



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



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SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS SERVING FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Summer 2017



*A guide to creating
early childhood
settings that
support the safe
and healthy
development of
young children
experiencing
homelessness.*

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Introduction

As a provider of high-quality early care and education programs, you regularly support the healthy and safe development of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are experiencing homelessness in your community. This is especially important considering the high number of young children who experience homelessness and the effects that the stress caused by homelessness can have on their development. Research has shown that homelessness puts children at increased risk of poor health, developmental delays, academic underachievement and mental health challenges. Welcoming children and families who experience homelessness to your safe, developmentally appropriate program will assure that these children have the best possible start to a bright future.

This Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness has been specifically designed for child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and public pre-k programs as a guide for welcoming and supporting families and children experiencing homelessness into these programs. We know that ending family homelessness will require us to implement whole-of-community strategies to ensure that every member of each family experiencing homelessness is offered the services and the supports they need to thrive. Early care and education providers play a critical role in identifying and supporting families with young children who are experiencing homelessness and connecting those families to other resources within their community.

This tool is just one of several resources that the Administration on Children and Families (ACF), Ounce of Prevention Fund, CSH and others have created to support the healthy and safe development of children experiencing homelessness. Others include:

- [Birth to Five: Watch me Thrive!](#)
- [Developmental Screening Guide for Shelter and Housing Providers](#)
- [Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List](#)
- [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters](#)

Definition of Homeless Used by HS/EHS, Child Care, and Preschool

HS/EHS follows the definition of homeless children established in Sec. 725 of the McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Act.

Subtitle VII-B of the [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#) (per Title IX, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act) defines homeless as follows:

The term "homeless children and youths"—

- (a) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and
- (b) includes—
 - (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;*
 - (ii) children and youths who 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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));
 - (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
 - (iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

*Per Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, "awaiting foster care placement" was removed from the definition of homeless on December 10, 2016; the only exception to his removal is that "covered states" have until December 10, 2017 to remove "awaiting foster care placement" from their definition of homeless.

- [Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Supportive Housing](#)
- [Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness: CCDF State Guide](#)
- [Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness: CCDF State Self-Assessment](#)

Why This Tool Is Important

Approximately 1,211,348 children under the age of 6 will be homeless at some point during the year,¹ many of whom will spend substantial time in shelters. These children face a host of barriers that are linked to poor physical, socio-emotional and intellectual development outcomes.² Supporting the healthy development of young children experiencing homelessness can reduce the prevalence of developmental and behavioral disorders that are associated with high costs and long-term consequences for the housing crisis, health, mental health, education, child welfare and justice systems.³ Early childhood programs can be a positive force in the lives of children and mitigate the negative impact that homelessness can have on their development by creating an environment that is safe and developmentally appropriate.

Additional Concerns: Child Abuse & Domestic Violence

We recognize that in the course of working with young children, providers may discover situations of concern within the family. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, contact your local Child Protective Service or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Many states have a toll-free number to call to report suspected child abuse or neglect. To find out where to call, consult the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#).

If you find that a child is currently part of a family that is experiencing domestic violence, find a safe time and place to speak to the parent. Let her or him know that there is help available by calling **1.800.799.7233**. The [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) provides crisis intervention and can help the parent plan for safety and next steps.

For additional resources, check out Childhelp®, a national organization that provides crisis assistance and other counseling and referral services. Call **1.800.4.A.CHILD** (1.800.422.4453). The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with professional crisis counselors who have access to a database of 55,000 emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are anonymous.

¹ Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile, June 2017, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/epfp_50_state_profiles_6_15_17_508.pdf.

² Bassuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011; Tumaini R. Coker, Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. "Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness among Fifth-Grade Students." *American Journal of Public Health* 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009; Bassuk, E. L., Volk, K. T., & Olivet, J. "A framework for developing supports and services for families experiencing homelessness." *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 3, 34-40. 2010.

³ Johnson, K. and J. Rosenthal. (2009). Improving Care Coordination, Case Management, and Linkages to Service for Young Children: Opportunities for States. (Portland, ME: The National Academy for State Health Policy, April 2009). www.nashp.org/making-the-case#sthash.e4r0aYlK.dpuf; Reynolds, A. and J. Temple. (2008). "Cost-effective early childhood development programs from preschool to third grade." *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 4, 109–139.

Organization of This Tool

This tool contains recommendations for making early childhood programs more responsive to the unique needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families who experience homelessness in five areas: Identification and Support; Removal of Barriers; Responding to Family Needs; Engagement in Strategic Collaboration; and Improving Collection, Reporting and Utilization of Data. Links to resources referenced in the tool are highlighted and listed at the end of the tool starting on page 20. Also accompanying these recommendations is an action plan form that can be found on page 18.

