

# What's It Like to Be Homeless?

Children who are homeless are just like other kids, except they do not have their own home. They worry that they will never have a place to live. They do not know where they will sleep at night. They worry about what will happen to their parents or siblings. They do not have regular meals or medical care. They may also see violence within their families. Many are suddenly separated from their families and put in foster care or sent to live with relatives.

Many children who are homeless live in shelters. A shelter can be a room in a church or temple, school, or other type of building. A homeless shelter can be a scary place for a child. Despite the dedication of people who work at shelters, many shelters are noisy, too hot or too cold, crowded, and lack many comforts. Children sleep in the same room with their parents, and sometimes in the same room with people they do not know. Bathrooms must be shared. There may be no place for children to play or do their homework. It is often hard to go to school when living in a shelter, even though homeless students have certain rights under the law. (McKinney-Vento Act for Homeless Children and Youth)

Shelters are usually designed to provide only a few weeks or months of emergency housing. But as the number of families becoming homeless increases, more and more shelters are forced to provide long-term housing for families with no place else to go. Many families who are homeless are not able to live in shelters because there are not any where they live or the local shelters are full. They remain hopeful on the waiting list. These families are forced to live in cars or vans, RVs, garages, tool sheds, walk-in closets, at campgrounds or encampments, or doubled up with their friends, relatives or even strangers.

Being a kid and being homeless means not having a home of your own. Even with all of the people living with them and around them, it can be a very lonely place. Therefore, schools may become the families' safe haven providing a consistent routine, meals and a sense of extended family. Educators play a vital role with their understanding, compassion and love.

