



Head Start and VPI Administrators and Staff

Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

You play a critical role in identifying young children experiencing homelessness and giving them the support they need to succeed in school.



Identify Children Experiencing Homelessness and Be Aware of the Importance of Early Identification

- Look for a history of multiple addresses, missing documents, erratic attendance, chronic hunger or fatigue, and poor health or hygiene.
- Listen for parent statements about being in transition or living with relatives or friends due to loss of housing or economic hardship. This is known as “doubled-up”.
- See the [McKinney-Vento Quick Guide](#) for other common signs of homelessness.
- Know that very young children experiencing homelessness remain significantly undercounted.
- These children are at significantly higher risk for cognitive, social emotional, physical, and developmental delays.
- The earlier they are identified and connected to the support they need, the greater the chance these delays can be lessened.
- Make sure these children are prioritized in your enrollment process.
- Young children who are experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible to participate in VPI programs and Head Start.
- Consider reserving slots for these children. Head Start programs may reserve up to 3% of funded enrollment slots for children experiencing homelessness.



Be Flexible and Stay Connected to Families

- Parents may struggle to provide verification of temporary housing. Be flexible with the types of documentation you accept.
- Immunization and other medical records may be unavailable. Be supportive and work with families to enroll the child first and then obtain medical records.
- Stay connected with families, even if they are on your waitlist.
- Invite them to socialization activities.
- Provide books or toys that the family can keep where they are staying.



Adopt a Trauma-Informed Approach and Connect Families to Resources

- Provide consistent routines and one-on-one time with children and their families. They may be reluctant to tell you they lack basic needs, so providing this consistent and supportive space will help them to feel safe and ask for what they need.
- Demonstrate empathy without judgment. Show families that you understand any of us could be in their shoes.



- Continue to show up even when families miss appointments. Many of these families are operating in crisis mode. Your consistency will show them that you are there to support them.
- Collaborate regularly with local agencies and programs and connect families to these resources.



Connect With Your Local McKinney-Vento Liaison

- Your local school division's McKinney-Vento liaison is legally required to coordinate with early childhood programs in their area.
- Liaisons can help determine if a situation should be considered homeless, connect the family to other community resources, and assist children and parenting youth with educational and developmental needs.



PROJECT
HOPE
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Find Your Local
McKinney-Vento
Liaison



For More Information

Learn more about how to support children and youth experiencing homelessness with these resources:

- [Project HOPE-Virginia](#)
- [Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Webinar Series](#)
- [Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#)
- [McKinney-Vento Quick Guide](#)