HOW TO HELP A HOMELESS PERSON
Should I call 911 or 311?

WHEN SHOULD YOU CALL 911?

It is not a crime to be homeless in NYC. But if you feel the person is in danger or poses a threat to him/herself or others, avoid approaching the individual and call 911.

What happens when you call 911? The NYPD will come within a few minutes. They also have a Crisis Outreach and Support Unit that focuses on assisting homeless individuals both directly and in partnership with outreach workers and city agencies. Police cannot force individuals off the street if they are behaving lawfully.

WHEN SHOULD YOU CONTACT 311?

If you feel safe and comfortable approaching the individual, ask if he or she needs assistance. If you would like to get help for someone and it is not an emergency, contact 311 by phone or the NYC 311 app to initiate a Service Request.

What happens when you contact 311? Be prepared to provide the individual’s location and a description of their appearance, clothing, etc. An outreach team will be dispatched and should arrive within an hour. Outreach teams cannot force an individual to engage or accept services. However, the teams do return to the location to continue to engage the individual and encourage them to accept help. A goal of the Department of Homeless Services is to engage and track all individuals on the street and ultimately help them accept services and transition to shelter.
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HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Offering money is not recommended, as it may discourage people from seeking shelter or other assistance, and many panhandlers are not homeless. Instead:

- Contact 311 (via phone/app)
- For outreach in the subway, Grand Central or Penn Stations contact the BRC helpline: 212-533-5151
- Consider offering food/water
- Direct the person to services: offer a Street Sheet, the NCS guide to resources on the Upper East Side, or the DHS Pocket Guide to Accessing Homeless Services
- If you feel comfortable, offer an ear to listen

HOW ELSE CAN YOU HELP?

- **Donate** cash or make an in-kind donation (e.g., coats, food, supplies) to a homeless services organization.
- **Volunteer** with a meal program or homeless services organization. Organize a drive to collect badly needed items (e.g., coats, toiletries, or socks).
- **Advocate** with your elected officials for supportive housing, eviction prevention measures to keep people from becoming homeless, and more government funding for homeless services. Join your local community board to support services in your neighborhood or organize to provide them.