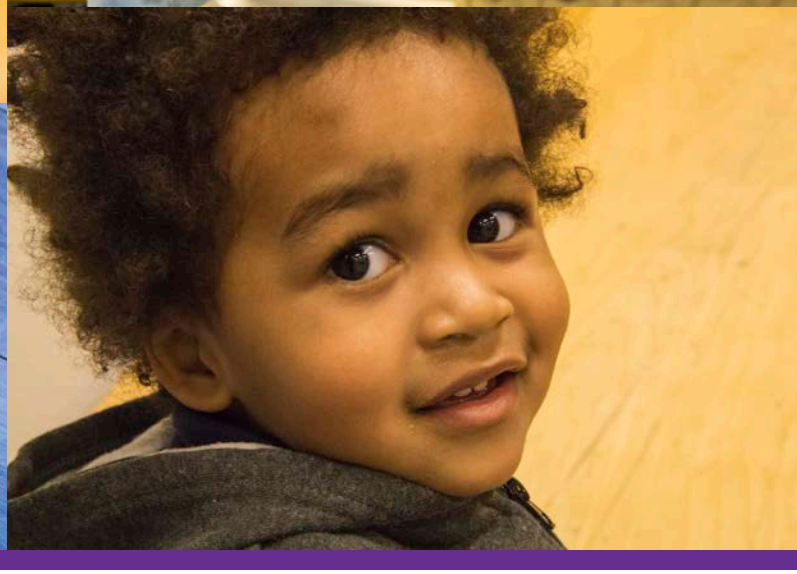
BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



Responsive Early Education for Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

California Department of Education Sacramento, 2019

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A Message from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

High quality early childhood education programs have the potential to be a source of healing and educational opportunity for young children experiencing homelessness. As this important book so clearly illustrates, this requires that educators and program leaders become aware of the extent of homelessness in early childhood, become informed of the negative effects homelessness can have on children's behavior and development, and learn how to responsively support children in unstable living conditions.

Early childhood homelessness has been a hidden reality for many young children for far too long. Unfortunately, California has one of the highest percentages of young children experiencing homelessness as 1 in 12 children under the age of 6 lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The experience of homelessness creates significant stress for young children at a critical time in their development. Responsive, housing-sensitive, and trauma-informed early childhood programs that offer stability, emotional support, and understanding can protect children from the negative impacts of homelessness and support them to build resilience.

It is for this reason that I am pleased to introduce this publication. I believe that Responsive Early Education for Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness will be an invaluable resource for early childhood teachers, administrators, and program staff aiming to provide high quality early childhood programs for all children. The bounty of knowledge and expertise included throughout this book is fundamental for all teachers and providers who are committed to working responsively with our youngest children experiencing homelessness.

This book provides essential factual information and resources about the extent of early childhood homelessness in addition to concrete research-based strategies teachers can implement that benefit all of the children in their care and are essential for young children and their families impacted by homelessness. This book is made more powerful and useful with the inclusion of many

authentic vignettes created from interviews with children and families experiencing homelessness across California in addition to the diverse professionals who serve them. These stories remind us of the urgency and shared responsibility we have to ensure that all children have opportunities to participate in early learning environments that promote their well-being, optimal development, and educational success.

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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INTRODUCTION

VIGNETTE

Ava, four years old, and her mother, Ruth, are sleeping in a car they have converted into their home in a California county. For safety, and because nobody has asked them to move, Ruth parks her car every night at a truck stop and says that she has not truly slept since they were evicted two months ago. While the truck stop is the safest parking place they have found, she still feels she needs to be alert. Ava has been going to a public preschool program for the past year. Ruth drops her there early and rushes to work during the time Ava is at school. When asked whether she has shared her situation at her daughter's preschool, Ruth is puzzled and says, "No, why would I do that? They would think I am a bad mom!" Ruth has never seen any pamphlets or signs that inform her of services for families experiencing homelessness. In the area where she lives, there are no shelters that she knows of and she is truly afraid that if she discloses her situation, the teachers might report her to social services. In fact, Ruth makes sure that Ava is always on time and clean so that no one suspects anything. But she says she is worried because Ava is tiny compared to her peers and they struggle having enough to eat, so Ava often arrives at preschool telling her mom that she is hungry.

Ruth's story reflects the reality of a mother and her young child experiencing homelessness in California. Ruth works hard to maintain a sense of normalcy for her daughter, Ava, and she makes sure Ava is able to attend her preschool daily. However, Ruth worries because she knows that their lack of food and a safe place to sleep might be affecting Ava's development and interfering with her ability to learn while at school. But Ruth doesn't know what else to do. Parents like Ruth, who are experiencing homelessness with their young children, are often fearful that their housing status will be discovered by others. Many worry that they will be judged, reported to Child Protective Services (CPS), or have their children taken away even though, despite the significant stress they experience while homeless, most of these parents are taking care of their children. As described in this book, these concerns are understandable: Research shows that early childhood professionals can have negative perceptions about families experiencing homelessness and judge their children's behavior. Additionally, many educators confuse signs of homelessness with signs of neglect and abuse.

Ruth and Ava's story describes how crucial it is for early childhood teachers to be informed and prepared to engage responsively to the needs of young children and their families experiencing homelessness. Imagine how different this story would be if Ruth had seen a poster at the preschool sharing resources for families going through a difficult time. Consider the benefits for Ava's development and learning if the teachers in her classroom had reached out to her mother as part of their practice of establishing trusting, trauma-informed, housing-sensitive, and supportive relationships with all families. Ava's teachers could have seen the signs of malnutrition and exhaustion and responded by initiating a caring, nonjudgmental conversation with Ruth to discover whether she was interested in learning about community resources and supports for her family. Ava's preschool could have allowed her to take longer naps on days when she arrived tired after a night with little sleep. They also could have added books to the classroom that describe the experience of homelessness without stigma so Ava could have her experiences and feelings acknowledged. All these elements, and more, are part of the strength-based,[1] responsive approach to childhood homelessness described in this book.