We understand that your program is likely operating at capacity, with little extra time or financial resources. Therefore, this tool categorizes recommendations by the estimated amount of resources they will require.

- Recommendations that likely require few resources, i.e. those that can be done for little to no money or staff time, are marked with an asterisk and highlighted in white.
- Recommendations that likely require some resources, i.e. those that may need a small amount of money or staff time, are marked with two asterisks and highlighted in light blue.
- Recommendations that likely require substantial resources, i.e. those that may require shelters to apply for grant funding, are marked with three asterisks and highlighted in dark blue.

Low Resource Requirements*

Some Resource Requirements**

Substantial Resources***

How to Use This Tool

We recommend that early childhood program staff use this tool first to do an initial assessment of their program, noting whether each recommendation has been accomplished, is improving, or needs action. Based on the results of the initial assessment, staff and leadership then can use the resources referenced to identify strategies to best support young children and their families who experience homelessness. These strategies can then be translated into an action plan.

We suggest that staff members use this tool to re-evaluate the program's progress at least once during the implementation process and once after the process's completion. Periodically repeating the process will ensure ongoing progress and the ability to address newly identified needs. Also, because of the complex and changing nature of each family's experience with homelessness, it may be helpful to consistently engage volunteers and parents throughout the process of improving the program's policies and practices related to infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families who experience homelessness. It may be helpful to engage homeless service providers, McKinney-Vento liaisons, and other homelessness/housing experts in your community in the process as well.

This tool is not intended to serve as a comprehensive guide to programming in early childhood programs or as a guide for ensuring the full educational and developmental needs of young children. It is simply a mechanism to guide early childhood staff and leadership as they begin the process to improve how well their program welcomes and serves young children and their families who experience homelessness.

Thank You for Making a Difference

Research indicates that the first 5 years of a child's life are critical to brain development, academic achievement, and outcomes later in life. The work you are doing to provide the infants, toddlers and preschoolers who experience homelessness in your program with a safe and developmentally appropriate experience is vital to the trajectory of their lives.

In addition, you can continue to play an important, positive role in the lives of countless young children by passing this tool along to other early childhood programs and publicizing the need for specialized practices in serving young children experiencing homelessness throughout your community. Early care and education providers are encouraged to actively participate in their community's [Continuum of Care](#), which coordinates homeless service delivery in order to better connect to external resources available to families experiencing homelessness. If you aren't already, it would also be helpful to reach out to your [Local Emergency Food & Shelter Program Board](#), which provides funding for temporary shelter and food services. Both are great places to advocate for young children experiencing homelessness and to share the work you are doing to make a difference in your community. Finally, it would also be helpful to connect and collaborate with McKinney-Vento liaison(s) stationed at local schools, as they can be great partners in recruiting and enrolling young children experiencing homelessness into early childhood programs.

Please visit ACF's website for a full list of [ACF resources on early childhood homelessness](#). Please visit Ounce of Prevention Fund [publications webpage](#) for a full list of articles, newsletters and toolkits.



Self-Assessment Tool

Section A: Identification and Support

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
<p>A1. We use respectful and sensitive language on all flyers, applications and in intake processes; we don't use the word "homeless" with families or staff, but more neutral language like "temporary living situation"*</p>					
<p>A2. Our forms are McKinney-Vento compliant/friendly, and ask sensitive questions about living situations (e.g. do not ask a family if they are homeless)*</p>					
<p>A3. We post outreach materials prominently in our programs targeted specifically to families experiencing homelessness*</p>					
<p>A4. We partner with local schools to identify and enroll younger siblings of school-aged children who are identified as experiencing homelessness*</p>					
<p>A5. We provide awareness activities and training on homelessness for all staff in a position to interact with families, such as attendance clerks, custodial staff, bus drivers, teachers, nurses, etc.**</p>					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
A6. We do outreach and enrollment in places families experiencing homelessness may be, such as shelters, motels, health clinics, public assistance offices, campgrounds, with other families in our program, etc.**					
A7. We have a designated liaison to serve as a single point of contact who identifies and enrolls families experiencing homelessness, refers families to coordinated entry and other housing resources, coordinates with community partners, and/or supports other staff***					

Resources Referenced in This Section

- A1 (respectful and sensitive language): [Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act](#)
- A2 (forms McKinney-Vento compliant/friendly): [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Common Form](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

Staff training and awareness resources

- [Core Competencies in the HCH Setting: A Guide for Administrators](#)
- [Serving Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children](#)
- [Awareness Videos on Homelessness and Homeless Education](#)
- [Expanding Early Care and Education for Homeless Children](#) (multiple resources)
- [Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services](#)

Other

- [Continuum of Care](#)

Section B: Removal of Barriers

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
B1. We are flexible with documentation, screening and other enrollment requirements*					
B2. Our program marketing and recruitment materials are “ McKinney-Vento friendly ” and do not unintentionally discourage homeless families from applying ^{4*}					
B3. We coordinate closely with other community service agencies, including and particularly homeless service providers, for referrals*					
B4. We prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment in our program*					
B5. We expedite and/or simplify enrollment for children experiencing homelessness*					

⁴ Families who experience homelessness may be discouraged from applying if outreach materials state that certain documentation is required at the time of application. Materials should omit required documentation or clearly state that families who experience homelessness do not need to produce these documents in order to apply.

