



## GUIDE TO USING SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES' RESOURCES ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS: SUGGESTIONS FOR HOMELESS ASSISTANCE AND HOUSING PROVIDERS

\*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. Public schools have identified 1.3 million children experiencing homelessness in grades K-12. Ten percent of 13-17-year-old girls experiencing homelessness are pregnant or parenting, and 44 percent of 18-25-year-old young women experiencing homelessness are pregnant or parenting.

Homelessness in early childhood is associated with delays in language, literacy, and social-emotional development, putting children at risk for later academic problems. Connecting parents with quality early childhood and education programs can change the trajectory of a child's life, mitigating and even preventing many of the harmful lifelong effects of homelessness on education, health, and well-being. Early care and education also can change the lives of parents, enabling them to obtain stable employment so that they can obtain and maintain their own housing.

Here, we provide some tips for how you as a homeless assistance or housing provider can use [Sesame Street in Communities homelessness resources](#) and other materials to help children and families experiencing homelessness.

1. Give families in your program an opportunity to reflect on their positive associations with the concept of "home." Make photocopies of the [Home is Where the Hugs Are coloring book](#) and ["We Got This: Storybook."](#) 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 read them with their children.
2. 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.
3. Consider making the resources available to older siblings to help destigmatize homelessness and to support their relationships with their younger siblings. Show children the ["Home Is" video](#) to show how siblings can talk about "home" in a positive way.
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](#) and follow the prompts; 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. Review the article [Creating a Sense of Home](#) for suggestions on maintaining a sense of home despite high mobility. Consider doing the [Comfy Cozy Nest imagination activity](#) to show children they can make any place feel like “home.”

6. 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.
7. Review [this short document for homeless assistance and housing providers](#) for basic information about advocating with your families and youth for appropriate educational services, from birth through higher education. The rights and protections outlined here apply to all children and youth experiencing homelessness, as defined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
8. If parents need child care to make employment or education possible, share [this tip sheet](#) with them so that they can find high-quality, free (or reduced fee) care in their community.
9. Be mindful of incorporating child-friendly, developmentally supportive practices at all levels of programming. Make sure your spaces, practices, and policies are safe for infants, young children, and school-aged children by reviewing this child-proofing checklist and [ACF’s early childhood self-assessment](#).
10. Children who have suffered trauma are highly attuned to their environment. Consider creating a [trauma-informed play area](#) in your client-facing workplace.
11. Share the Sesame Street resources and the [Sesame Street press release](#) with local media. Encourage reporters to write a story about family homelessness (including families headed by young parents) in your community; recent trends; the services your program provides; and what actions need to be taken locally to support children and families experiencing homelessness.
12. Share the Sesame Street content with your [local Child Care Resource & Referral](#) agency, [your local Head Start provider\(s\)](#) and other early childhood education providers and ask them to share it with all of their parents. Explore how you can work together to improve the identification, enrollment, and support of children experiencing homelessness.
13. Reach out to your school district’s Homeless Liaison to brainstorm ways to use the Sesame Street content to increase awareness of and support for families experiencing homelessness in your community. 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.
14. Share the Sesame Street resources with your partners, donors, and prospective donors, to help them understand the important work you do to support young children and families experiencing homelessness.