

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS



## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TALK TO MY KIDS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS?

Children often know more than we give them credit for. If you live in Seattle, it is likely that your child will witness homelessness early on. Homelessness is a crisis in Seattle and is only going to grow due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your children will likely go to school with children who are experiencing homelessness. Before talking to your kids, it is important for you to be educated on homelessness yourself. Here are some quick facts & common myths to be aware of.

### Common Myths:

**All people who are homeless are using drugs or mentally ill.** There are many reasons that people do not have homes. Drug abuse and mental illness are often a result of the trauma people experience on the street, not a cause of homelessness.

**People who are homeless are dangerous or violent.** People who are homeless are actually more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators of it.

**People who are homeless are lazy, they just need to get a job.** Many people work multiple jobs and are still unable to afford rent. Finding employment (for those who don't work) is difficult without a home address, no clean clothes, no place to shower, and the stigma of being homeless.

**People choose to be homeless.** Immediate access to independent housing with support services is welcomed by most people who are homeless. Some people may reject the option of crowded, unsafe shelters, but not housing.

## QUICK FACTS\*

**>11,751** folks homeless in Seattle

**>3,743** families homeless in Seattle

**>955** unaccompanied youth homeless in Seattle

**BIPOC & LGBTQ+** individuals disproportionately experience homelessness.

**47%** of households that rent in the Seattle metro area spend more than 30% of their income on rent alone.



## TALKING WITH CHILDREN AGES 2-6

### **Provide a simple explanation.**

It's best to respond in a way that a small child can understand. Some people don't have enough money to pay for a house. Avoid discussing additional components of homelessness such as mental illness or substance abuse. This will only confuse your child.

### **Use people-first language.**

Labeling people by their situation perpetuates the stigma and the myths that we shared above. Try to say "people experiencing homelessness" when you can instead of "the homeless" or "homeless people".

### **Empower your child to help in a way that is meaningful to them.**

Your child may feel a desire to do something. At this age, money may be too abstract of a concept for children to understand. Donating toys or picking out food to give to a non-profit is a more concrete way to teach your child to help.

### **Encourage your child to "look for the helpers"**

After acknowledging the sadness of the situation, reassure your child of their own safety. Let your children know that there are organizations who help people who are homeless find a place to live and offer food & shelter.

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“WHEN I WAS A BOY AND I WOULD SEE SCARY THINGS IN THE NEWS, MY MOTHER WOULD SAY TO ME, ‘LOOK FOR THE HELPERS. YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND PEOPLE WHO ARE HELPING.’”

”

### **Express empathy and sadness.**

Your child will learn the importance of caring for others' troubles through your modeling.





## TALKING WITH CHILDREN AGES 7-12

### Common Questions (and answers!)

#### What does homeless mean?

Homeless means that a person doesn't have a home. When someone doesn't have a home, they have to sleep outside or in a shelter with lots of other people.

#### Why are people homeless?

I don't know **OR** they don't have enough money to pay for a house.

It's okay to not have all the answers. The truth is, we know about the underlying causes of homelessness, but we don't know why any individual is homeless.

### Tips & Tricks:

#### Actions speak louder than words.

Take note of how you react when you see homelessness. Are you acting from a place of fear or compassion?

#### Give your kids straight answers.

Why is that man sleeping outside?  
Because he doesn't have a home.

**Model empathy.** Direct the conversation to the underlying problems that cause and perpetuate homelessness, not individual choices.

#### Get involved as a family!

Volunteering is a great way to encourage empathy and direct impact on your community. You can have your children pick out toys or go to the store to buy toys to donate to a local organization.

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**“LOVE AND  
COMPASSION ARE  
NECESSITIES, NOT  
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CANNOT SURVIVE.**

”

-Dalai Lama

#### Use people-first language.

Labeling people by their situation perpetuates the stigma and the myths that we shared above. Try to say "people experiencing homelessness" when you can instead of "the homeless" or "homeless people". This is a small change you can make to help your child understand empathy.

# ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS

## Children's Books:

Fly Away Home (Eve Bunting) ages 5-8

A Shelter in our Car (Monica Gunning) ages 6+

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen (Dyanne Disalvo Ryan)

Maddi's Fridge (Lois Brandt) ages 4-8

A Chair for my Mother (Vera B Williams) ages 4-8

Those Shoes (Maribeth Boelts) ages 5-8

Tight Times (Barbara Shook Hazen) ages 4-9

Last Stop on Market Street (Matt de la Pena) ages 3-5

Still a Family (Brenda Reeves Sturgis) ages 4-8

Poverty & Hunger: Children in our World Series (Louise Spilsbury) ages 5-8

Lulu and the Hunger Monster (Erik Talkin) ages 5-9

On Our Streets: Our First Talk About Poverty (Dr. Jillian Roberts) ages 6-8

The Lunch Thief: A Story of Hunger, Homelessness & Friendship (Anne C. Bromley) ages 9-12

## Coloring pages:

Page 5 & 6 of this media kit

[Matthew 25:35](#)

[Matthew 25:35](#)

[Matthew 6:19-20](#)

## Seattle Area Service Providers:

Mary's Place

Street Youth Ministries

Union Gospel Mission

ROOTS Young Adult Shelter

Teen Feed

## Projects:

Lemonade stand/ Yard sale & donate proceeds

Choose toys to give to a local family shelter

Pick out food at the grocery store to give to a local food bank

Host a cold weather drive for clothing items/tents/sleeping bags

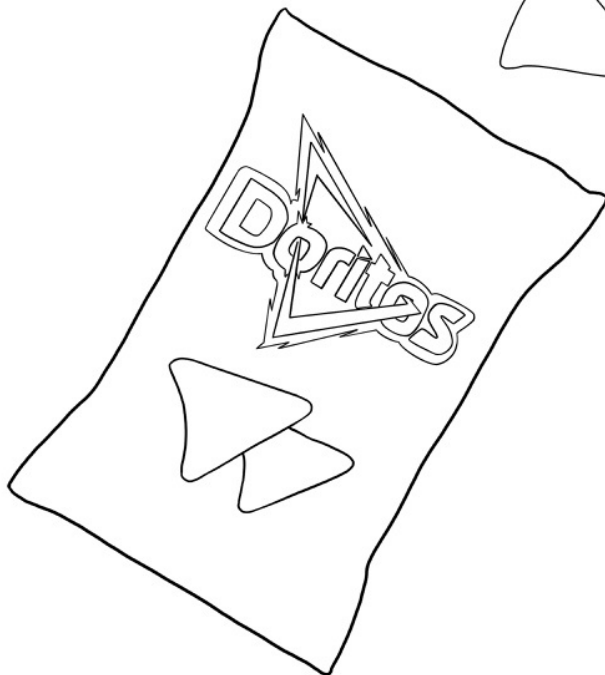
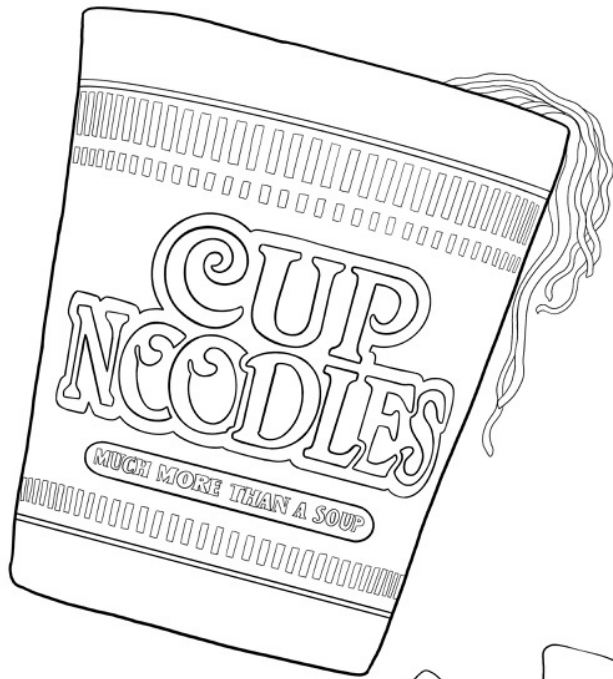
Create hygiene/snack kits in zip-lock bags to hand out to folks on the side of the road



# What do people DO at Drop-in?



# Which Drop-in snack is your favorite?



## **Sources:**

[The 12 Biggest Myths about Homelessness in America \(nyu.edu\)](#).

[The Roots of the Crisis - Homelessness | seattle.gov](#)

[How To Talk Homelessness With Your Kids | United Way of King County \(uwkc.org\)](#).

[How to Talk to Your Kids About Homelessness | ParentMap](#)

[Homelessness Fact Sheet and Lesson Plan for Kindergarten-Second Grade Students \(nationalhomeless.org\)](#).

[14 Ways to Effectively Explain Homelessness and Poverty to Your Child | Wellspring Family Services \(wellspringfs.org\)](#).