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
B6. We focus recruitment and enrollment of homeless families as close as possible to the beginning of the program year, if applicable*					
B7. We reserve slots in our program for children experiencing homelessness**					
B8. We retain children experiencing homelessness in our program, when possible, even when they move outside of our service area in the best interest of the child ^{5**}					
B9. We assist families in obtaining needed documentation, know who to work with in our community to access documents already on file, and in particular we avoid unnecessary duplicate immunization, etc.**					
B10. We provide or arrange for transportation for children experiencing homelessness***					

⁵ Per the Every Student Succeeds Act, early childhood programs administered by a Local Education Agency, including Head Start programs, are required to allow children to remain in their school of origin, subject to best interest of the child, if they become homeless and move outside of the program’s typical service area,

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
B11. Our programs or services are located close to where families experiencing homelessness are, such as shelters and motels***					

Resources Referenced in This Section

- B2 (McKinney-Vento compliant/friendly materials): [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Common Form](#)
- B4 (prioritize children): [CCDF Homelessness Guide](#)
- B7 (reserve slots): [Summary of Final Head Start Regulation Related to Homelessness](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [NAEHCY Chart](#) outlining Head Start, Child Care and pre-k policies
- [McKinney-Vento definition](#)



Section C: Responding to Family Needs

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
C1. We expect and plan for mobility, including developing a communication plan with families and preparing for unexpected transitions*					
C2. We develop positive relationships with families experiencing homelessness at a comfortable, respectful pace using strengths-based attitudes and relationship-based practices *					
C3. We respond to non-academic needs, such as clothing, diapers, etc. and partner with other community-based organizations to provide additional supports and services**					
C4. We are vigilant in screening for developmental delays or disabilities , or past involvement with Early Intervention or Early Childhood Special Education, for children experiencing homelessness**					
C5. We expedite IDEA services whenever possible and provide extra support to families experiencing homelessness**					
C6. We train our staff on the impacts of trauma and how to accommodate and work with children and families who have experienced trauma**					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
C7. Our program policies are trauma-informed**					
C8. We have procedures in place to support children and families who have experienced trauma**					

Resources Referenced in This Section

- C2 (positive relationships with parents): [Strengths-Based Attitudes and Relationship-Based Practices](#)
- C4 (screening for developmental delays or disabilities): [Birth to 5: Watch me Thrive!](#)
- C5 (IDEA services): [Question and Answers on Special Education and Homelessness](#)
- C7 (trauma informed care): [ACF Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [Supporting Homeless Children and Youth with Disabilities: Legislative Provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
- [McKinney-Vento, IDEA and You: Strategies for Helping Homeless Children with Disabilities](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(ECTA\) resource page](#)



Section D: Engaging in Strategic Collaboration

Because families who experience homelessness often have complex needs that require support and services across a number of service systems, strong and active collaborative relationships with service partners is an essential component to serving families who experience homelessness. This section outlines some of the most critical partnerships and collaboration practices that early care and education programs should have in place in order to effectively serve these families.

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
D1. We have relationships with key homeless services partners, such as McKinney-Vento liaisons, shelters, supportive housing providers and public housing agencies*					
D2. We have relationships with community partners who can assist in identifying and providing supportive services to families experiencing homelessness, such as motel managers, law enforcement, legal aid, behavioral health agencies, domestic violence agencies, public health departments and soup kitchens*					
D3. We meet regularly with partners to develop collaborative plans for supporting children and families experiencing homelessness**					
D4. We go onsite to partner agencies to engage and enroll families**					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
D5. We collaborate with key partners on service provision, such as case management services**					
D6. We have a designated staff liaison who is responsible for collaborating with homeless services partners***					
D7. We have joint procedures, forms, or agreements with partner agencies for simplifying and expediting referrals ***					
D8. We cross-train with key partners and share best practices across organizations in working with families experiencing homelessness***					
D9. We share data with key partners, and in particular, offer data to local homeless service providers and Continua of Care to help them understand the scope of early childhood homelessness in the community***					

Resources Referenced in This Section

- D7 (joint agreements with partner agencies): [Memorandum of Agreement between the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Head Start Association](#)
- D9 (offer data): [homeless data in community assessments and program planning](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness](#)
- [Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit for Partnership, Collaboration, And Action](#)
- [Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness](#)



