



GUIDE TO USING SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES' RESOURCES ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS: SUGGESTIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

*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 homelessness. Not surprisingly, homelessness in early childhood is associated with delays in language, literacy, and social-emotional development, putting children at risk for later academic problems. Early childhood education programs can change the trajectory of a child's life, mitigating and even preventing many of the harmful life-long effects of homelessness on education, health, and well-being. Here, we provide some tips for how your early childhood program can use [Sesame Street in Communities homelessness resources](#) and other materials to help children and families experiencing homelessness.

1. To help increase the identification of homeless children in early childhood programs, include information about the [Sesame Street homelessness resources](#) in emails, newsletters, website articles, mailings, and other methods of communicating with all parents. Include your contact information and an invitation for parents who are experiencing homelessness to come forward, so that you may provide assistance. Avoid using the word "homeless" in family outreach whenever possible. Use descriptive language (such as "in transition" or "in a temporary housing situation") and ask any follow-up questions with discretion.
2. Give all families in your program an opportunity to reflect on their positive associations with the concept of "home." Make photocopies of the ["We Got This: Storybook"](#) and the [Home is Where the Hugs Are coloring book](#) and create a space for families to read and color together. You can also make copies of the ["We Got This: A Together Poem"](#) and encourage parents to take them. These activities also may help staff identify children who are experiencing homelessness.
3. Young children understand the attachment to objects like a favorite pillow or a soft toy. Show children and families the [Special-Special Comfort video](#) or do the [Comfy Cozy Nest imagination activity](#) with children. Be prepared to provide children with a comfort item if needed, and/or to show them comfort activities like stretching or breathing that can be done without props, anywhere at any time. By showing the video or doing the activity with all children in the program, you will be sure to reach any children experiencing homelessness who may not openly identify with this experience.
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 prompts for guidance in talking about the healing power of supportive connections.
5. Show children and parents the ["Home Is" video](#); after hearing what the children in the video have to say about what home means to them, talk together about what home means to everyone. Consider

doing the [Comfy Cozy Nest imagination activity](#) to show children they can make any place feel like “home.”

6. Host family engagement activities with parents in your program or in homeless assistance programs; provide Sesame Street resources, crayons, and food. Family engagement activities could include showing the [Special-Special Comfort video](#), and engaging children and their families in a conversation about their favorite objects and how these objects bring comfort. The [Hooray for Hands video](#) also could be shared as part of family engagement; guide families through the conversation prompts in the video script to show children the value of being a loyal friend and helping other children in need.
7. Print and share the article [Talk About It: For Children Experiencing Homelessness](#) to help parents answer difficult questions their children may ask. Share this article with all parents in your program to help families who may not have disclosed their homelessness know it is safe to talk about their situation with you. Review the article [Creating a Sense of Home](#) for suggestions on maintaining a sense of home despite high mobility.
8. Contact your school district homeless liaison(s) to make sure that he or she knows about the Sesame Street homelessness resources. Set up a meeting to brainstorm ways to use the Sesame Street materials locally to increase the identification and enrollment of young children experiencing homelessness in child care, Head Start, preschool and other early childhood programs. 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.
9. Share the Sesame Street materials with organizations in your community who may be providing services to families experiencing homelessness, including your [local United Way](#), [Family Promise Affiliate](#), [Family and Youth Services program](#), [Salvation Army](#), or [HUD homeless assistance programs](#). Take the opportunity to offer to help them [child-proof their programs](#), conduct [an early childhood self-assessment](#), and advocate for the early care and education of the children they serve.
10. Participate in the Administration for Children and Families' comprehensive [online training on homelessness](#) intended for professionals in Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care, including early childhood and school-age child care providers, Child Care and Development Fund Lead Agency or designated entity staff, and other key stakeholders. This training—for which certificates of completion are available—will help you learn how to identify families experiencing homelessness, conduct community outreach and connect with community partners, and much more.
11. Share [The Red Door, an essay by a Head Start program coordinator](#), with your staff to prompt a conversation about identifying children experiencing homelessness, supporting parents, and improving transitions to the K-12 school system.