---

1. A strength-based approach assumes that all children and families have resources, personal characteristics, and relationships that can be mobilized to enhance their learning, development, and well-being, no matter how many risk factors or challenges they face (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2012).

An estimated 1.2 million children like Ava under the age of six experience homelessness each year in the United States. In fact, young children ages birth to six are more likely to experience homelessness than any other age group, and they represent half of all children in federally funded homeless shelters (US Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], US Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], and US Department of Education [ED] 2016). In California, the number of infants through children in kindergarten officially counted as homeless has increased 20 percent since 2014, with current estimates at just over 260,000 of our youngest children counted as homeless across the state (Bassuk et al. 2014; Jones 2017). Official counts likely significantly underestimate the actual number of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers experiencing homelessness because the counting methods often rely on public school enrollment data (ACF 2017a). The number of children without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is projected to rise due to a range of factors, including a crisis in the lack of affordable housing, the increased frequency of natural disasters, expanding levels of poverty, and gaps in both accessible and affordable health care and child care across California (Bassuk et al. 2014; National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY] 2013).

This situation is alarming. Homelessness places children's development, educational achievement, health, and well-being at risk (Fantuzzo et al. 2012; Masten et al. 2014). Many young children experiencing homelessness live in conditions of chronic stress and trauma that will negatively affect their development and well-being for years to come. Trauma disrupts healthy development by interfering with a child's capacity to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, to play and learn, and to self-regulate emotions, attention, and behavior. Although research provides evidence of the negative outcomes that can result from a persistent experience of homelessness, we also know that, with the right protective factors, young children can build resilience and coping skills that reduce its negative effects (Masten 2014; Masten et al. 2015). The research is clear: the most important protective factor a child experiencing homelessness can have is a consistent, caring, and responsive relationship with a caregiver who supports a feeling of

the most important protective factor a child experiencing homelessness can have is a consistent, caring, and responsive relationship with a caregiver who supports a feeling of safety and protection and acts as a buffer to reduce the daily impact of stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed.

safety and protection and acts as a buffer to reduce the daily impact of stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed.

To provide responsive care to young children experiencing homelessness, early childhood teachers must have knowledge and understanding about the causes of homelessness, the diverse circumstances of families who experience it, and the impact it has on young children's learning and development. Unfortunately, information about family homelessness is rarely included in early childhood coursework or professional development, and, as a result, few early childhood teachers are aware of the significant number of young children in their communities who are experiencing homelessness on a daily basis. Most families without stable housing go to great lengths to avoid sleeping in public spaces with their children. The daily hardships these families manage are too often invisible to many in the community, including early childhood staff. In California, for instance, approximately 86 percent of children experiencing homelessness sleep under a temporary roof, which often includes moving frequently from one friend's or family member's home to another, or moving between motels, cars, or shelters (Jones and Willis 2017; Hyatt, Walzer, and Julianelle 2017.). Families experiencing homelessness frequently keep their circumstances private for fear of losing their children, fear of deportation, or concern that they will be judged as bad parents. This fear is illustrated clearly in our opening story, but also in Armando's and Tamara's experiences.

VIGNETTE

Armando and his family have been homeless for the past year and the recent escalation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity has him living in a state of constant stress and fear. Armando knows from a friend that recently, in a neighboring city, ICE agents waited by a shelter where individuals experiencing homeless were entering to spend the night. They stopped adults and children who looked Latino to detain them. As a result, he used all the money his family had and paid for the week at an inexpensive single room occupancy residential hotel to keep his family safe. Now, he no longer has money and is not sure what to do to get food. His two young sons were born in the United States and they qualify for food stamps through SNAP benefits. Armando has called the food bank on a few occasions and has been assured many times that

VIGNETTE *(CONTINUED)*

his family's information would never be shared by the food bank with ICE. However, he is still not sure he can trust this advice. He feels it is too risky to share any personal information with the government and has decided not to apply for food assistance for his children. Armando learned in a legal workshop that schools and school bus stops, hospitals and medical clinics, and churches are supposed to be safe from any ICE raids and arrests. Armando reluctantly waits in line with his three-year-old son, Salvador, at a food bank in the basement of a local church. While in line, he hears from others that ICE agents have been seen recently standing outside churches like this one. Discreetly, Armando steps out of the food bank line with Salvador and walks back toward their room at the nearby motel. His son, Salvador, knows they won't be getting the bag of food today and is crying silently as they walk. Deeply upset, Armando returns to his wife and their other son, Manuel, without food. He knows that things would be worse for his family if he is detained and deported. He gives a glass of water to his sons and talks with his wife. They conclude that there is not much more they can do today.

Tamara, a single mother with two young children, has many concerns about other people discovering her family's experience of homelessness. She explains, "I have been homeless for two years, and I don't want anyone to know. I definitely have not said anything at the child care center. It is already hard, you know? I am trying to figure out how to pay my credit card debt, how to find a place that will accept me and my children without asking for three months' rent in advance, and how to care for my children each day. I don't want people to think I am a bad mother or to look at me with pity. I am working hard to get out of this hole. I want to keep my head high.

