



Crisis Community Advocate – talking to young people toolkit



Working together to end homelessness

Using this toolkit

- Throughout this toolkit are suggestions of activities you can use with young people and links to the relevant activity sheets. These are optional based on the time and resources you have available.
- We have broken the toolkit down into themes and provided suggestions of discussion content
- If you need any further help, please email community.advocate@crisis.org.uk.



How to approach a conversation about homelessness

Talking about homelessness with children/young people helps them process what they see, form compassionate attitudes and understand the role we all play in our communities. The Crisis Community Advocate team are here to support you, so don't hesitate to contact us to chat through talking to young people before you do it.

- **Keep it simple, honest and age appropriate**

For younger children, keep explanations clear and gentle. Avoid overwhelming details and reassure them that being without a home is something no one chooses for fun. It is often due to difficult circumstances. Example response:

“Some people don't have a home to live in right now. This can happen for a lot of reasons, maybe they lost their job, got ill or don't have family to help. It's very hard and we should be kind.”

- **Encourage questions and curiosity**

Let children lead the conversation with their questions. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers. *“That's a really good question, let's learn more about this together”* shows it is okay to be curious and caring.

- **Focus on empathy, not fear**

Children might ask “Will that happen to us?”. It is okay to provide comfort. Encouraging empathy rather than fear builds emotional resilience and community minded thinking. Example response:

“We're safe and have a home, but it's important to care for others who don't. And we can do things to help.”

- **Talk about ways to take action together**

- **Be considerate of the fact there may be children in the room who are experiencing homelessness through living in temporary accommodation. If they need support, please involve the teacher/group leader.**



Theme 1 – understanding what home means to them and what homelessness is.



What does home mean to you?

Activities that can help facilitate conversation on what does home mean to you?

Young children (under 10)- Build a bug house activity

Older children – what does home mean to you?

Purpose – to understand the key important elements of a home:

- Food
- Warmth
- Safety and security
- Somewhere to sleep
- Be with family
- Pets
- Somewhere to play, be creative, do homework, relax
- Somewhere to have fun, play games and connect online
- Somewhere to come back to after school

Discussion point – Everyone should have a safe, decent home. This is more than the basics of somewhere dry to live, but includes feeling safe, secure, having support and being happy. Homelessness is not just people living on the street, but people who haven't got a safe place they can call home and where they can keep their things and feel safe, for example sleeping on someone's sofa, in a car or in a temporary home like a B&B or hotel.

Why do people become homeless?

Activities that can help facilitate conversation on why people become homeless?

Activity - a safe bridge or In the net

Purpose – to understand the reasons people become homeless and the impact of pressure

Discussion point – people become homeless for many reasons. Ask the young people to call out if they can think of any of those reasons.

Reasons include

- People losing their job
- Illness
- Things costing more including the cost of home and bills increasing,
- Falling out with their family
- Lack of affordable housing

These things cause **pressure** on people, and this can **push** someone into homelessness.



Theme 2 – understanding the impact of homelessness.



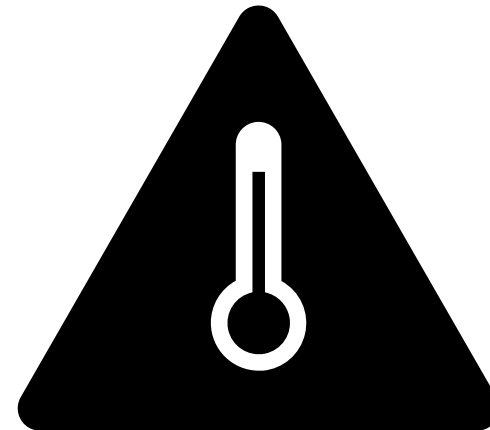
Activity - Would you rather?

This activity is to help build empathy and understanding around homelessness through facing the nearly impossible choices that some people are forced to make every day. The slide is hyperlinked to the pdf of the activity.

For each question people have to make a choice and place themselves on one side of the room or the other or stand up/sit down. Pick on a couple of people to give their answers.

The idea is to start with general questions and then build into the topic of homelessness. You can use the examples below or come up with your own!

[Activity sheet](#) – which contains further explanations and a list of would you rather suggestions



How does homelessness impact on people?

Refer back to the things that the young people said home meant to them. Ask them to think about how it might feel if they didn't have those things?

Be conscious there may be young people in the room experiencing homelessness, for example living in temporary accommodation.

Examples include:

- *Not having their own space, somewhere to keep their things*
- *Not feeling safe*
- *Difficult to do homework/concentrate*
- *Living away from family or friends*
- *Parents being stressed*
- *Feel sad, lonely, isolated*

Being homeless can mean it is harder to find or keep a job, affect your mental or physical health including making it harder to access doctors, nurses and dentists, impact on relationships and leave you feeling isolated.





Theme 3 – how can they help someone who is homeless?



Everyone has a right to a safe, stable home – these things are important for everyone to have. You could relate this to rules they understand – like not hitting or being mean to others and how this is a right everyone has. Likewise, everyone has the right to feel safe, just like the rule we have that we shouldn't hurt each other.

Explain if they see someone sleeping on the streets, they should seek their parent's permission before doing anything (whilst we don't want to put young people off, it is important a safety-first approach is taken). They should then:

- Be kind and caring
- Say hello – often people who are sleeping rough feel invisible and ignored and just being treated like a person can make a difference
- Buy them a drink/something to eat
- Learn more about homelessness
- Share what you have learnt with other people
- Do things to help homeless charities such as fundraising

What to do if someone they know is experiencing homelessness:

- Be kind, caring and compassionate
- Understand there may be things they cannot do such as attend parties or play dates
- Learn more about homelessness, but understand everyone's experience is different





Theme 4 – what does Crisis do?



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What does Crisis do?

You may want to play the video or explain:

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. Crisis helps people by helping with:

- Finding a job
- Finding a home
- Helping access health services
- At Christmas providing food, support, a friendly face

Crisis also talks to important people in government to try and get the changes made needed to end homelessness.

Link for video <https://youtu.be/n0sa8-dXHUQ>





Theme 5 – FAQ's



Children ask all sorts of difficult questions all the time and while we don't want to upset them it's important to answer their questions directly while still using age-appropriate language. Children often ask very big/broad questions based on people or things they have seen; sometimes it helps to break down a big question to figure out where the question has come from. However, we don't know everyone's story so it's best to talk in broad terms. Some of the most common questions from young people are below:

'Why do homeless people take drugs?'

First, it's important to tell them that not all people experiencing homelessness take drugs or drink a lot of alcohol. We actually did some research that said only 1 in 4 people experiencing homelessness use drugs a lot. (source: [Crisis Skylight Final Report of the University of York evaluation](#)) But being homeless is really really hard so some people do to help them cope. This is why we want to get people into homes as quick as possible.

'Why do homeless people have dogs if they can't afford a home?'

You can talk about how dogs offer company and friendship. Dogs love being outside, going on walks. Maybe ask if they have a dog, the best bits about having a dog and when the dog is most happy (with their family and when they get to go outside and on walks). Mention that there are other charities that help people who are experiencing homelessness dogs with food, grooming etc such as All4Paws in Edinburgh and Street Paws and Street Vets.



‘Why can’t the government just give everyone a home?’

This is a really big question, it’s important not to get too political when answering it. Simply put, the government could give everyone a home, but it’s really complicated because anyone can become homeless and so it’s hard to keep track of everyone that is entering homelessness. However, we are trying to help the government make it less complicated and put the systems in place so that everyone is looked after, and no one gets missed out.





Homelessness is not inevitable and we
know that together we can end it.



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