

WHAT A SCHOOL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL CAN DO TO HELP HOMELESS STUDENTS

Immediate Assistance

- Be familiar with the common characteristics of homeless children, so that you may recognize and assist them without delay.
- Contact your School District Homeless Liaison and the student's teacher(s) when you identify a homeless student in the school, so that other services (lunch program, tutoring, etc.) may be made available without delay.
- Assist homeless parents with the completion of all necessary medical records. Be aware that some parents may lack skills in comprehension, reading and writing.
- Contact the previous school in order to obtain immunization records and health records.
- Ask parents if they know the names of clinics where their child has received medical attention. Assist parents in obtaining child's medical information from clinics.
- Alert principal, counselor and teachers of any serious medical condition of the child. Teamwork and sharing of information is very important, especially if the child's stay in the school is short.
- Be aware that, if a child should become sick during the day, the parent may be difficult to contact. Make arrangements upon enrollment for this type of situation.
- When the student is ill and must be sent "home," remember that the place he or she may be going to may not be stable or quiet.
- Be familiar with the requirements of the ***Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act*** and the ***Illinois State Board of Education Policy on the Education of Homeless Children and Youth***. Be able to explain these requirements to other school staff.

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Continuing Care

- Follow-up on all children who have been excluded from school due to incomplete immunizations and suspected communicable illnesses. The law requires that students be admitted regardless of immunization history. Work with parent and school personnel to get student into school and to a resource for free or low-cost health services.
- Contact parent and/or shelter staff if a homeless child is absent for three or more days to find out if assistance is needed. Often, the parent is not motivated to send the child to school, especially if the family is not in a supervised shelter setting.
- Offer the child emotional support and reassurance that homelessness is a temporary condition and that the family will find stable housing. *Reassure the child that this situation is not his fault.*
- Be available, accessible and compassionate to the concerns, needs and feelings of the homeless families. Try to boost the self-esteem of the children and their parents by conveying concern, respect, kindness and compassion. Be a good listener and be empathetic.

Expanding Outreach

- Identify reliable, accessible sources of medical and dental care in the community. Share your discoveries with the School District Homeless Liaison.
- Serve as a contact person for referrals to help homeless families. Get to know the best resources to connect families for things like housing, counseling, food, and transportation.
- Make personal visits to local shelter(s). Stress importance of school attendance with parents and shelter staff. Help to set up workshops for parents and shelter staff on such topics as nutrition, stress, and general health needs.

Questions?

Call the Illinois State Board of Education

1-800-215-6379

or

Visit the Opening Doors Web Site:

<http://homelessed.net>



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