

# Identifying Children and Families in Crisis

Identifying children and families who are experiencing homelessness can be a difficult task for child care providers. Families may be fearful of consequences such as loss of custody or being forced to take children to unsafe family environments.

Families may not realize that their living situation fits the definition of homelessness and may not seek out available services.

Below you will find common indications that children or families may be experiencing crisis and need additional support.

## Indicators that a family may be experiencing a crisis include:

- Timeliness of paperwork
  - Families consistently struggle to finish paperwork on time
- Lack of a permanent address or list multiple addresses
- Personal grooming and hygiene
  - Children wear the same clothes multiple days in a row
- Inconsistent schedules
  - Inconsistent arrival and departure times
- Food insecurity
  - Children may hoard or talk excessively about food
- Sudden behavior changes
- Frequent illness or medical concerns
- Fatigue
- Concern for safety of belongings

## Emergency Assistance for families

**Dial 211**—Non Medical Emergencies: Connections to Food, Shelter, Job Support, Counseling and other available services



## Definition of Homelessness

The term “homeless children and youth”

- A. Means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...;and
- B. Includes
  2. children and youths sharing the housing of other persons
  3. children and youths who have a nighttime residence not designed for regular sleeping
  4. children and youths living in cars, parks, substandard housing or similar settings
  5. migratory children who qualify as homeless due to living circumstances described above

A more in-depth definition of the legal definition can be found that the Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

# Tips for Administrators

It can be hard to have conversations with families about needing a little extra support. There are strategies that assist with beginning the conversation, sometimes before any one is in need of additional support.

## Paperwork

There are times when parents find it difficult to keep up with the paperwork necessary for their children to be enrolled in child care. Families experiencing homelessness may not be able to access their child's records. Tips to support them include:

- Provide your time and a computer to safely access records. Support families' understanding of what records are necessary for the health and safety of their child.
- Assume that all parents are doing the best they can in terms of delivering what you need to administer your program.
- **Note:** Wisconsin Child Care Licensing has flexibility in paperwork timelines for families experiencing homelessness. Please check with your licensing specialist to determine what works best for you.

## Program Policy

Including support for families experiencing homelessness within your handbook or policies can create an environment where families are comfortable sharing their circumstances.

- Include the definition in your handbook
- Avoid using the word "homeless"
- Connect with the Homeless Liaison through the school district
- Provide outreach materials throughout your program including community supports, contact information, and support for basic needs
- Include a needs assessment in your intake forms
- Provide teachers and staff with regular professional development opportunities around serving homeless families in your communities



### Resources for Providers

[YoungStar](#)

[Wisconsin Shares Child Care subsidy](#)

[Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies](#)

[Family resource centers](#)

[Local School district liaisons](#)

[Wisconsin First Step](#)

**Call 2-1-1:** information on community-based support for housing, food and other essentials

**Maternal and Child Health Hotline:** Resources for pregnant women, infants, children and families 1-800-722-2295. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**NCHE Helpline:** Assistance for parents and community organizations who support children and their families. 1-800-308-2145 or [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org)