



Youth at Risk of Homelessness – Identification & Action

Purpose of this document

To assist teachers, counsellors, and other youth service workers in the identification of youth who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness and to help to connect them with the appropriate services.

Discussion

It is often difficult to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness. Youth living alone and families facing homelessness will try to hide the situation to avoid stigma or because of fear of having children taken away. Early identification, however, can put children, youth and families in contact with services that can assist in times of crisis. The *Common Signs of Homelessness* can help you make this early identification. Also included is a flow chart which details a course of action should those indicators create enough concern that this youth is facing homelessness.

Tips & Tools for Approaching Youth & Families

If a student is identified as being homeless or at risk of homelessness it is important that any initial contact should be made in a sensitive way.

When discussing the issue approaches to consider include:

1. Discuss confidentiality.
2. Ask direct questions.
3. Avoid stigma words like homeless and homelessness. Ask questions instead, such as 'Are you living at home?'
4. Have resources, information and contact numbers available prior to meeting.
5. Ensure you have enough time to explore the issue and make a plan prior to initiating discussion.

Service Contacts

Should a student be identified as homeless or at-risk of homelessness they can be connected to a variety of different services. These agencies can assist in different situations:

Ministry of Children and Family Development

- Resource Booklet: BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect
- Contact: Helpline for Children toll free at 310-1234 (no area code) any time of day or night.
- Contact: During work hours call Service BC – In Greater Victoria call 250-387-6121 and ask for your local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency nearest you.

Youth Support Agencies

- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society General Support: 250-383-3514
- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society direct line to Outreach: 250-220-8938
- Boys and Girls Club: 250-384-9133
- Burnside/Gorge Community Association: 250-388-5251
- Saanich Neighborhood House: 250-360-1148
- Esquimalt Neighborhood House: 250-385-2635
- Beacon Community Services, Sidney: 250-656-0134
- Beacon Community Services, Quadra (Home Support – 24 hr. answering service): 250-658-6407
- KEYS (Kiwaniis Emergency Youth Shelter): 250-386-8282
- Out of the Rain: 250-415-3856
- Pacific Centre Family Services: 250-478-8357
- Pandora Youth Apartments 250-380-2663
- Quadra Village Community Centre: 250-388-7696
- Threshold Housing: 250-383-8830
- Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health: 250-589-3119
- Young Parents Support Network: 250-384-0552
- Vancouver Island Crisis Society – Youth: 1-888-494-3888

Aboriginal Agencies

- Victoria Native Friendship Centre: 250-384-3211
- NIE/TU,O: 250-544-1400
- Surrounded by Cedar Rd: 250-383-2990

Support Agencies for Families at-risk of Homelessness

- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society General Support: 250-383-3514
- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society direct line to Outreach: 250-220-8938
- Burnside/Gorge Community Association: 250-388-5251
- Saanich Neighborhood House: 250-360-1148
- Single Parent Resource Centre: 250-385-1114
- Family Services of Greater Victoria: 250-386-4331

Aboriginal Agencies

- Victoria Native Friendship Centre: 250-384-3211
- Hulitan Family and Community Services: 250-384-9466

Counselling and Family Crisis Agencies

- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society General Support: 250-383-3514
- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society direct line to Outreach: 250-220-8938
- Burnside/Gorge Community association: 250-388-5251
- Boys and Girls Club: 250-384-9133
- Discovery Youth & Family Substance Use Services, Island Health: 250-519-5313
- Burnside/Gorge Community Association: 250-388-5251
- Saanich Neighborhood House: 250-360-1148
- Esquimalt Neighborhood House: 250-385-2635
- Beacon Community Services, Sidney: 250-656-0134
- Beacon Community Services, Quadra (Home Support – 24 hr. answering service): 250-658-6407
- Pacific Centre Family Services: 250-478-8357
- Quadra Village Community Centre: 250-388-7696
- Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health: 250-589-3119
- Young Parents Support Network: 250-384-0552
- Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888

Aboriginal Agencies

- Victoria Native Friendship Centre: 250-384-3211

Common Signs of Homelessness

The following indicators of homelessness can help you make early identification.

Poor Hygiene

- Lack of shower facilities/washers, etc.
- Wearing same clothes for several days
- Inconsistent grooming

Poor Health/Nutrition

- Chronic hunger (may hoard food)
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)
- Lack of immunizations and/or immunization records
- Unmet medical and dental needs
- Respiratory problems
- Skin rashes

Lack of Personal Space After School

- Consistent lack of preparation for school
- Incomplete or missing homework (no place to work or keep supplies)
- Unable to complete special projects (no access to supplies)
- Lack of basic school supplies

Transportation & Attendance Problems

- Erratic attendance and tardiness
- Numerous absences
- Lack of participation in after-school activities
- Lack of participation in field trips
- Inability to contact parents
- Loss of books and other supplies on a regular basis
- Concern for safety of belongings

Lack of Continuity in Education

- Attendance at many different schools
- Lack of records needed to enroll
- Inability to pay fees
- Gaps in skill development
- Mistaken diagnosis of abilities
- Poor organizational skills
- Poor ability to conceptualize

Social & Behavioral Concerns

- A marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self-esteem
- Extreme shyness
- Unwillingness to risk forming relationships with peers and teachers
- Difficulty socializing at recess
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- Substance abuse
- Indicators of a harsh or punitive parenting style
- “Old” beyond years
- Protective of parents
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Fear of abandonment
- School phobia (student wants to be with parent)
- Anxiety late in the school day

