

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act is a federal law that protects the educational rights of students in temporary housing.

It defines “**homeless** children and youths” as any student who **lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**



School Social Workers and Guidance Counselors are often the first line of communication for students in temporary housing and their families. Individuals in these roles have an important role to play in creating a sensitive and supportive environment for families.

1. The first step in supporting students in temporary housing is to identify them. Signs of an unstable housing situation may include:

Poor Nutrition, Health, and/or Hygiene

- Chronic hunger
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)
- Wearing the same clothing for several days
- Unmet medical/dental needs
- Inconsistent or inadequate grooming
- Lack of immunization/medical records
- Often sick

Lack of Continuity in Education

- Attendance at many different schools
- Inability to contact parents
- Numerous absences
- Lack of participation in class/field trips
- Lack of participation in afterschool activities

Reactions/Statements by Parent, Guardian, or Student

- Anger/embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mention of staying with relatives, friends, or in a motel/hotel
- Comments such as:
 - “I don’t remember the name of my previous school.”
 - “I can’t remember our new address.”
 - “We are going through a bad time right now.”
 - “We are staying with relatives until we get settled.”

Social and Behavioral Cues

- A marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Extreme shyness
- Difficulty socializing at recess
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Difficulty or avoidance of building relationships with peers and/or teachers
- “Old” beyond years
- Aggression

Social Workers and Guidance Counselors will also want to stay in communication and/or follow-up with teachers and administrators about students who:

- Are often unprepared for class
- Have numerous unexplained absences or late-arrivals to school
- Don’t participate in after-school or before-school activities
- Have parents or caregivers who are difficult or impossible to reach

2. After a family has been identified as living in temporary housing, you should **contact your district’s McKinney-Vento liaison** and tell them you think the student may be in temporary housing. If you are not sure who to contact, **call NYS-TEACHS at 800-388-2014.**

3. Be aware that students in temporary housing have certain educational rights including:

**CHOICE OF
SCHOOLS:**

A student in temporary housing has the right to stay enrolled in the school of origin (the school attended when last permanently housed or the school last attended) or transfer to the local area where the student is temporarily living. It is usually in the student's best interest to stay enrolled in the same school. If the student transfers, she is entitled to immediate enrollment in the new school, even if she doesn't have the documents normally needed.

TRANSPORTATION: The student has the right to transportation to/from the school of origin.

**FREE MEALS and
TITLE I:** The student is entitled to receive free school meals without filling out paperwork regarding his family's finances. He/she is also entitled to receive Title I services.

- 4.** Finally, a student or family experiencing homelessness may also be experiencing a level of stress and/or trauma that requires a **supportive** and **trauma-sensitive approach**.

How to give trauma-sensitive support:

- Be discreet and make the student/family feel safe. Speak privately and empathetically about the family's living situation. Assure them that you are not asking questions to get anyone into trouble, but that you want to help. If another staff member in the school has a stronger relationship with the student or family, ask that person to have the conversation.
- Be sensitive to the stigma attached to words like "homeless" and "shelter." Instead, use phrases like "temporarily housed" or "temporary living situation."
- Make the student and family feel welcome by actively listening, stressing partnership over power, taking a strengths-based approach, avoiding blame, and being clear about expectations.
- Connect the student to the school community (e.g. refer the student to a tutoring/mentoring program; help coordinate transportation to before or after-school activities; talk to the student about his/her interests and make appropriate connections).
- Provide any needed school supplies (e.g. backpack, uniform, pencils) and/or educational services (e.g. school record transfers, IEP review/renewal, speech/language therapy, mental health services). Explore Title I set-aside funding to pay these supplies and services.
- Help the student maintain proper hygiene by keeping needed toiletry items on hand or allowing the student to use locker-room facilities (e.g. showers) before or after school.
- Have snacks available for students who may need food after school or on weekends.
- Help other school-based staff understand the impact of trauma and provide professional development on trauma-sensitivity.



Toll Free Hotline: (800) 388-2014

Email: info@nysteachs.org

Website: www.nysteachs.org

This tip sheet was adapted from materials from the Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia Departments of Education and the National Center for Homeless Education.