

# Common Signs of Homelessness

## Lack of Continuity in Education

- Attendance at many different schools
- Lack of records needed for enrollment
- Gaps in skill development

## Poor Health/Nutrition

- Lack of immunizations and/or immunization records
- Unmet medical and dental needs
- Chronic hunger (may hoard food)
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)

## Transportation and Attendance Problems

- Erratic attendance or tardiness
- Inability to contact parents
- Numerous absences
- Avoidance of class field trips

## Poor Hygiene

- Wearing the same clothes for several days
- Lack of shower facility or washers to stay clean

## Not Ready for Class

- Lack of basic school supplies
- Concern for the safety of belongings
- Incomplete or missing homework

## Social and Behavioral Cues

- Change in behavior
- "Old" beyond years
- Protective of parents
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self-esteem
- Difficulty or avoidance of making friends
- Difficulty trusting people
- Need for immediate gratification

## Reactions/Statements by Parent, Guardian, or Child

- Anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mention of staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in a motel
- Comments such as:
  - "I don't remember the name of my previous school."
  - "We've been moving around a lot."
  - "Our address is new; I can't remember it" (may hide lack of a permanent address).
  - "We're going through a bad time right now."

**Note:** These are general guidelines. There is significant variability among the school-age homeless population.

Warning signs adapted from flyers developed by the Illinois and Pennsylvania Departments of Education.