

Potential Warning Signs of Homelessness

Students may not disclose this information readily. These are considered warning signs; please recognize that this is general guidance. There is wide variability and individual students may differ significantly from the following general characteristics.

Social and Behavioral Concerns

Lack of Continuity in Education

- Attendance at many different schools
- Lack of personal records needed to enroll
- Inability to pay fees
- Gaps in skill development
- Mistaken diagnosis of abilities
- Poor organizational skills
- Poor ability to conceptualize

Poor Health/Nutrition

- Lack of immunizations or records
- Unmet medical and dental needs
- Increased vulnerability to colds & flu
- Respiratory problems
- Skin rashes
- Chronic hunger (may hoard food)
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)

Transportation & Attendance Problems

- Erratic attendance and tardiness
- Numerous or extended periods of absences
- Lack of participation in afterschool activities
- Lack of participation in field trips
- Absences on days when students bring in special treats from home
- Inability to contact parents

Poor Hygiene

- Lack of shower facilities/washers, etc.
- Wearing same clothes for several days
- Inconsistent grooming – well groomed one day and poorly groomed the next

Lack of Privacy/Personal Space after School

- Consistent lack of preparation for school
- Incomplete or missing homework (no place to work or keep supplies)
- Unable to complete special projects
- Lack of basic school supplies
- Loss of books and others supplies on a regular basis
- Concern for safety of belongings
- Refusing invitations from classmates

- Marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self esteem
- Extreme shyness
- Unwillingness to risk forming relationships with peers and teachers
- Difficulty socializing at recess
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- “Old” beyond years
- Protective of parents
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Fear of abandonment
- School phobia (student wants to be with parent)
- Need for immediate gratification
- Anxiety late in the school day; doesn’t want to leave school
- Arriving very early: carrying clothing in backpack

Reaction/Statements by Parent, Guardian or Child

- Exhibiting anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mentions staying with grandparents, relatives, friends, or in a motel, etc.
- Makes comments such as:
 - “I don’t remember the name of the last school.”
 - “We’ve been moving around a lot.”
 - “Our address is new. I don’t remember it.” (may hide lack of permanent address)
 - “We’re staying with relatives until we get settled.”
 - “We’re going through a bad time right now.”
 - “We’ve been unpacking, traveling, etc.” to explain poor appearance and/or hygiene

For more information visit the National center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>