



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement



Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness
for Early Childhood Professionals

Decision-making Tool to Determine a Family's Homeless Situation

Use this tool to determine a child and family's homeless situation or status using the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's definition of "homeless" children and youth. The definition is included in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act [42 U.S.C. § 11435a(2)] referred to here as the "McKinney-Vento Act's definition." In this resource, the term "homeless status" refers to an eligibility determination.

Determining a Family's Homeless Situation

As you learn about a family's living situation, analyze the information shared to see if the family's situation meets the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of "homeless." Review Module 4 of the *Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness, An Interactive Learning Series for Early Childhood Professionals* to learn more about how to have sensitive conversations with families.

McKinney-Vento Act's Definition of "Homeless"

The McKinney-Vento's Act's definition of "homeless" includes the following living situations for children and youth:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Having a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Lacking a nighttime residence that is fixed, regular, and adequate.

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Consider the Answers to the Following Questions to Make Your Determination

- **Is this family sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason?**
 - **Sharing the housing of other persons** implies that the child is staying in another person's home. Determine the following:
 - Does the family have any legal right to be in the home?
 - Can the family be asked to leave at any time with no legal recourse?
 - Is the living situation intended to be temporary or long-term?
 - Did the family move into the home as an urgent measure to avoid being on the street or in another dangerous situation?
 - **Due to loss of housing** implies that the child has no personal housing available. Determine whether the family lost their previous housing due to:
 - An eviction or an inability to pay the rent or other bills
 - Destruction of or damage to the previous home
 - Abuse or neglect
 - Unhealthy conditions such as an inadequate physical environment, infestations, drug or alcohol abuse in the home, or domestic violence
 - The absence of a parent or guardian due to abandonment, the parent's or guardian's incarceration, or another reason
 - **Economic hardship** includes cases where limited financial resources have forced families to leave personal residences and share housing due to an inability to pay rent and other bills. It is important to consider why the family is sharing housing and what the arrangement will be going forward. Determine the following:
 - Did an economic hardship such as an accident or illness, loss of employment, loss of public benefits, or condition of poverty force the family to share housing temporarily? *If yes, the children meet the definition of homeless.*
 - Is the family in a long-term, cooperative living arrangement with relatives or friends that is fixed, regular, and adequate? *If yes, this is not considered a homeless situation, even if the parties are living together to save money.*
- **Is this family living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations?**
 - **Due to the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations** implies that the family is living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or camping ground because they don't have another suitable place to stay and these settings are not fixed, regular, and adequate. While a trailer park may be fixed and regular, think about the condition of the trailer. Consider if there are issues with utilities or other conditions that need to be addressed for the trailer to be adequate.

- **Is this family living in an emergency or transitional shelter?**
 - Emergency or transitional shelters include: domestic violence shelters, emergency family housing shelters and transitional living programs, supportive housing and residential recovery programs for women who are pregnant or have children. Keep in mind that the setting is temporary and the family will need to find a place to go when they leave.
- **Does this family have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings?**
 - Examples of this type of arrangement include settings like a health clinic, office, public restroom, or 24-hour business.
- **Does the family live in a car, park, public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or a similar setting?**
 - Most of these living arrangements are self-explanatory. Substandard means falling short of a standard or norm or of a quality lower than that prescribed by law. Housing standards, including city, county, or state housing codes may vary by locality, but consider factors like the condition of the home and the number of occupants for the space. Also, think about the condition of the plumbing, heat, and electricity.
- **Is the family's living situation fixed, regular, and adequate?**
 - **Fixed** implies that the family's living situation is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. Is it a place where a family has a permanent home and from which the family has no present intention of moving? Consider asking the family these questions:
 - Where are you staying now? What has led you to stay there?
 - How long have you been staying where you are now? How long do you plan to stay there?
 - Where were you staying before you moved to where you are now? Did you want to leave there or was there a reason you had to leave?
 - Are you looking for another place to live?
 - Are you staying with other people? If so, did you and the people you are staying with decide to move in together, and share a home and expenses for the long term? Or is this a temporary situation for you?
 - Are you all sharing the home equally, or are you guests in their home?
 - What would happen if the people you are staying with asked you to leave?
 - If you couldn't stay where you are now, where would you go?
 - **Regular** implies that the family's living situation is used on a predictable, routine, or consistent basis. Is it a place familiar to the family? Consider asking the family these questions:
 - Do you have a key to where you are staying?
 - Can you come and go as you please?
 - Do you stay in the same place every night or do you move around a lot?

- **Adequate** implies that the family’s living situation is considered sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs of children and parents that are typically met in a home environment. Is it a place that is reasonably sufficient for the family’s needs? Consider asking the family these questions:
 - How many people are staying in the home? How many bedrooms and bathrooms does it have? Are people sharing rooms? If so, how many people are staying in one room?
 - Are you and your children sleeping in a bedroom or are you staying in a common area like a dining room or living room? A garage or unfinished basement?
 - What is the condition of the home?
 - ◆ Does it have working utilities, such as heat, electricity, and running water?
 - ◆ Is it warm and dry? Does it keep out rain and wind?
 - ◆ Is it free from infestations, such as mice, bugs, and mold?
 - ◆ Does it have a working kitchen and toilet?
 - ◆ Is it safe for you and your family?

Children of migrant and seasonal workers meet the criteria for homeless status and qualify for services related to their homeless status if they are living in circumstances described in any of the above categories in the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of “homeless” children and youth. However, children of migrant and seasonal workers are not considered homeless due to their regular temporary housing and seasonal relocation.



Decision-Making Tool to Determine a Family's Homeless Situation

Use the flow chart to determine if a family's situation is considered "homeless" according to the McKinney-Vento's definition.

Directions:

Start at the top of the chart and continue through all of the questions.

- If the answer is YES to at least one of these questions, **the family meets the criteria for homeless status.**
- If the answer is NO to ALL of these questions, **the family does not meet the criteria for homeless status.**
- **If you are still unsure whether the family meets or does not meet the criteria,** consult a peer, supervisor, or the Local Educational Agency, McKinney Vento Homeless Education Liaison.

