



HELPING HOMELESS YOUTH SUCCEED IN COLLEGE: STRATEGIES FOR PARENTING STUDENTS

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According to the [Institute for Women's Policy Research \(IWPR\)](#), 26% of undergraduate students--about 4.8 million students--are raising dependent children. Students of color are more likely to be parents; additionally, about 70% of parenting students are women. These students are balancing many competing demands: attending classes, keeping up with schoolwork, and caring for children. College and child care are costly, with the [average cost of child care](#) ranging between \$8,000-\$35,000 each year. As a result, parenting students are [more likely to experience food and housing insecurity](#) than students who do not have children.

A Voices of Youth Count [brief](#) from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that pregnant and parenting youth are more likely to experience homelessness: 43% of 18-25 year-old women and 29% of 18-25 year-old men who experienced homelessness reported having at least one child.

Parenting students, and specifically homeless parenting students, are a reality on college campuses. Higher education provides the surest way out of poverty and homelessness and can help break generational cycles of poverty. Some colleges and universities are beginning to respond to student parents by providing them with resources and services to help alleviate the financial burden of child care and housing and to meet other unique needs. However, the [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#) reported that colleges can do more to help parenting students with child care, including publicizing dependent care allowances to parenting students. While resources and services may vary among institutions, the strategies we enumerate below can be universally effective in assisting homeless parenting college students and their children.

Current Laws & Policies

[Title IX](#) - Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education and in programs and activities that receive federal funding. Title IX's protections extend to parenting and pregnant students. Schools should ensure that they comply with Title IX and that their students, including homeless, parenting students, are made aware of their rights under Title IX. Higher education institutions receiving federal funding are also required to designate a Title IX coordinator who is responsible for ensuring the school complies with Title IX.

Identification and Outreach

Higher education professionals might consider these strategies to identify parenting students who are experiencing homelessness.

- Partner with Financial Aid to use the FAFSA to identify students under age 24 who have listed dependents and, therefore, might be parenting youth who are struggling to meet basic needs. To learn more about other practices for identifying homeless college students, see our [Identification Tip Sheet](#).



- Work with Admissions to see if students submitted college essays about being a parenting student. These students might be eligible for specific programs or scholarships.
- Consider using Endicott College's [Family Friend Campus Toolkit](#) to create a survey to assess and understand the needs of parenting students on campus.
- Provide trainings to faculty and staff about parenting students and their rights under Title IX.
- Work with faculty and deans directly to create priority enrollment or flexibility with class scheduling for parenting students.
- When advertising events and speakers on campus, include information about whether the event would be appropriate for children (including ages).
- Provide information well in advance to parenting students concerning field trips or lectures that are strongly encouraged or mandatory so that they have ample time to find appropriate child care.
- Connect parenting students with the Title IX coordinator on campus so that they are aware of their rights. Sacramento State created an [FAQ list](#) for parenting students.

Housing

- [Purdue University](#) offers married and family apartment-style housing. This area includes yard space and a playground and is conveniently located near campus for an easy commute to class.
- Some institutions, like [Misericordia University](#), provide furnished housing year-round for single mothers. In addition to providing housing, Misericordia also covers costs of textbooks, meal plans, medical needs, and laundry access for single mothers and even provides them the opportunity to study abroad.
- Wilson College, among others, has a [Single Parent Scholar Program](#) which provides not only housing to single parents, but also ongoing case management, emotional readiness, time management, financial workshops, and other life skills.

Child Care

- On-campus child care can provide a safe, supportive place for children while parents are taking classes. Some campuses provide free child care for children up to a certain age. [Wilson College](#) will cover the cost of child care for school age children at the YMCA. Child care services should extend to the evening for students taking night classes. [The Isabel Patterson Child Development Center at CSU Long Beach](#) serves as a family support service for the entire campus community, including faculty and staff, but prioritizes students first.
- Other institutions, like Columbus State University, provide [child care subsidies](#) for eligible Juniors and Seniors by partnering with an outside service provider.
- Student parents can use federal financial aid, including loans, to help pay for child care by asking their college to provide a "dependent care allowance," such as at the [University of Georgia](#). Institutions should inform eligible students about this allowance.



Supporting the Children of Parenting Students

- Create a child-friendly study lounge like the [Family Resource Center at Los Angeles Valley College](#) where parenting students can study. Tutors are available to help both children and parents with school work or enriching play activities.
- The [Early Learning Center at Everett Community College](#) provides a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment that values child development through play-based learning. The center provides a reduced rate and priority enrollment for parenting students enrolled in a minimum of 3 credits.
- Because of the stresses their student parents face, there is a danger that children of students might come to view school and education negatively, perceiving it to be the source of their parents' stress. To encourage and create a more positive relationship with school and education, some institutions--like Ohio State--are creating a mentoring program pairing children with other college students.
- Consider investing in and covering the costs of children's activities, like sports or clubs. Misericordia University pays for one extracurricular interest per child per year. Misericordia also requires each child and their parent in their program to learn how to swim with lessons taught by the swim team as a safety skill.
- Normalize the presence of children on campus by hosting campus-wide events targeted for children, like an Easter Egg Hunt or Halloween trick-or-treating.

Partnerships

- Establish relationships with nonprofits that support parenting students, like [Generation Hope](#), which provides a scholarship to parenting students in addition to ongoing case management and professional development opportunities.
- Pursue partnerships with public housing authorities to support parenting students as "non-traditional students," such as the partnerships and comprehensive services of [Family Scholar House](#) in Louisville, KY.
- Collaborate with your local Head Start. A recent [report](#) from IWPR shows that Head Start partnerships with colleges can help increase postsecondary success for parenting students.

Additional Strategies

- Use the [Find Your Way](#) regional guidebook series to identify campuses that are parent friendly.
- Research [scholarship opportunities](#) for parenting students.
- Many institutions, including [Sacramento State](#), have lactation rooms and diaper changing stations scattered throughout campus. Make sure they are private and easy to locate.
- Create a student organization for parenting students like [Rutgers Students with Children](#).
- Ensure that parenting students are aware of existing resources on campus, like a food bank/pantry or emergency funds, by creating a website dedicated to existing resources like at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#), or use print materials like table tents or posters.
- Include diapers, formula, and other supplies in food pantries/banks and convenience stores on campus.
- Have maternity clothing or baby/children's clothing in clothing banks, if available, or host child clothing exchanges.



- Allow children to eat for free or at a discounted price in the dining hall. Some parenting students might be required to have a meal plan, which can be a problem if the children are not included in the plan. Eating at the dining hall is easy and convenient for parents if their children can eat there, too.
- Provide child care during counseling sessions, like those offered at [Los Angeles Valley College Family Resource Center](#). Ascend at the Aspen Institute published a brief focused on the mental health needs of parenting students that can be downloaded [here](#).

To see other tip sheets on higher education from SchoolHouse Connection, click [here](#).