As suggested previously, these fears do, in fact, have some basis in reality. Research suggests most people do not understand the circumstances of family homelessness, and many adults hold deficit beliefs and negative stereotypes about families who are experiencing homelessness. Deficit beliefs and stereotypes about homelessness place responsibility on the families and children for their circumstances. Common inaccurate and damaging stereotypes docu-

mented in research include beliefs that parents who are homeless are not caring or attentive to their children, that all families without homes live in cardboard boxes on the street, and that all children experiencing homelessness display challenging behaviors (Kim 2013). Importantly for Tamara, without a clear understanding of how homelessness affects children and their families, providers and teachers might erroneously interpret children's behaviors or appearance as signs of neglect or abuse, which can lead to reporting to CPS, family separation, and more stress to the family (see discussion on this topic at the end of this chapter).

Early childhood teachers, administrators, and program staff need to have factual information so that they can create welcoming, inclusive, and strength-based environments that are responsive to the unique needs of young children and families experiencing homelessness. This book was written with this goal in mind and, specifically, to support early childhood teachers and program leaders to learn about the following:

- the number of young children and their families who experience homelessness nationally and across California and its underlying causes;
- recent federal and state laws, policies, and entitlements that address child and family homelessness;
- the impacts that homelessness can have on young children's health, development, and ability to learn; and
- effective strategies and trauma-informed practices that can be implemented in early childhood programs to support children and their families experiencing homelessness.

Person-First Language

Throughout this book, we intentionally use person-first language. Person-first language places the person first instead of defining individuals in language that is too generalizing, stereotyping, or stigmatizing. By saying children and families experiencing homelessness rather than the homeless, homeless children, or homeless families, an individual infant, toddler, preschooler, parent, or caregiver is named first and the condition they are experiencing—homelessness—is second. This small but important shift in language communicates that homelessness is not the defining aspect of an individual's identity but, instead, one of many aspects that define a person's current situation and diverse range of life experiences. Although person-first language requires more words, its use is important for many reasons:

- **Words matter.** The way that we speak and the word choices we make influence how we see and understand the world. Children and families experiencing homelessness have names, faces, complex lives, identities, and stories and are members of our communities. As early childhood professionals, we need to work with all children and families in a way that communicates respect and dignity, regardless of what they are going through at any point in their lives.
- **Person-first language supports the disruption of stereotypes.** This approach to communication highlights a person's value, individuality, and capabilities instead of using language to label, generalize, stereotype, devalue, or discriminate. When we say the homeless, our language inaccurately categorizes all children, families, and people experiencing homelessness as a universal group instead of recognizing the wide range of diversity in all families and individuals (including some members of the early childhood workforce) and their unique experiences of homelessness. Referring to "homeless" people also creates an "us" versus "them" perception, suggesting that people experiencing homelessness are significantly different from individuals with stable housing. In contrast, if we talk about "Marcel, a four-year-old boy who is currently experiencing homelessness, and who misses the cat that he had to leave behind when his family was evicted," we all can connect with Marcel as part of "us."

Using person-first language is a way of showing respect and of communicating the need to find solutions to homelessness. A child and parent(s) experiencing homelessness probably once had a home and, hopefully, will have support to be housed again soon. Homelessness is something families and children are experiencing at a particular moment, but it does not define all of the complex parts of who they are or their entire life experience.

Homelessness is something families and children are experiencing at a particular moment, but it does not define all of the complex parts of who they are or their entire life experience.

Authentic Stories and Images

This book includes many vignettes drawn from conversations with families experiencing homelessness in California and a range of early childhood teachers, advocates, homeless liaisons[2] , and others working to serve them. We are grateful for the generosity and kindness of all of the individuals who shared their experiences with us. These stories teach all of us about responsive ways of interacting with young children and their families for, at least, two main reasons. First, for those who have never experienced homelessness, it might be difficult to imagine the circumstances that lead families to lose their homes, the stressors they experience, and the range of creative coping skills they develop to manage the extraordinary number of challenges they face daily. Their firsthand stories provide opportunities for readers to increase their awareness, understanding, and empathy for the strengths and vulnerabilities of families experiencing homelessness and create a foundation for learning to interact with them in responsive ways. Second, because the narratives reflect a wide range of authentically lived experiences of actual children and families in California, they are powerful evidence-based examples that disrupt common

2. The McKinney-Vento Act requires local educational agencies (LEAs, hereafter school districts) to designate an appropriate staff person, known as the local homeless education liaison, to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and connect them with educational and other needed services.

stereotypes and deficit beliefs associated with homelessness. Take for instance, the following story shared by a family experiencing homelessness:

VIGNETTE

Sam is a preschooler at the center he has attended since he was a baby. Since the beginning, Sam has been a happy and healthy child. He loves science activities, spending time in the cozy corner paging through books, and sharing with his peers when they are all gathered on the rug each day. He has always been interested and engaged in whatever he does each day. Lately, though, Sam has been tired and distracted, and, recently, he has fallen asleep several times while sitting in the cozy corner. He has also been taking longer naps. The staff are concerned that perhaps he could be ill. One of the administrators at the child care program approached Sam's mom to ask if she had noticed anything unusual at home and to share what they were observing each day at school. This staff member did not know Sam's mom very well and was hesitant to ask too many questions. She also noticed that Sam's mom seemed uncomfortable, so she decided to ask if there was someone else whom Sam's mom might feel more comfortable talking with, which there was.

Sam's teacher, Miss Jane, from last year had a great relationship with Sam's mom. So, Miss Jane went with Sam's mom to a quiet area of the center, got them each a cold drink, and shared that the staff was concerned that Sam may not be feeling well. She explained that Sam seemed tired a lot, had fallen asleep in the cozy corner a few times, and was napping longer, which was unusual for him. Sam's mom opened up to Miss Jane and seemed relieved to be able to share what Sam and she were going through. Sam and his family had been evicted from their apartment two weeks ago. Though Sam's parents were working, their car had died a few months ago and they needed to buy a new one. However, Sam's dad was not getting the overtime hours he had gotten in the past, and their landlord recently increased the rent when their lease was up. They were behind on their rent payments and were having a really hard time catching up. As a result, they had moved in with Sam's uncle and his family, but there really wasn't enough space so they were staying in the living room

VIGNETTE *(CONTINUED)*

on the couch. With everyone coming and going until ten or eleven at night, their typical evening routine was impossible to keep. So, not only was Sam unable to go to bed at his regular time, once things quieted down, but he was also feeling unsettled with all of the recent changes, which was making it hard for him to fall asleep and causing him to wake up frequently during the night.

