



# NYSTEACHS

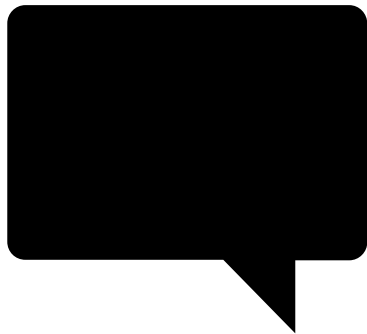
NEW YORK STATE TECHNICAL AND EDUCATION  
ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

# Navigating Conversations with Families



Presented by the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS)

# Introduction



# Using a Trauma-Sensitive Approach for Challenging Conversations

- Trauma sensitivity is not about treating trauma symptoms.
- Trauma sensitivity is about creating the environment in which a person is:

1. **Approached with empathy** and understanding

2. **Made to feel safe** and supported both physically and emotionally

3. **Empowered and viewed as a strong** and resilient survivor with strengths to share



## How can you incorporate *trauma sensitivity*?

1. Provide a safe and comforting environment
2. Be empathetic
3. Avoid blame or shame
4. Focus on partnership, not control or authority
5. Focus on student and family strengths (rather than weaknesses or challenges)





## Remember:

*Trauma sensitivity* can be practiced by anyone and can be used in many situations.

# Communication is Key



- Conversations about a student's living situation are *highly sensitive*.
  - Have conversations about students' housing arrangements in **private spaces**.
  - **Avoid using the word "homeless."**
- **Gather information about the student's living situation** from the perspective of the parent, guardian, and/or youth.
  - **Provide context** for your questions.

# FERPA

Information about a student's living situation cannot be considered *Directory Information* under FERPA

- In general, **no talking to others outside of school/district staff about where the student is living without consent** of the parent/eligible youth.
- Feedback from students

# I feel comfortable...

Extremely  
uncomfortable

Extremely  
comfortable



- Comfortable = prepared, relatively low anxiety
- Comfortable does not mean happy or excited



# Guidelines and Goals

- Your responses are only for you. You will *not be required* to share your specific answers.
- There are no “correct” answers. It is expected that reactions will vary.
- The goals for this activity:
  - Think about topics that may need additional reflection, research, and/or preparation.
  - Explore why you might feel uncomfortable. *Remember that it is expected that you will feel uncomfortable talking about many of these topics, especially with families and youth you have recently met.*
  - Identify resources that may help you become more at ease, more informed, or more prepared to have these conversations.

# First Reactions?

# What can I do to feel more comfortable or more prepared?

- Work off of a pre-written list of questions or topics (e.g. NCHE's *Determining Eligibility* brief)
- Prepare a comprehensive list of resources to hand to parents and youth (You can use our template as a starting point)
- Participate in professional development
- Read and share articles with colleagues
- Create a list of internal referrals, such as referrals to the school counselor to handle mental health or trauma
- Take time to reflect on areas of discomfort

## Spotlight on NYS-TEACHS Resources: Tips for Navigating Challenging Conversations

### Challenging Conversation Topics Include:

- Family providing vague or generalized answers to questions about where they are living
- Questions about adequacy of the living arrangement
- Questions about continued eligibility where the family has been doubled-up for an extended time
- Different versions of the story
- Lack of enrollment documentation
- Unaccompanied youth

### McKinney-Vento Quick Tip Series

### TIPS FOR NAVIGATING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act is a federal law that protects the educational rights of students in temporary housing. It defines “homeless children and youths” as any student who **lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**



Conversations about a family’s housing situation can be tense, uncomfortable, or invasive. This tip sheet provides trauma-sensitive strategies and conversation starters for some of the most common conversations you will encounter with students, families, and district administration.

THE CHALLENGE	WHY IT'S CHALLENGING	TRAUMA-SENSITIVE STRATEGIES AND CONVERSATION STARTERS
When asked about a current address or living situation, the family gives only vague or generalized answers.	This is challenging because liaisons and/or district staff need specific housing information in order to make an informed decision about McKinney-Vento eligibility. Vague answers may be misinterpreted as a “false story,” leading someone to make an incorrect determination. Additionally, a family may feel under attack or become upset as a result of numerous clarifying questions.	If you need more information from a family about their housing situation, first explain <b>WHY</b> you need housing details before you ask any additional questions. You may also want to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite the family to speak with you in a private setting. Avoid talking at the front desk or registration counter.</li> <li>• Explain your position/role and intentions. For example, “I am the McKinney-Vento liaison and my job is to connect students in temporary housing with educational supports and services.”</li> <li>• Be clear about the goal of the conversation. Make clear that you are not trying to get them in trouble, but rather, want to make sure they receive all services for which they are eligible.</li> <li>• Avoid the word “homeless.” Instead, talk about a temporary housing arrangement.</li> </ul>
A family’s housing situation seems to be fixed and regular, but you need to know if it is also adequate.	This is challenging because questions about housing adequacy can feel particularly uncomfortable and intrusive. Adequacy conversations are also challenging because families may be nervous that information shared about	It is important to take a very sensitive approach to this type of conversation. Before asking any questions about the adequacy of the housing arrangement, <b>begin the conversation by reminding the family that students living in temporary housing situations have special education rights</b> , which may be beneficial to the student and his/her family. Reassure them that your questions are intended to connect the student with appropriate supports and services.

**The Challenge: A family has been living at the same address for more than a year, and you are unsure if the housing should still be considered temporary.**





**The Challenge: An unaccompanied youth shows up at a school or enrollment office without any paperwork wanting to sign up for school.**

**The Challenge: A family's housing situation seems to be fixed and regular, but you need to know if it is also adequate.**





**The Challenge: A student who is temporarily housed is exhibiting challenging behavior in school and/or is repeatedly absent.**



# Resources



- Educate district staff and administrators about McKinney-Vento eligibility and services – *Under ESSA, this is now a Liaison requirement!*
  - Trainings and webinars
  - NYS-TEACHS [Tip Sheet Series](#)
  - Share resources [on trauma sensitivity and trauma-sensitive schools](#)
- NYS-TEACHS + Urban Arts Partnership [Registration Simulation video](#) highlights the importance of conversations in McKinney-Vento identification and service delivery.

**NYS-TEACHS**

800-388-2014

Email: [info@nysteachs.org](mailto:info@nysteachs.org)

Website: [www.nysteachs.org](http://www.nysteachs.org)



**NYSTEACHS**

NEW YORK STATE TECHNICAL AND EDUCATION  
ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS