



Referring Young Children to Early Childhood Development Programs: Checklist for Homeless Liaisons

As the back-to-school rush gets underway, school district homeless liaisons are busy working on outreach to families in the community, ensuring students are identified, and securing all the items necessary for immediate enrollment and attendance.

But what about the younger siblings of school-aged children? Early childhood development programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, Early Intervention, and Home Visiting can mitigate the traumatic effects of homelessness, preventing long-term developmental delays and academic struggle. Yet many families experiencing homelessness face barriers when trying to access these programs. In fact, [less than 5% of children experiencing homelessness are enrolled in Head Start, Early Head Start, or a district-funded program.](#)

Homeless liaisons have a responsibility under the McKinney-Vento Act to identify and refer younger children to early learning programs and are uniquely positioned to make those connections, but it can be difficult to know where to start. Use this checklist as a guide for ensuring young children experiencing homelessness are enrolled.

1. Identifying Younger Children Experiencing Homelessness

- Does your school district have a process in place for asking if there are younger siblings (aged 0-5, or otherwise not yet school aged) in the family? For example, many school districts include a checkbox on enrollment forms to ask if there are other children in the household.
- Do your identification questionnaires and conversations include asking about any younger siblings?
- Do others in your district know to contact you if they become aware of younger siblings experiencing homelessness? This could include IDEA, Migrant Education, English Learner, Title IX, and other programs.
- Does your identification process include working with youth experiencing homelessness who are current or expectant parents and whose child(ren) will need care?

2. Referring Younger Children to Early Childhood Development Programs

- Do you know your local early childhood partners? You can use the following tools to find programs in your community:

- [Head Start and Early Head Start Locator Tool](#) (for children 0-4 and expectant parents)
- [Child Care Resource and Referral Agency Finder](#) (for children 0-12)
- [Early Intervention State Contacts](#) (for children 0-3 with developmental delays and disabilities)
- Do you have a system for making referrals to early childhood programs? The [Referral App for Children Experiencing Homelessness](#), developed by SchoolHouse Connection and the National Head Start Association, might be a helpful tool.
- Do you have early childhood programs descriptions available to help families understand the services provided and benefits of enrollment? [Project Hope in Virginia developed these resources, tools, and tip sheets](#) for homeless liaisons and early childhood educators.
- Do you know your [state policies for removing barriers so that families experiencing homelessness can access programs](#)? Many states offer extended time for providing documentation such as immunization requirements, and waivers for work requirements and co-payments. Check to see how your state makes it easier for families experiencing homelessness so that you can reassure them.

3. Reporting and Follow-up

- How do you track and share data about younger siblings experiencing homelessness?
- How do early development programs in your community share their data with you? Head Start, Early Head Start, and federally-funded child care programs are required to collect data on homelessness, and many home visiting programs also collect this information.