Stories like this one offer, first of all, a rich description of children, their families, and teachers as complex human beings trying their best. Because they are real experiences, they challenge simplistic and negative views of both children and their families experiencing homelessness. It is through authentic vignettes like this one that we can truly see how responsiveness starts with relationships. As seen in the vignette, the administrator noticed something amiss and did not blame the family for bad parenting but, instead, made sure to find a person this family knows and trusts who can start a conversation. The circumstances that led Sam's family to lose their home—unexpected rent increases, loss of job, and a broken-down car—are conditions that many people have experienced. Truly listening to these circumstances, like Miss Jane did, can help teachers and providers connect with families at a human level and responsively find ways to support them in ways that are tailored to their needs.

Complementing the authentic narratives are photographs throughout the book that respectfully represent its content. Diane Nilan, founder of HEAR US (https://www.hearus.us), a nonprofit organization providing information to those concerned about family homelessness, traveled to California and established relationships with families experiencing homelessness who generously agreed to allow her to take their photos for this book. All the families and children pictured were experiencing homelessness at the time their photographs were taken. They were all working alone or in collaboration with service providers to access housing that better meets their needs and to improve their situations.

Organization of the Book

- Chapter 1: Definitions and Policies Related to Homelessness introduces the common definitions used in federal and state policies and programs serving families experiencing homelessness.
- Chapter 2: Learning about the Families with Young Children Experiencing Homelessness presents the prevalence, causes, and diversity among children and families experiencing homelessness. This chapter also describes some of the common barriers that prevent their enrollment in early childhood programs.
- Chapter 3: The Impact of Homelessness on Young Children's Development and Learning describes early brain development, the impact of stress and trauma on children's development, and key protective factors that buffer stress and support children to build resilience.
- Chapter 4: The Important Role of Early Childhood Programs in Supporting Children Experiencing Homelessness provides a range of strategies early childhood teachers, program leaders, and other staff can use to create inclusive trauma-informed environments that support children and their families who are experiencing homelessness.
- Chapter 5: Responsive Relationships and Partnership with Families provides information to guide teachers and program leaders in building culturally sensitive, strength-based approaches to family engagement for families experiencing homelessness.
- The final sections of the book include a conclusion, glossary, references, a list of recommended children's books that discuss the topic of homelessness in a sensitive and respectful manner, and a list of resources that includes national and state organizations and websites, research, reports, fact sheets, and best practices related to family homelessness.

Homelessness is not abuse or neglect and is not reportable. Lack of housing alone is not legal grounds to remove a child from a family.

Early childhood teachers and providers are required by the state of California to report any known or suspected inmstances of child abuse or neglect. The intention of the mandatory reporting law is to protect children from harm.

Neglect is an intentional willingness to harm or a willful disregard of a child. It is not the same thing as being homeless. It is critical that teachers and providers understand that homelessness is not a form of neglect and families should not be reported to CPS simply because they are experiencing homelessness.

homelessness is not a form of neglect

- If a child is experiencing homelessness,

  teachers should not conclude that the child is being abused or neglected.

- Legally, children cannot be removed by CPS for the sole reason that their families are experiencing homelessness.[3]

Unfortunately, homelessness is often misunderstood as a sign of neglect. Many of the commonly described "warning signs" of neglect (listed on government websites and included in mandatory reporter trainings) may not be a result of child maltreatment, but instead are signs of a lack of stable housing and poverty.

The following warning signs of neglect could also be signs of homelessness:

- Clothes that are ill-fitting, filthy, or inappropriate for the weather.
- Hygiene that is consistently bad (a child who is unbathed, has matted and unwashed hair, or has a noticeable body odor)
- A child who is frequently late or missing from school.
- Untreated illnesses.

Source: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/ap/childabusereportingguide.asp

Certainly, abuse or neglect may be occurring in families experiencing homelessness because such conditions are unfortunately a possibility within any family. Anytime teachers suspect that a child could be a victim of abuse, they are legally required as mandatory reporters to call CPS.[4]

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3. The California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA) states that a child experiencing homelessness, as defined in Section 11434a of the federal McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act, is not, in and of itself, a sufficient basis for reporting child abuse or neglect (Penal Code §§ 11164–11174.3).

4. A new mandate in California, beginning January 2018, requires that all licensed providers, applicants, directors, and employees must complete Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Training and renew every two years to be mandatory reporters (Health and Safety Code §§ 1596.8662).

It is essential, however, that teachers not assume that children experiencing homelessness are being abused or neglected. Before calling CPS, teachers can consider the following:

- Pause and consider whether any "warning signs" they see may be due to poverty or homelessness instead of child maltreatment.
- Consider what they know about a family's housing and economic circumstances. A foundation of a high-quality early childhood is a trusting, responsive, strength-based relationship between teachers or providers and families. Such relationships communicate inclusive, nonjudgmental messages to families and their diverse circumstances, including those experiencing homelessness. Taking time to listen and learn from families without judgment creates the foundation necessary for families to open up about their circumstances and for teachers to interrupt inaccurate assumptions and biases they may have about families experiencing homelessness. Even when trusting relationships exist, families may not feel safe talking about their homeless status with anyone because of their fears that they will be reported to CPS and that their children will be removed. Research suggests that these fears are warranted.)

