” mean to her? Draw a picture together showing what “home” means to both of you. You also can print the [Home is Where the Hugs Are coloring book](#) and follow the conversation prompts provided on the printable.
2. Read the [“We Got This: Storybook”](#) and follow the prompts provided by Sesame Workshop to help guide a discussion about what it means to be homeless and better understand some of the reasons children and families are homeless. Help your child understand that families in all communities experience homelessness, and that homelessness can look different for each family, emphasizing that children and families are not “at fault” for experiencing homelessness. Sesame Street’s “Lily” character is staying with someone she knows, but this is not always the case: children and families experiencing homelessness sometimes stay with strangers, or in hotels or motels, or in shelters. With age-appropriate discretion, show your child pictures of some of the places where children experiencing homelessness might stay. Parents are encouraged to reassure their children that they will take care of them and to be responsive to any expressions of fear or anxiety about becoming homeless.
3. Help your child understand that one of the most important ways they can help their peers who may be experiencing homelessness is to be kind to their friends who might be sad or lonely. Watch the [Ribbons of Hope video](#) and discuss how Elmo was such a good friend to Lily while she was experiencing homelessness. [Watch the Hooray for Hands video together](#). Follow the conversation prompts in the video script to remind your child to be a loyal friend and help other children in need. Also reassure her that she can always “reach out” for help when she needs it, too.
4. Show children the [Rainbow Kind of Day video](#) and ask them to share examples of a time they had “big feelings.” Help them understand that it’s okay to talk about sadness or disappointment and to remember that, no matter where they live or whenever they feel sad, “there’s always hope and love.” Similarly, show children the [Ribbons of Hope video](#) and/or the [Dot to Dot video](#) to remind them that,

with the support of their friends and loved ones, they've "got this." Follow the conversation prompts to talk about the healing power of supportive connections. Consider doing the [Comfy Cozy Nest imagination activity](#) to show children they can make any place feel like "home."

5. Young children understand the attachment to objects like a favorite pillow or a soft toy. Watch the [Special-Special Comfort video](#) or do the [Comfy Cozy Nest imagination activity](#) with your child. Engage her in a conversation about favorite objects and how these might bring comfort to a child experiencing homelessness. Consider initiating a blanket or stuffed animal drive at your child's school or in your community and ask your child if she wants to share one of her gently-used toys or blankets.
6. For older school-age children, consider assigning a project or report on homelessness: encourage children to research what homelessness looks like in their immediate community or in their state by contacting their local homeless liaison or area homeless assistance providers. Students then can ask these providers what local families need and facilitate a fundraiser or clothing drive as applicable. If you can't find the contact information for your school district liaison on your school district's website, visit [this directory of state coordinators for the education of homeless children and youth](#) to find your State Coordinator, who can share local contact information.