

# TALKING TO OUR KIDS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS



*As parents, it's natural to want to protect our children from the more difficult aspects of life including homelessness and poverty. What's more, we often carry our own questions around the complexities of this issue, and often do not feel equipped to engage our children on the topic. All of this is understandable; take heart, you are not alone!*

*That said, it is so important that we talk with our kids about hard realities, in an age-appropriate way, as their Christ-centered worldview is being formed. Below are some suggestions to consider as you navigate the conversation of homelessness with your child.*

## **SEE**

Your children are watching and taking their cues from you! As you encounter folks holding signs on the street see, acknowledge and engage the person. This might be as simple as offering a friendly wave through the car window. Affirming the dignity and humanity of your unhoused neighbor without fear or judgement will leave a lasting impression on your child.

## **ENGAGE**

As you encounter homelessness with your children, be open to engaging the conversation with them. Your child might naturally have questions about a person they see on the street. This curiosity is normal, and a great opportunity to go a bit deeper on the topic. If your child does not appear curious, that is ok too. You might consider prompting their curiosity by simply asking, “did you notice that person asking for help?”

As the conversation unfolds try to offer honest explanations, while also avoiding assumptions or judgments about what may have led a person to experience homelessness. With younger children, focus on what it means to be homeless. You might say something like, “When a person is homeless, it means they do not have a stable place to go home to every night.” Your child might be curious about why a person experiences homelessness. As you respond to these questions, emphasize the multitude of reasons that can lead to a person not having a place to live. With older children, it might be helpful to acknowledge the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) as a primary factor in causing homelessness.

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This can help cultivate a spirit of compassion in your child, as they learn to “see” the homeless in our city with the eyes and heart of Christ. Do not feel the pressure to have all the answers. It’s ok to say, “I am not sure, but if you would like we could research that together?”

It is normal for children to have big feelings in response to learning about homelessness. Reactions of sadness and fear are based on your child’s growing capacity for empathy. Affirm and make space for these feelings (“yes, it’s sad when a person does not have a place to live”) while also offering assurance (“there are organizations that exist to support our homeless neighbors and ways we can lovingly engage with them as well.”)

## INVITE

As you speak with your child, invite Jesus into the conversation. Ask him or her what they think Jesus teaches about how we should respond to those experiencing homelessness. Remind your child that every person is created by God and loved deeply by God, with gifts to offer the world. Highlight the example of Jesus, who spent a great deal of time lovingly engaging with and affirming the most vulnerable people in his day. The parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24) is a great example of Jesus’ unique care for the poor and vulnerable.

## ACT

As you talk with your child about homelessness, make an action plan to serve unhoused neighbors . Ask your child if they have any ideas for what this could look like! Below are some suggestions to consider:

- Praying for unhoused people in our city.
- Buying granola bars to offer unhoused neighbors you encounter during the week.
- A child giving a portion of their weekly allowance to Aurora Commons Compassion initiative.
- Serving with Community Meals at BCC.

## MORE RESOURCES

For more information on Adverse Childhood Experiences and homelessness, visit sponsored by The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a research institute devoted to learning more about homelessness.

[Joining forces for Children](#)

[The Deepest Well](#)

[Nadine Harris Ted Talk](#)