Unsubstantiated reports to CPS[5] can lead to negative consequences for children and families experiencing homelessness:

- Families of color, and especially black families, experiencing homelessness are significantly more likely than white families to be referred to CPS.[6] Although they are referred more often, their referrals and investigations do not lead to more child removals (Rodriguez and Shinn

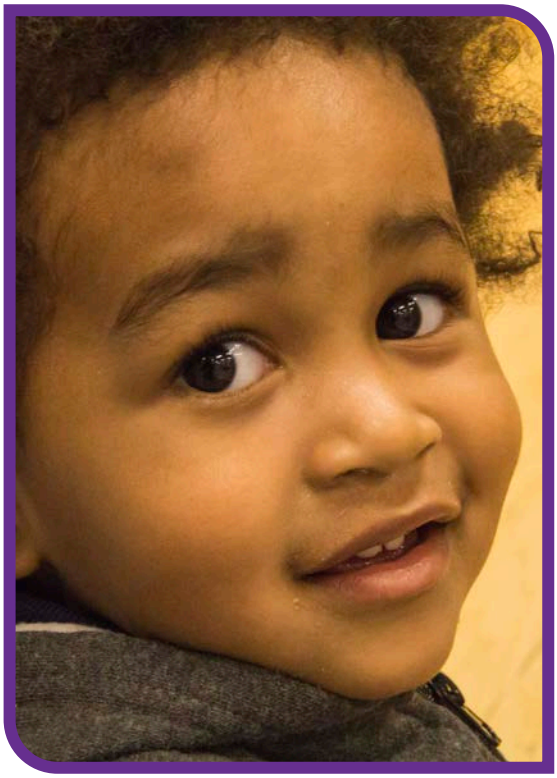
5. If a CPS investigation determines that the allegation of child maltreatment is *unsubstantiated* (also referred to as *unfounded*), it means that there is insufficient evidence for the caseworker to conclude that a child was abused or neglected, or that what happened does not meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect. A finding of unsubstantiated or unfounded does not always mean that maltreatment did not occur; it may mean that there is not enough evidence to support a finding of substantiated. If the case is determined to be unsubstantiated, the CPS agency may still provide services. In other cases, the family may be referred to a community provider for voluntary services. In some circumstances, the case may be closed with no further contact between the family and the CPS agency (see https://training.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/section-2-understanding-child-welfare-system/3014).

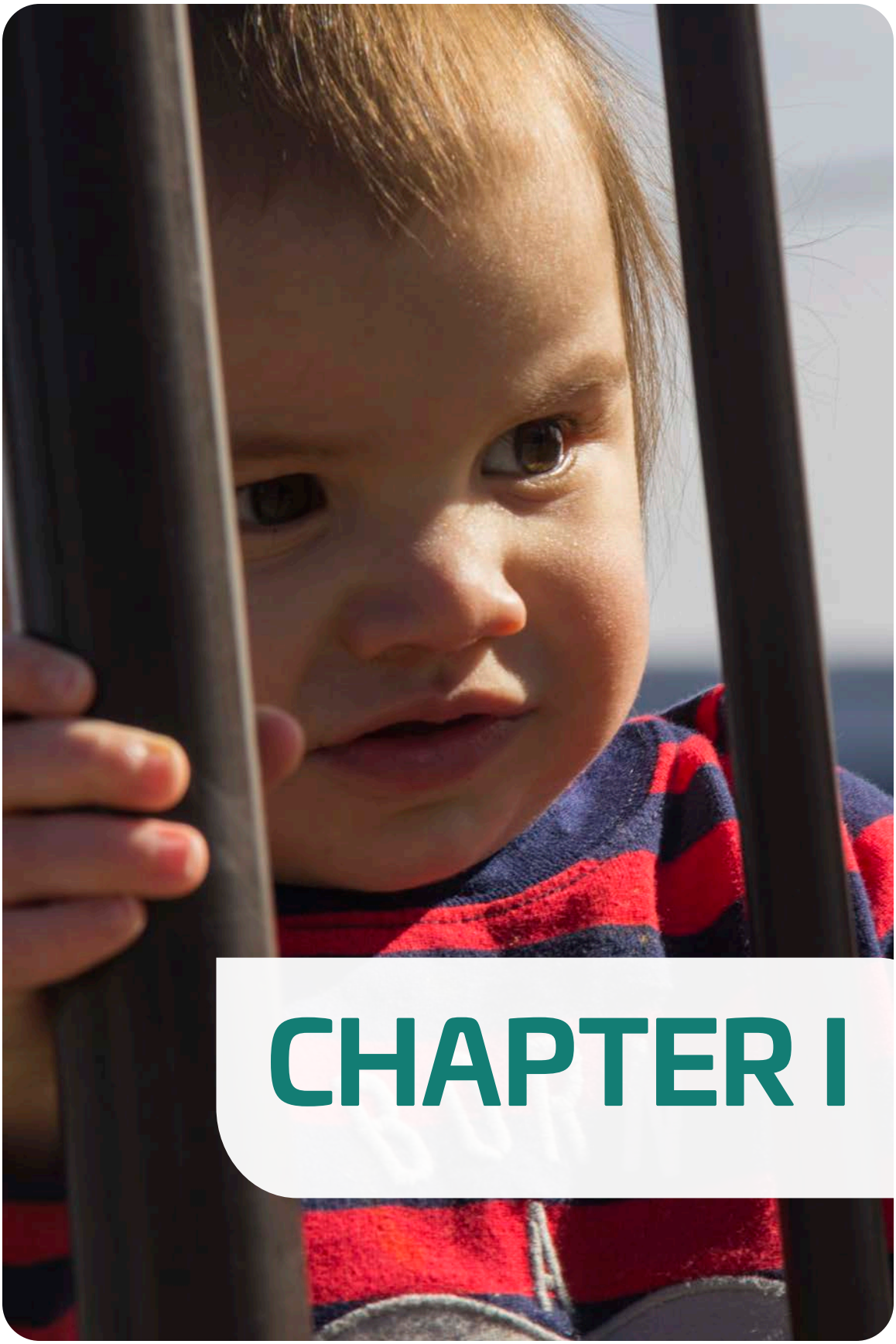
6. See https://cflhomeless.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/just-what-is-%E2%80%9Cchild-neglect%E2%80%9D/.