Section E: Improving Collection, Reporting and Utilization of Data

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
E1. We identify children experiencing homelessness in our program and record, report, and track that data*					
E2. We provide regular training to all staff involved in data collection and reporting related to homelessness**					
E3. We review enrollment data on children experiencing homelessness regularly and develop improvement plans as needed**					
E4. We regularly collect and review data on retention and attendance of children experiencing homelessness and develop improvement plans as needed**					
E5. We consider homelessness data in community needs assessments and program planning ***					

Resources Referenced in This Section

- E5 (homelessness data): [homelessness data in community needs assessments](#)

Action Plan for Creating a Safe, Developmentally Appropriate Environment for Young Children

Goal: _____

Action Steps	Timeline	Person(s) Involved	Resources Needed

Signature of Leadership/Staff: _____

Appendix A: Forms

Use Forms to Sensitive Screen for Homelessness

- Check box if address listed is temporary
- Describe living situation
- Provide living situation options

Follow Up With a Conversation Whenever Possible

- Tell me about where you're staying now.
- Is your living situation temporary or permanent?
- Are you all sharing the home equally or are you more like guests?
- Do you move frequently? How many times have you moved in the past year?
- Do you expect to move again soon?
- How many people are staying in the home? How many bedrooms and bathrooms does it have?
- Do you have heat/electricity/running water where you are?
- Do you feel safe and secure where you are?

Allow For Multiple Modes of Contact

- Email, alternative phone numbers, alternative addresses

Appendix B: Resource Links

Section A: Identification and Support

Resources Referenced in This Section

- A1 (respectful and sensitive language): [Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act](#)
- A2 (forms McKinney-Vento compliant/friendly): [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Common Form](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

Staff training and awareness resources

- [Core Competencies in the HCH Setting: A Guide for Administrators](#)
- [Serving Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children](#)
- [Awareness Videos on Homelessness and Homeless Education](#)
- [Expanding Early Care and Education for Homeless Children](#) (multiple resources)
- [Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services](#)

Other

- [Continuum of Care](#)

Section B: Removal of Barriers

Resources Referenced in This Section

- B2 (McKinney-Vento compliant/friendly materials): [McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Common Form](#)
- B4 (prioritize children): [CCDF Homelessness Guide](#)
- B7 (reserve slots): [Summary of Final Head Start Regulation Related to Homelessness](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [NAEHCY Chart](#) outlining Head Start, Child Care and pre-k policies
- [McKinney-Vento definition](#)

Section C: Responding to Family Needs Resources

Resources Referenced in This Section

- C2 (positive relationships with parents): [Strengths-Based Attitudes and Relationship-Based Practices](#)
- C4 (screening for developmental delays or disabilities): [Birth to 5: Watch me Thrive!](#)
- C5 (IDEA services): [Question and Answers on Special Education and Homelessness](#)
- C7 (trauma informed care): [ACF Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [Supporting Homeless Children and Youth with Disabilities: Legislative Provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
- [McKinney-Vento, IDEA and You: Strategies for Helping Homeless Children with Disabilities”](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(ECTA\) resource page](#)

Section D: Engaging in Strategic Collaboration Resources

Resources Referenced in This Section

- D7 (joint agreements with partner agencies): [Memorandum of Agreement between the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Head Start Association](#)
- D9 (offer data): [homeless data in community assessments and program planning](#)

Additional Resources for This Section

- [Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness](#)
- [Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit for Partnership, Collaboration, And Action](#)
- [Building Partnerships to Address Family Homelessness](#)

Section E: Improve Collection, Reporting and Utilization of Data Resources

Resources Referenced in This Section

- E5 (homelessness data): [homelessness data in community needs assessments](#)

Other Resources

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network blends the best practices of the clinical research community with the wisdom of front-line community service providers. Its mission is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States. For more information go to www.NCTSN.org.

- Administration for Children and Families: www.acf.hhs.gov and www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/interagency-projects/ece-services-for-homeless-children
- Children's Defense Fund: www.childrensdefense.org
- Education for Homeless Children and Youth: www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless
- Health Care for the Homeless Information Resource Center: www.nhchc.org/resources/clinical/tools-and-support/hch-information-resource-center
- National Alliance to End Homelessness: endhomelessness.org
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth: www.naehcy.org
- National Center on Homeless Education: nche.ed.gov/about.php
- National Coalition for the Homeless: www.nationalhomeless.org
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council: www.nhchc.org
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty: www.nlchp.org
- Ounce of Prevention Fund: theOunce.org and collaboratingpartners.com/documents/CCDFHomelessnessGuidedefinalOct2015.pdf
- SchoolHouse Connection: www.schoolhouseconnection.org
- Urban Institute: www.urban.org
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness: www.usich.gov
- Zero to Three: www.zerotothree.org



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