

A black and white photograph of a person's hands holding a dark backpack against a brick wall. The person is wearing a ring on their finger. The image is partially obscured by two large overlapping circles: a white one on the left and an orange one on the right. The text is centered over the white circle.

**DOES MY LIVING  
SITUATION MEET  
THE DEFINITION OF  
HOMELESSNESS?**



SchoolHouse  
Connection

A number of federal laws help to remove barriers to K-12 education, early childhood education, child care, and higher education (including financial aid). All of these education laws use the same definition of homelessness. This resource is designed to help you see if you meet this definition of homelessness, and if so, how you can access education and other resources.

## The Definition of Homelessness for Early Care and Education

Under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the term “homeless children and youth” means individuals who lack a **fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**. This specifically includes children and youth whose living situations fall into one of the categories below.

**01** Temporarily Staying with Other People

**02** Staying in Emergency or Transitional Shelters

**03** Staying in Motels, Campgrounds, Cars, Parks, Abandoned Buildings, Bus or Train Stations, or any Public or Private Place not Designed for Humans to Live in

**04** Staying in Substandard Housing

## Additional Definitions

### Accompanied Homeless Youth

If your situation falls into one of the categories below and you are in the physical custody (living with) a parent or guardian, your living situation meets the definition of a homeless youth.

### Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

If your situation falls into one of the categories below and you are not in the physical custody (living with) a parent or guardian, your living situation meets the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth.

# TEMPORARILY STAYING WITH OTHER PEOPLE



If you lost your home or had to leave your home and you are now staying with someone temporarily because you don't have anywhere else to go, you meet the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness. This can include a variety of specific situations, but it comes down to this: if you are staying with someone temporarily, and that person could ask you to leave at any time, your living situation likely meets the definition of homelessness.

## EXAMPLES

- Robin is in her first year of Community College and had to flee her home after experiencing physical abuse by her parents. When Robin left, she had nowhere to go, but thankfully a friend said she could sleep on their couch for a few days. Robin knows that her parents' home is not a safe place and therefore, continues to stay temporarily with friends. Robin would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because she meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and she is not in the custody of a Parent or Guardian.
- Damien is a high school senior whose mother moved in with her boyfriend after being evicted from their home. Unfortunately, there wasn't room for Damien and he was left with nowhere to go. Damien called his pastor to ask for help. His pastor said that he had a spare bedroom and that Damien could stay with him so he could finish high school. Damien moved in and even though he doesn't think his pastor would kick him out, he knows his Pastor could choose to ask him to leave at any time. Damien would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because he meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and he is not in the custody of a Parent or Guardian.
- Bryan and his mother had to flee from their home after experiencing domestic violence. His mother tried to call the local domestic violence shelter, but there were no beds available. Thankfully, Bryan's aunt said that they could sleep in her living room for a while until they figure out a permanent option. Bryan and his mother are staying temporarily with his Aunt and they could be asked to leave at any time. They meet the definition of homelessness under McKinney-Vento.

# STAYING IN EMERGENCY OR TRANSITIONAL SHELTERS



If you are living in a shelter or another form of emergency housing, you meet the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness. This can include domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, youth shelters, trailers provided by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), housing paid for by programs such as Rapid Re-Housing, transitional living facilities, etc.

## EXAMPLES

- Ebony experienced a devastating hurricane where her home was destroyed. After the hurricane, Ebony's family applied for FEMA and they were approved for temporary housing in a FEMA trailer while they worked to make repairs or rebuild their home. Ebony's FEMA trailer is considered emergency housing and she meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Carlos is a 5th grader who escaped domestic violence with his mother. His mother did not have anywhere to go, but she was able to get a bed at the local domestic violence shelter. Carlos and his mother are now staying at the shelter until they can find their own housing. Carlos meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Matt was kicked out of his home at age 16 after coming out as being gay. Matt had nowhere to go and googled shelters in his community. He found a program supporting LGBTQ+ homeless youth and called the number. He found out that they had a shelter and he was able to move in and stay temporarily until they figured out a long-term housing option for him. Matt would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because he meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and he is not in the custody of a Parent or Guardian.

# STAYING IN MOTELS, CAMPGROUNDS, CARS, PARKS, ABANDONED BUILDINGS, BUS OR TRAIN STATIONS, OR ANY PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PLACE NOT DESIGNED FOR HUMANS TO LIVE IN



If you are staying in a hotel, motel, camping ground, car, or any place outside/not meant for human habitation, your living situation meets the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homelessness.

## EXAMPLES

- Riley is a 5th grader whose mother was evicted from their home because she could not afford rent. Riley's mother has since been pulling together money every day to try to pay for motel rooms to keep a roof over Riley's head. Riley meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Omar is a high school sophomore who was kicked out of his home. With nowhere to go, Omar has been sleeping in the dugouts of the baseball field behind his school. Omar would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because he meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and he is not in the physical custody of a Parent or Guardian.
- Krystal and her family lost their housing and are now sleeping in a tent at a local campground. Krystal meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Olivia was kicked out of her home at 18 years old as a High School senior. With nowhere else to go, she has been sleeping in her car. Olivia would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because she meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and she is not in the custody of a Parent or Guardian.

# STAYING IN SUBSTANDARD HOUSING



Substandard housing is housing that poses a serious risk to the health, safety, or physical well-being of occupants. Examples of living in substandard housing can include inadequate sanitation, lack of water, lack of heating, unhealthy infestation of vermin or pests, fire and structural hazards, unsafe ventilation, and inadequate weather protection. If you are living in housing that doesn't meet local building codes, or the utilities are turned off, it is generally not adequate, and you likely meet the definition of homelessness.

## EXAMPLES

- Jessica is in her first year in college. She found affordable housing near campus, but it has multiple serious utility issues (the plumbing and water don't work and there is asbestos on the walls). She has to get buckets of water from a neighbor. She has brought up these issues to the landlord repeatedly, but he hasn't gotten back to her. Jessica doesn't know anyone else in the city and cannot afford any other apartment. Jessica would be considered an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, because she meets the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act and she is not in the custody of a Parent or Guardian.
- Eric is 12 years old and living with his immediate family and some of his extended family members in a crowded one-bedroom apartment. Most of the time there is no room to play or do homework and the apartment is filled with food, trash, and other items. Eric has seen multiple mice in the apartment and has told his mother he doesn't feel safe, but she explains that they have nowhere else to go. These conditions would be considered as substandard housing and Eric and his family would meet the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Javier is living with his family in a camper behind a family friend's home. The camper does not have electricity or sewage hooked up, so they have to go into a family friend's home to use their restrooms when they are able to. These conditions would be considered substandard housing and Javier and his family would meet the definition of homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act.

# Resources for PreK-12 Students

If your situation falls into one of the categories above, you have a right to go to school and to receive help with your education. Every K-12 school district is required to have a staff position called a McKinney-Vento liaison. This person is required to help students experiencing homelessness. If you are not yet experiencing homelessness, but you fear you may soon be, the liaison may still be able to help connect you to resources and help to ensure you can continue attending school. Here are some of the things your liaison can help with:

- Enroll in school, even if you aren't living with your parents or if you are missing documents like your birth certificate or vaccination records.
- Get you signed up for free and reduced lunch.
- Help you get transportation to and from school.
- Help you access resources to help with school fees, school supplies, and basic needs.
- Write a letter that will allow you to apply for financial aid (FAFSA) even if you don't have parental information (if you are an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth).

## HOW TO CONTACT YOUR MCKINNEY-VENTO SCHOOL DISTRICT LIAISON

Your school or district website may have a page that provides information about the McKinney-Vento Act and you may find your liaison's email or phone number there. It may be helpful to search the words "liaison" or "McKinney-Vento" on the school website as you look for these pages. The liaison is there to help you and can be an important resource to help you succeed at school. You also can talk with a trusted teacher, guidance counselor, principal, or other staff member who can help you get in touch with your liaison.

# Resources for College Students

If you are experiencing homelessness in college, help may be available on your college campus. Resources vary by campus, but a good place to start is by browsing your university website or talking with a trusted faculty or staff member. Some colleges have programs specifically designed to help students experiencing homelessness, while others may have resources that are available to all students in need.

**For additional resources and to learn about navigating topics such as FAFSA, student loans, accessing basic needs resources, buying a car, and much more, visit our Youth Resources page.**

**[CLICK HERE](#)**