2016); that is, their cases are substantiated in similar numbers to other groups in total. This suggests that racial bias and a lack of cultural competence may be a factor influencing the higher rate of referrals for families of color (Boyd 2014).

- Being in a homeless shelter increases the risk for families that they will be reported to CPS even if these reports are later unsubstantiated. Furthermore, CPS referrals for families experiencing homelessness (even if they are unsubstantiated and no abuse is found) increase a family's risk that their children will be removed and placed in the foster care system (Reed and Karpilow 2009; Rodriguez and Shinn 2016).

Homelessness is not abuse or neglect and is not reportable. Lack of housing alone is not legal grounds to remove a child from a family. By increasing their knowledge about the experience of homelessness for young children and their families, early childhood teachers and program leaders will be in a better place to support these vulnerable families and avoid putting them at further risk.





CHAPTER I

Definitions and Policies Related to Homelessness

VIGNETTE

It's 5:30 a.m. and Lillian [four years old], her mom, Sarah, and sister, Grace [eleven years old], are getting ready to go to Grace's school and then to Lillian's Head Start center. They are temporarily living in a church basement shelter, the only place that took them in after a heart attack left Sarah in debt and without a home. The church was a welcome help in a dire moment, but Grace's school is miles away and the family needs to take three different buses to get there. "If I miss one bus for any reason, I am late," Lillian explains, "It takes us more than two hours to get to Grace's school, and we get tired." For Sarah, finding a job is difficult. She completes the two-hour trip from the shelter to Grace's school and then to the Head Start center twice a day. Sarah is grateful to know her daughters are getting an education, but she doesn't see how she can improve their situation because she has no time to focus on finding a job.

For early childhood programs to create responsive environments for young children like Lillian and their families experiencing homelessness, understanding how the word homeless is defined in state and federal policies is a helpful start. Unfortunately, we do not have a unified definition of child homelessness in the United States. Instead, two common definitions are used to inform policies and access to programs and services serving children and families experiencing homelessness. One is specified in the federal legislation that regulates the US

Department of Housing and Urban Development and the other is defined in the legislation, referred to as the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney–Vento Act), that regulates the federal Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, Justice, and Agriculture.

This chapter:

- provides commonly used definitions of homelessness in federal and state legislation and policy;
- describes the McKinney–Vento Act local education agency (LEA)[7] homeless liaison role and the supports liaisons can provide to early childhood staff and families with young children; and
- introduces the key requirements and rights for children and their families experiencing homelessness as outlined in ED's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Head Start for School Readiness Act, the reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A New Bill Pending:
Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 1511/S. 611)

New legislation is pending in Congress that would significantly change some of the policy information presented throughout this chapter. Because this legislation is pending and there is no certainty about how long it will take to be signed into law, we introduce the current federal policies in the body of the chapter and summarize the proposed legislation. In this section. readers can learn about the existing laws affecting children and families experiencing homelessness while also becoming aware of the important changes currently being discussed in Congress.

7. *Local education agency, or LEA,* is a technical way to refer to the school districts or an entity responsible for operating local public elementary and secondary schools in the United States.

In August 2018, the House Financial Services Committee passed the bipartisan Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 1511), which is cosponsored by Congressman Steve Stivers (R-OH) and Dave Loebsack (D-IA). This bill will now likely be considered by the full House of Representatives. A bipartisan Senate companion bill (S. 611) is led by US Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Rob Portman (R-OH).

To check on the status of this bill go to: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1511/all-actions?overview=closed#tabs. If passed into law, the Homeless Children and Youth Act would lead to several important changes intended to make it easier for communities to support children, youth, and families who experience homelessness:

- **Aligns HUD's definition of homelessness with the definition used in other federal agencies.** If passed, children and families who are defined as homeless based on the eligibility criteria used in at least one of eight specific federal programs (including those using McKinney–Vento Act definitions, such as public schools or Head Start) would also be eligible for HUD homeless assistance. This means that children and families who are doubling up* or residing in other temporary environments (e.g., hotels, motels) would be eligible to be assessed to determine if they qualify for HUD services. Under HUD's current definition of homelessness, children in such living situations are not eligible to be assessed for services. This bill would change that.
- **Allows HUD homeless assistance funds to be used to meet locally defined needs.** Currently, local communities, to be competitive for funding, have to align with HUD priorities (e.g., Rapid Rehousing), even if these solutions are not effective for the populations they serve. This bill requires HUD to evaluate applications for funding based on whether they are cost-effective in meeting the priorities and goals that communities identify in their local plans, instead of using a "one-size-fits-all" approach to funding and addressing homelessness.
- **Requires HUD to include data on homelessness in its annual report to Congress.** Data that HUD shares with Congress are used to plan budgets and to inform public and private action plans for supporting children, families, and youth experiencing homelessness. If HUD data are more accurately representing the range of diverse experiences of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness (e.g., doubling up), budgets and action plans will better align with the actual needs in communities.

What is the likelihood that *The Homeless Children and Youth Act* will be signed into law?

