

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clinginess, difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships, “old” beyond years, uncharacteristically aggressive or withdrawn.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.