

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act is a federal law that protects the educational rights of students in temporary housing.

It defines “**homeless** children and youths” as any student who **lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**.



Teachers play a critical role in creating a classroom environment that is safe and supportive for all students. For students in temporary housing, a safe and supportive environment includes sensitivity to the stress and trauma that often accompanies homelessness. Below are tips for teachers to help students in temporary housing succeed in school.

1. KNOW THE SIGNS:

Be familiar with common characteristics of students in temporary housing including:

- Enrollment at multiple schools, gaps in learning, attendance problems.
- Poor hygiene, lack of preparedness for class, extreme exhaustion.
- Ongoing behavior challenges as *these may be a result of chronic stress or stress related to housing instability*.
- Social cues such as extreme shyness, clinginess, difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships, “old” beyond years, uncharacteristically aggressive or withdrawn.
- Lack of participation in class/field trips and/or afterschool activities.

2. TAKE A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE APPROACH:

NYS-TEACHS offers a “[Matrix of Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for School Success](#).” A few highlights includes:

- Be sensitive to the stigma of homelessness (e.g. *talk to the student privately about his/her living situation and use the term “temporarily housed” rather than “homeless”*).
- Make the student feel safe and welcome (e.g. *deliberately connect the student with a mentoring program or other extracurricular activity; make snacks and/or hygiene supplies available; praise effort and strengths in order to build confidence; give the student opportunities to lead; emphasize partnership, not power; etc.*).
- Ensure that the student has every opportunity to participate in school activities. Consider using Title I funds to provide school/project supplies, cover field trip fees, purchase uniforms, etc.

3. INFORM AND CONNECT:

- Students in temporary housing have specific education rights, including immediate enrollment, free meals, and transportation. If you suspect that a student is living in temporary housing, contact your district’s McKinney-Vento liaison about next steps. If you are not sure who your liaison is, call NYS-TEACHS at 800-388-2014.
- Make appropriate staff aware of any student living in a temporary housing situation so they can assist with any health/social/academic needs.

Remember, **all students**, not just those in temporary housing, benefit greatly from a positive classroom environment that is both safe and supportive. The time and energy put into creating this type of classroom environment will result in higher levels of success for everyone.