



**Shared
Health
Foundation.**

Homeless Families - Guidance for Schools

This guidance has been developed in collaboration schools, health professionals and families with lived experience of homelessness.

We know that a little can go a long way in providing children and their families with a sense of hope during a very difficult time, and that schools are well placed to provide the stability a child needs to continue to thrive in their education.

Below is provision your school could offer to support families in difficult housing situations. This flexible guide is a summary of what is already working for schools seeking to support homeless families. There is no 'one size fits all' and it is important to have conversations with individual families about what it is they really need. It is also important that support given is done so in a way that doesn't single out children to their peers. Many families can live in temporary accommodation for years, so support should be offered with this timescale in mind.

Families may find it hard telling their school that they are homeless, so it is important that schools are proactive and upfront about their willingness to support homeless families. Support offered can be detailed in information packs or school letters.

We know that lots of schools already offer excellent support for all their children, whatever the circumstances, but this guidance will help ensure a consistency of approach across all schools. As one mum explained to us:

'All 3 of my children were suffering in their own way. They began to fall behind in school as I couldn't make it there on time. I was travelling from one borough to another four times a day. This had its repercussions. They couldn't attend their school disco because of their lateness percentage, they were falling behind in certain subjects and the change in their behaviour became noticeable.

Their school was amazing. I broke down in the reception area and told them everything - I couldn't hold the weight of it all any longer. The school supported me in every way they possibly could.

They allowed the children to attend breakfast clubs and after school clubs for free, they would save any left-over food and package it and give it to me after school. They gave them a play therapist once a week and they would ask me for any updates with the whole situation.

They would hug me and tell me it will all be ok. That hug was a hug of support, a hug of 'you're not alone'.

But that had to come to an end because I had to move the children to a school closer to where we had been placed. I physically couldn't get them to school. My car had taken a beating from all the mileage, my body was broken and their safety at the school was in jeopardy.

The day came and they had their first day in their new school.

It was tears of sadness, loneliness, no friends, and no support. Their new school advised me they couldn't offer the kids a play therapist or after school clubs - and they wanted the weekly money for breakfast club. The teachers would pull me up on attention seeking behaviour or how behind my youngest was compared to the rest in reception.

They gave me some uniform from lost property so they could look the same as the others, but we were in darkness again.

They didn't make friends. My daughter would say 'what is the point we don't know how long we can have them for'. She was anxious every day, she didn't trust anyone - nervous of the world around her, unable to sleep at night, creating scenarios in her head that would cause her to cry.

They were no longer like normal children - they were being shaped by their situation and it killed me to watch them become a shell of who they once were.

Schools and families we talked to have identified the following helpful strategies:



Named staff member with oversight for homelessness to monitor identification of and support for homeless children.



Staff-supported **homework facilities** to prevent children from falling behind. Temporary accommodation can be cramped with little space to do homework.



Systems which take the child's situation into account when giving **sanctions**. For example, it would not be appropriate to sanction a child for being late if they have been displaced far from the school.



Displaced families offered **funding to assist with transport** to and from school.



Students / pupils accessing a **tailored school day** if required.



The provision of **breakfast club**, and at the same time schools and parents ensuring that children entitled to free school meals are receiving them. Families may not have access to adequate kitchen facilities. Breakfast clubs can also provide a safe, calm space for children in difficult circumstances to de-stress before the school day starts, helping them to be more ready to learn. Schools could also provide an **emergency food parcel**.



Students / pupils supported to attend **after school activities**. Many will have little or no social contact with other children once they leave school and may be unable to host play dates in their accommodation.



A **laundry service** and a store of spare uniform and PE kit can be invaluable for families. Laundry facilities in temporary accommodation vary widely. There may be a charge to use it and it may be shared between multiple families.



Free access to the school's **internet and phone**.



Families might need additional support with **transition** to a new school. This could either be a family leaving your school due to being displaced by homelessness, or a new family arriving for the same reason. Children will be dealing with a huge sense of loss in both situations. If possible, give **priority access to school places** for homeless children accommodated in your local area.



Provide mentoring and **emotional support for the whole family**. Regular meetings should monitor the progress of the child and see where more support could be given. Transitioning between temporary accommodation properties can be tiring, difficult and traumatic. Sit with the family, let them share their concerns and worries, and give them space to reflect. Sometimes you may be the only other adult the parent has spoken to that week.



Signpost the family to other local support.