

Are you facing becoming homeless?

This pamphlet has been produced by Clyst Vale Community College Counselling Service and is intended to provide useful information to a young person facing homelessness. It is not a definitive guide.

There are two ways a young person may become homeless, one is by choice, the other is by losing or being thrown out of your home.

Your age is important...

Your age plays an important part in deciding how much support you will be given by agencies like Social Services and other support groups.

Basically, if you are under 16 years old you will be referred to Social Services, no matter what the reason for leaving home may be.

Social Services have an obligation to find you a place to stay. This means they must take responsibility for you and find you somewhere to stay.

Often, this may be a very short term solution, like staying overnight in a hostel for instance.

While the law states clearly Social Services must act on your behalf, how helpful they will be can depend on how close you are to your 16th birthday.

The closer to 16 years old you are, the less helpful they may be able to be.

16 years old or over

At this point Social Services have no obligation to re-house you.

Choosing to become homeless

A few reasons why young people choose to become homeless are:

- Arguments in the family
- Violence in the family
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Pregnancy
- Running away from care
- A stressful situation, like the death of someone you love

Choosing to give up your home is a huge decision and is best considered with the help of a supportive adult, like a member of school staff or a counsellor.

You can also talk to someone from Childline – 0800 1111.

If you are going to leave home, tell a teacher as soon as you can, try to avoid leaving it till the end of the day as it can take a while to sort out. But, even if this is the case, ask a member of staff for help.

If you choose to leave home Social Services are not obliged to offer you any re-housing.

18 years old or over

Whether you have been forced out of your home or have chosen to leave, the government is under no obligation to offer you special treatment. You will be treated like any other homeless adult.

Alternatives – any age

There are a few alternatives possible for homeless young people, but each depends on individual circumstances.

- Consider staying with a member of your extended family like grandparents or aunts and uncles. Even if this is only for a few days it may provide enough time for things to cool down at home, or for you to consider all your options
- Staying at a friend's house. Again, this may be an excellent option for a few days while options are considered.

Either of these options may buy you a few extra day's relief. Don't waste them! Get in touch with the school or the counsellors as soon as possible so we can try to help you.

Things to avoid

It can be tempting to think how much easier life would be if you just lived in a tent in a field somewhere...?

There are many reasons why this is not a good idea, mainly for your safety and the practical problems associated with day-to-day living.

If you live in a tent there will be extremely limited protection against harm from other people. You may need permission to erect a tent on someone else's land. Preparing food, keeping yourself clean and attending school may prove very difficult.

Living on the street is also a dangerous practise and can lead to you being at serious risk of harm from others, as well as difficulties finding a place to sleep, staying warm, access to washing facilities etc.

Ideally, resolving any issue at home is the most practical solution to imminent loss of accommodation.

The school is willing to intervene on your behalf and act as a 'go between' to try and resolve any conflicts.

This might mean finding a new way to relate to parents or guardians. The counsellors will also offer you their support.

Biting the bullet

Given all the difficulties and dangers around leaving your home, you may be better off considering sorting out what problems are making you want to leave.

Remember, by law, parents are there to help you, not insult or abuse you. If something needs to be changed at home in order to make things more bearable for you do please come and speak to one of the counsellors.

Useful web site

<http://www.childline.org.uk/Info/HomeFamilies/Pages/HomelessnessRunaway.aspx>
(Childline)