SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Collaboration between Early Learning Providers & Districts

Orange County Department of Education
Homeless Outreach Promoting Educational Success - (HOPES) Collaborative

STEFAN BEAN, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

Collaborating with your **Local District's McKinney-Vento Liaison** is essential in **identifying, recruiting and enrolling** young children experiencing homelessness.

Coordination between homeless liaisons and Head Start/State Pre School Programs include:

- **Coordinated/centralized entry intakes for referred families**
- **Waiting lists**
- **Prioritized educational supports**
- **Streamlined resources and information for young children with older siblings**

Partners

Districts

- Partner with local school districts and ensure K-12 registration forms have a section to list pre-school age children or younger siblings
- Request educational materials for younger siblings

Shelters

- Send enrollment information to all family shelters including: domestic violence survivor and pregnant & parenting youth

Motels & Public Areas

- Partner with family resource centers, library outreach programs, local motels, transportation centers, grocery stores, gasoline stations, and laundromats
- Post educational rights outside the following:
  - pediatricians' offices; low-cost health clinics; libraries
  - Application offices for:
    - Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Community Resource Centers

Training is key

- Train all staff on how to identify homeless children **during the enrollment process, and throughout the year.**
- Provide local liaison's contact information, on enrollment applications/forms, as a resource for families who do not have proof of address; the local liaison should follow up with the family and provide service referrals as needed
- Avoid referring to families as "homeless" on school forms or in conversation. Instead, provide examples of living situations that meet criteria:

  "Are you renting a room or sharing with other families?"
  "Is your family living in a motel?"
  "I understand you are staying with friends until you find a new place?"
  "Since the pandemic started, has your address changed or have you had to move?"

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Homelessness is a state of vulnerability for children and families. Young children need stability and consistency to form the foundation for future social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

Ways to help

- **Allow children to keep personal items close to them, if they need them for comfort**
- **Offer choices and reinforce their sense of control**
- **Reinforce positive behaviors**
- **Create a relationship and connection so the child learns that adults can be safe and supportive**
- **Seek to understand the meaning of a specific behavior**
- **Look for patterns of behavior, including individual triggers that activate children's stress response systems**
- **Use different means of parent communication (email, social media, text, voice message, request shelter to allow the family to use a phone or computer)**
- **Be informed about transportation resources in the area (bus and gas vouchers, carpools, partnerships with agencies)**
- **Provide referrals for medical, dental, and health/wellness services as well as domestic violence programs and housing**
- **Practice self-care as it is the best prevention for burnout, and you deserve it!**

Safety

- **Offer informal support for parents to discuss issues or private concerns, and help them understand the services available:**
  - **Assistance with referrals in school meals, before/after-school programs, mentoring, summer programs**
  - **Provide school supplies and/or clothing to meet a school requirement**
  - **Offer technology devices and Wi-Fi support**
  - **Provide transportation to and from school**

Environment

- **Create a calming environment**
- **Provide stable, predictable routines**
- **Take advantage of outdoor natural settings**

Young children develop resilience in the face of sustained stress and trauma by experiencing a consistent relationship with a supportive caregiver who is responsive to the child's needs. Be sensitive, patient, calm, and reassuring. YOU can make a difference!

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