

# Common Signs of Homelessness

*Note: While these are considered warning 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 Continuity in Education**

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

## **Poor Health/Nutrition**

- Lack of immunizations and/or immunization records
- Unmet medical and dental needs
- Increased vulnerability to colds & flu
- Respiratory problems
- Skin rashes
- Chronic hunger (may hoard food)
- Fatigue (may fall asleep in class)

## **Transportation and Attendance Problems**

- Erratic attendance and tardiness
- Numerous absences
- Lack of participation in after-school activities
- Lack of participation in field trips
- Absences on days when students bring special treats from home
- Inability to contact parents

## **Poor Hygiene**

- Lack of shower facilities/washers, etc.
- Wearing same clothes for several days
- Inconsistent grooming – well-groomed one day and poorly groomed the next

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

- Consistent lack of preparation for school
- Incomplete or missing homework (no place to work or keep supplies)

- Unable to complete special projects (no access to supplies)
- Lack of basic school supplies
- Loss of books and other supplies on a regular basis
- Concern for safety of belongings
- Refusing invitations from classmates

## **Social and Behavioral Concerns**

- A marked change in behavior
- Poor/short attention span
- Poor self esteem
- Extreme shyness
- Unwillingness to risk forming relationships with peers and teachers
- Difficulty socializing at recess
- Difficulty trusting people
- Aggression
- “Old” beyond years
- Protective of parents
- Clinging behavior
- Developmental delays
- Fear of abandonment
- School phobia (student wants to be with parent)
- Need for immediate gratification
- Anxiety late in the school day

## **Reaction/Statements by Parent, Guardian, or Child**

- Exhibiting anger or embarrassment when asked about current address
- Mention of staying with grandparents, other relatives, friends, or in a motel or comments, 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.”



Common signs adapted from flyers developed by the Illinois and Pennsylvania Departments of Education. For more information on homeless education, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.