

Common Signs of Homelessness

Lack of Continuity in Education

- Attendance at many different schools
- Lack of records needed for enrollment
- Gaps in skill development

Poor Health/Nutrition

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

Transportation and Attendance Problems

- Erratic attendance or tardiness
- Inability to contact parents
- Numerous absences
- Avoidance of class field trips

Poor Hygiene

- Wearing the same clothes for several days
- Lack of shower facility or washers to stay clean

Not Ready for Class

- Lack of basic school supplies
- Concern for the safety of belongings
- Incomplete or missing homework

Social and Behavioral Cues

- Change in behavior
- “Old” beyond years
- Protective of parents
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self-esteem
- Difficult or avoidance of making friends
- Difficulty trusting people
- Need for immediate gratification

Reactions / Statements by Parents, Guardian, or Child

- Anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mention of staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in a motel
- Comments such as:
 - “I don’t remember the name of my previous school.”
 - “We’ve been moving around a lot.”
 - “Our address is new; I can’t remember it” (may hide lack of a permanent address).
 - “We’re going through a bad time right now.”

Note: These are general guidelines. There is significant variability among the school-age homeless population. Warning signs adapted from flyers developed by the Illinois and Pennsylvania Departments of Education.