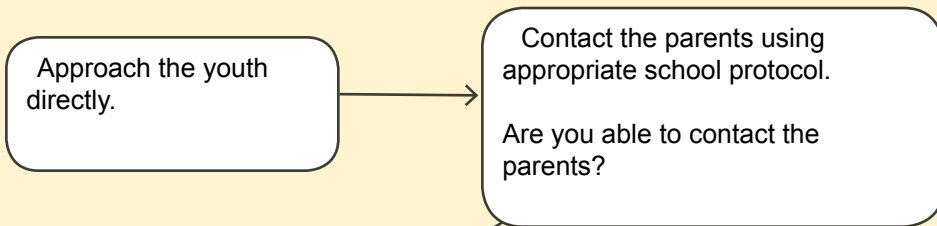
Reaction/Statements by Parent, Guardian, or Child

- Exhibiting anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mention of staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in a motel, or comments, such as
 - “I don’t remember the name of the last school.”
 - “We’ve been moving around a lot.”
 - “Our address is new; I can’t remember it”
 - “We’re staying with relatives until we get settled.”
 - “We’re going through a bad time.”

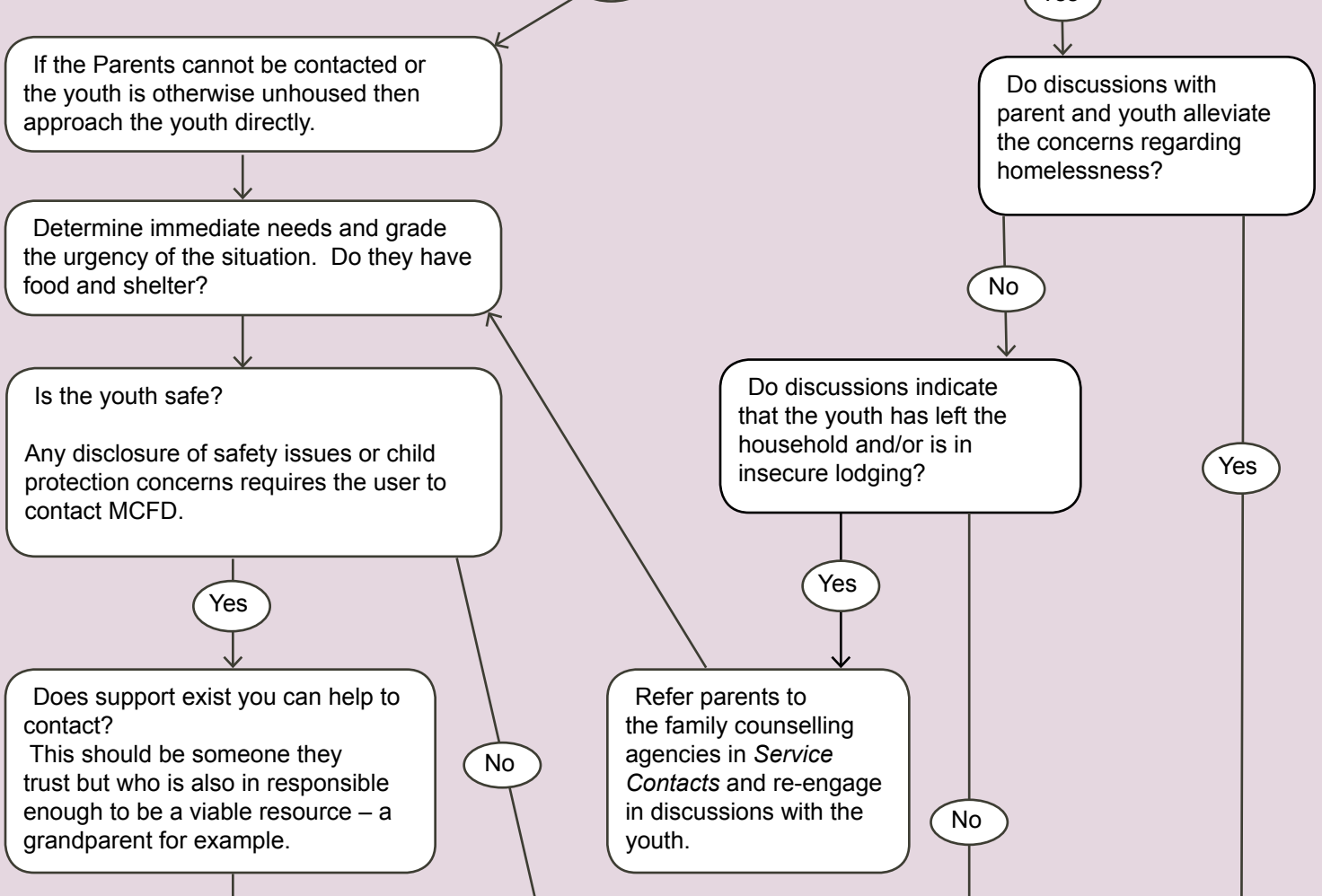
Course of Action

This Flowchart is intended as a guide. Please use your discretion to adapt to your own circumstances. If you suspect a youth is facing homelessness then approach the youth directly. Follow the advice in 'Tips & Tools for Approaching Youth & Families'.

Discovery



Evaluation



Response