The honest answer is that we do not know. However, if HR 1511 is not passed in 2019, it will be reintroduced in the next session of Congress because the bipartisan Congressional authors and a diverse range of organizations are committed to this legislation. If the Homeless Children and Youth Act becomes law, the content in this chapter will need revision to incorporate the required changes as summarized in the bullet list.

* Doubling-up refers to sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. It does not refer to cohousing by choice and is not based on cultural traditions; it refers to moments in which one lives in other people's houses because there is no other choice. It is often associated with lack of space, temporality, as well as a lack of say in how things are run in the household. See figure 2 in chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Defining Child Homelessness

The HUD and McKinney–Vento Act definitions of homelessness differ in important ways and affect the programs and services young children and their families experiencing homelessness can qualify for in their communities. The two different definitions also lead to different estimates of the total number of young children and families experiencing homelessness in the United States. These differences can create confusion for anyone trying to understand the eligibility requirements for housing and comprehensive services for families.

The McKinney–Vento Act definition of homelessness is the legal definition of *homeless* used by most child-serving and educational organizations, including ED and the California Department of Education.

HUD's definition is used to determine eligibility for housing assistance and emergency food and shelter programs. Understanding the similarities and differences between these definitions is important because the use of one or the other affects who is eligible to receive services offered by different programs (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Two Main Definitions of Homelessness: What Contexts Are Included in Each Definition?

Context	HUD Definition	McKinney Vento Act Definition
Unsheltered locations	Yes	Yes
Emergency shelters and transitional housing	Yes	Yes
Motels and hotels	No	Yes
Doubled-up families	No	Yes

Table 2. Federal Programs That Use Each Definition of Homelessness

HUD Definition	McKinney Vento Act Definition
Homeless Assistance Programs	Head Start Act
Emergency Food and Shelter	Child Nutrition Act
All programs under the US Department of Veterans Affairs	Violence Against Women Act
All programs under the US Department of Labor	ESSA
	IDEA
	Higher Education Act
	Child Care Development Fund

US Department of Housing and Urban Development

On January 4, 2012, final regulations went into effect to implement changes to HUD's definition of homelessness based on requirements in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. HUD's definition affects who is eligible for various HUD-funded homeless assistance programs and includes the following individuals and groups:

- An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which includes a primary nighttime residence that is a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground) or a publicly or privately operated shelter or transitional housing, including a hotel or motel paid for by government or charitable organizations. In addition, a person is considered homeless if he or she is being discharged from an institution where he or she has been a resident for 90 days or less and resided in a shelter (but not transitional housing) or a place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution.

- An individual or family who is being evicted within 14 days from their primary nighttime residence, and no subsequent residence has been identified and the household lacks the resources or support networks (e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks) needed to obtain other permanent housing.
- People with **all** of these characteristics:
  - Unaccompanied youth (less than 25 years of age) or family with children and youth;
  - Individuals defined as homeless under other federal statutes (for example, the definition used by ED) and not otherwise qualified as homeless under HUD's definition;
  - Individuals who have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing in the 60 days prior to applying for assistance;
  - Individuals who have moved two or more times in the 60 days immediately prior to applying for assistance; and
  - Individuals who have had or experienced one or more of the following: chronic disabilities, chronic physical or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, child with a disability, or two or more barriers to employment (lack of a high school degree or General Education Diploma [GED], illiteracy, low English proficiency, history of incarceration or detention for criminal activity, history of unstable employment).
- Any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence; has no other residence; and lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2012).

To determine the number of children and families experiencing homelessness, HUD completes an annual "Point-in-Time" (PIT) count. This PIT count process involves choosing a single night in January to count the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in cities and towns across the country and results in a yearly "snapshot" of homelessness in the United States. HUD data that describes the number of individuals across the country experiencing homelessness are reported to Congress and made available to the public on an annual

basis. Most federal funding streams and federal policies that address family homelessness originate from HUD.

It is important to know that HUD's definition of homelessness and the limitations of the PIT counting method leave hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children and their families uncounted and invisible to policymakers and the public. This is because the PIT count excludes children and families living in doubled-up situations (see the textbox, Doubled Up: The Hidden Homeless) as well as families living in motels, hotels, campgrounds, or similar settings. This means that many children and families are not qualifying for funding and services through HUD despite their housing instability.

The McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The second main definition used to decide access to programs and services for children and families experiencing homelessness is the one described in the McKinney–Vento Act. The McKinney–Vento Act was passed in 1987 to protect and improve the lives and safety of individuals experiencing homelessness, with special emphasis on the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and families with children. The Act also authorizes the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, making the McKinney–Vento Act the primary piece of federal legislation that addresses the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The McKinney–Vento Act is used by all state education agencies (SEAs) (e.g., California Department of Education) and LEAs (e.g., districts). Thus, the McKinney–Vento Act definition is used across all federally funded early intervention programs, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and any other federally subsidized preschool

programs. Thus, any school districts that are designated as Head Start grantees or funded with federal dollars for prekindergarten (pre-K) programs are required to use the McKinney–Vento Act definition. However, private child care and preschool programs are not governed by the McKinney–Vento Act.

The McKinney–Vento Act defines "homeless children and youths" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which includes children who are

- sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as "doubled-up");
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters, or abandoned in hospitals;
- staying in a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- experiencing migratory living and thereby qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above. (McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act 2011, §§ 11432–11433)

The California Department of Education has used the McKinney–Vento Act definition of homelessness since 1980 (see https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/homelessdef.asp).*

**It is important to note that the California Department of Education's Early Learning and Care Division (formerly the Early Education and Support Division) has a history of providing services to young children and families experiencing homelessness:*

1980—Child Development Act S. 8263;

2006—Update of Title 5 Regulations to include the 1987 version of the McKinney–Vento Act;

2014—Revised McKinney–Vento Act;

2017—Release of the Early Education and Support Division Management Bulletin requiring use of the 2014 definition in the revised McKinney–Vento Act.

