

# Common Signs of Homelessness

National Center for  
Homeless Education  
at SERVE

*Note: While these are considered common signs, please recognize that they only offer general guidance. There is significant variability within the school-age homeless population. Individual students may differ significantly from the following general characteristics.*

## ***Lack of Educational Continuity***

- Attendance at many different schools
- Missing records needed to enroll
- Inability to pay fees
- Gaps in skill development
- Mistaken assessment of abilities
- Poor organizational skills
- Poor ability to conceptualize

## ***Poor Health/Nutrition***

- Missing immunizations & medical records
- Unmet medical & dental needs
- Respiratory problems
- Skin rashes
- Chronic hunger or food hoarding
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)

## ***Transportation & Attendance Problems***

- Erratic attendance and tardiness
- Numerous absences
- Lack of participation in afterschool activities
- Lack of participation in field trips
- Inability to contact parents

## ***Poor Hygiene***

- Lacking shower facilities/washers, etc.
- Wearing clothes several days
- Inconsistent grooming

## ***Lack of Personal Space After School***

- Consistent lack of preparation for school
- Incomplete or missing homework

- Lacking basic school supplies
- Loss of books and supplies on regular basis
- Elevated concern for safety of belongings

## ***Social and Behavioral Concerns***

- A marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self-esteem
- Extreme shyness
- Unwilling to form relationships with peers & teachers
- Difficulty socializing at recess or lunch periods
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- “Old” beyond years
- Overly protective of parents
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Fear of abandonment
- School phobia (afraid to leave parent)
- Anxiety, especially late in the school day

## ***Reactions or Statements by Parents, Guardians, or Students***

- Exhibiting anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Avoidance of questions related to current address
- Statements about staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in motels & campgrounds
- Statements such as:
  - “I don’t remember the name of the last school.”
  - “We’ve been moving around a lot.”
  - “Our address is new; I can’t remember it.”
  - “We’re staying with relatives until we get settled.”
  - “We’re going through a bad time right now.”

*Adapted from flyers developed by the Illinois & Pennsylvania Departments of Education. For more information on homeless education, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at: [nche.ed.gov](http://nche.ed.gov)*