

# Guide to Homeless Students

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# Table of Contents

- Introduction
- Glossary
- Professional Friendly Podcast
- Suggestions
- Additional Resources
- References

## **Introduction**

Hello. My name is Austin Wallace. I am currently obtaining my Master's Degree in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. For one of my graduate classes, Emotional & behavioral Disorders in Childhood and Adolescents, I completed a study guide to a podcast I created on homeless students. I created this guide to inform all educators about the hardships that homeless students endure, and what they can do to help.

Within this guide, you will find interesting information on homeless students, and useful advice on how you can lend a helping hand. You will find in this study guide that I included a glossary of terms so that you may understand my podcast in its entirety, suggestions on what to do if you have a homeless student and additional resources if you wish to seek further information on this subject.

I hope you enjoy the information I provided. I think it is important for educators to be educated, and prepared in case a situation such as this one occurs in your classroom. To listen to my podcast and find out more information on emotional and behavioral disorders in the classroom, please visit [www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu). It is an excellent website that offers support to children and teenagers with a behavioral or emotional disorder.

## **Glossary**

Family Housing Fund (FHFund)

Homeless Children Education Fund (HCEF)

Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)

## **Professional Friendly Podcast**

Hey, my name is Austin Wallace and welcome to my podcast. Today we are talking about a serious issue that is on the rise in our country and around the world. The subject at hand is **“homeless children in the classroom.”** There are over 1 million children living in the streets in the United States. Homeless children are not just behind in the classroom but they are behind in all aspects of life. They falter in their physical health and their emotional, behavioral and cognitive development all together as well (Stronge & Tenhouse 1990). Some quick statistics on homeless children in the classroom: 44% of homeless children have two or more developmental delays, nearly 40% have emotional and behavioral problems, 50% homeless children have two or more illnesses a month, 75% are performing below a grade level in school, 43% are held back a year in school (FhFund 1999).

Two major issues complicating the education of homeless children are residency requirements and guardianship requirements. Residency requirements are unattainable by homeless children. It can delay the enrollment of a child that does not have a permanent address or does not reside in the school district of the school they wish to attend. Guardianship requirements can deny a child that does not have a legal parent or guardian’s signature enrollment into school. These requirements also can prohibit children, from enrolling if their parent or legal guardian does not reside in the same school district (Stronge & Tenhouse 1990). Most homeless children have been separated from their families making it difficult to claim residency and meet these guardianship requirements. For the children that are able to get into school, they face new barriers and issues that contribute to their poor performance.

According to the FHFund, children, while homeless, have very little access, if any to health care. Without healthcare one-third of homeless children lack essential immunizations for school and then later are exposed to disease and illness. Financial problems will also hinder a homeless child, there are fees associated with textbooks, labs, lockers, field trip expenses, gym clothes, school supplies, transportation cost etc; for homeless children all of these expenses can serve as a financial barrier.

Academic performance among homeless children is usually very poor and below grade level. The Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) tells us that 75% of homeless children have at least one major developmental delay and 44% have two or more. Unsupported developmental delays in homeless children has lead to 43% being held back yearly in school (Stronge & Tenhouse 1990). Nearly 30% of homeless children and their families move three or more times in one year. This causes the child to attend three or more schools in one year and leads to excessive absences (Fhfund 1999). Between moving, change of schools, and absences, 75% of homeless children perform below grade level. 74% are a grade level below in reading, 72% are a grade level below in spelling, 54% are a grade level below in math and 25% of them are in special classes (Stronge & Tenhouse 1999). Homeless children also experience more severe cases of anxiety depression (47%) and aggressive behavior (36%). Homeless children usually become very insecure, distrusting, and irritable.

In order for educators to begin to aid their children with this issue they must understand and address their social and psychological needs. In particular, educators must assist in decreasing their student's personal stress, and increasing social acceptance, and self-esteem (Stronge 1992). School teachers can establish order in their student's lives along with stability. Educators need to provide an environment that is a safe haven along with a sense of continuity

and belonging. Educators should also be aware of the stigmas that other students will place on homeless children in the classroom. If a homeless child is not aware of certain social norms, or is different in appearance or dress or has poor academic performance, he/she can ostracize. Finally, help build student's self-esteem. If students look upon themselves as failures they will have a harder time achieving any academic accolades. Stronge tells us that homeless children need understanding, not sympathy. Understanding is essential in the development of trust, and trust is the precursor to a productive educational environment (Stronge 1992).

## Suggestions

- Understand and address their social and psychological needs.
- Assist in decreasing their student's personal stress, and increasing social acceptance, and self-esteem
- Be aware of the stigmas that other students will place on homeless children in the classroom.
- Provide an environment that is a safe haven along with a sense of continuity
- Establish order in their student's lives along with stability.

## **Get Involved**

Volunteer work in shelters and homeless intervention programs for children

Donate funds or supplies to organizations that support homeless youth

-Homeless Children's Education Fund ([www.homelessfund.org](http://www.homelessfund.org))

-Rebecca's Community ([www.homeless.org.au](http://www.homeless.org.au))

-[www.oneworld.org](http://www.oneworld.org)

-[www.yapi.org](http://www.yapi.org)

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