Doubled Up: The Hidden Homeless

Children who are staying temporarily with friends or extended family or another household due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason are experiencing a form of homelessness described as doubling up. Children and their families who are doubling up are often described as the "hidden homeless" because they frequently move between the homes of different family members and friends and many do not self-identify as homeless.

Doubled-up families are frequently not aware that their children qualify for legal protections and support services under the McKinney–Vento Act. And even when these families are knowledgeable about services they are eligible for, they may not want to share their doubled-up status with others because it can place the family and friends they are staying with at risk of eviction. School districts often require the verification of addresses for students attending their schools, and doubling up is an illegal breach of most rental contracts.

Doubling up is estimated to represent 75 percent of young children and their families experiencing homelessness in the United States (USICH 2015). California has one of the highest percentages of doubled-up children and families in the nation.

Doubling up is estimated to represent 75 percent of young children and their families experiencing homelessness in the United States

Doubled-up families can be difficult to identify due to their living arrangements. Many families don't feel like they are homeless because they have a roof over their heads. Others don't want to admit that they are living with another family for fear of lease requirements. In addition, many cultures have rich traditions of cohousing and "clan approaches" to raising families that can provide very nurturing environments for children. Doubling up, instead, is not a choice but a living situation due to economic hardship. This living arrangement is temporary. When trying to determine if a family is actually doubled up, consider asking such questions as:

- Is it due to hardship or choice?
- Why did the family or youth move in with another family?
- Is this a long-term arrangement?
- Is it a situation of mutual benefit or convenience to both parties?
- Where would the doubling-up family or youth live if unable to stay with the host family?

The McKinney–Vento Act was amended in 2015 as part of the reauthorization of ESSA. The EHCY program is authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney–Vento Act (42 USC 11431 et seq.). Under the McKinney–Vento Act, originally authorized in 1987 and most recently reauthorized in December 2015 by the ESSA, SEAs must ensure that each child and youth experiencing homelessness has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youths. In addition, SEAs and LEAs are required to review and revise their policies and procedures to remove barriers to a high-quality education for children experiencing homelessness, specifically in the following ways:

- All LEAs that receive Title I Part A[8] funds must reserve funds to support children and families experiencing homelessness.
- State report cards must include disaggregated information on the graduation rates and academic achievement of children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Every SEA must have an Office of the State Coordinator responsible for overseeing the implementation of the McKinney–Vento Act. California's State Coordinator is responsible for the administration, monitoring, evaluation, and fiscal implementation of the federal EHCY program for all LEAs within the state in addition to coordinating the homeless liaisons (described in the next point) across the state. See https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/.
- Since 2001, every LEA must designate a local homeless liaison who can provide support to children and families experiencing homelessness. Liaisons are responsible for the following:
    - determining whether children and their families meet the HUD definition of homelessness to qualify them for HUD homeless assistance programs;
    - referring families to housing and other services;

8. Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html)

- disseminating information about the rights families experiencing homelessness have under the McKinney–Vento Act in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth, in a manner and form that is understandable to them; and
- ensuring that school personnel providing McKinney–Vento Act services receive professional development and other technical assistance activities on homelessness.

Homeless liaisons can support families by helping reduce the stress associated with homelessness, facilitating families' access to services, and advocating for children's educational rights. See, for instance, how Thuy, a mother of three children living in a family shelter, expressed the positive support provided by the local homeless liaison:

VIGNETTE

I was told that a school district homeless liaison could help me find clothing and bus passes for my kids, help me with after-school care, and I was like, 'what?! I did not know that.' The liaison told me that there are rules from the law, that we have priority [enrollment]. But when I was explaining this to the school, they were ignoring me. So, the liaison went to the school and waited to speak to the director and told her the rules. He told her that they had a responsibility to serve those who are homeless. And because of the liaison, my kids got into the school.

Connecting families with early childhood centers and making sure they are immediately enrolled is a crucial priority for homeless liaisons. Kathy's story illustrates this point:

VIGNETTE

Kathy, a homeless liaison, is starting her day with Gaby [three years old] and her dad, Frank. Gaby lives in a car because her father lost his job and had to sell everything except the car and some tools to get by. Frank tells Kathy that living in their car is okay, but not having a bathroom and not being able to wash their clothes worries him and is a big hassle. Frank

VIGNETTE *CONTINUED*

says that he has tried to find a shelter but that he hasn't found anything for single dads. Kathy immediately makes a call and secures a space for Gaby in a family child care center nearby so she and her dad can walk to the program each morning. She promises she is going to search for a shelter for them. Her phone rings, and she has to rush to a motel to help another family. Kathy explains, "We get 10 to 15 new families every week, and every family is in a crisis."

By making sure that Gaby can immediately attend a quality family child care center, Kathy is not only following the requirements stated in the McKinney–Vento Act but is also offering what we know are protective factors that can buffer the negative consequences of homelessness: access to consistent, caring, and responsive relationships in quality early childhood programs. Having this resource also influences Frank in significant ways by opening up time for him to work, find further resources for his family, and continue working to improve their situation while knowing his child is being well cared for.

School district homeless liaison coordinators can help teachers, administrators, acommunity services.

The California Department of Education uses the McKinney–Vento Act definition of homelessness described previously. Contact information for homeless liaisons across the state of California is listed at https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/. Recently, homelessness was added to the California Education Code as a criterion of eligibility for federal- and state-subsidized child development services (Section 8263). In July 2018, the Early Learning and Care Division (ELCD)[9] also issued a Management Bulletin (https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/mb1804.asp)[10]

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9. Formerly the Early Education and Support Division (EESD).

10. This bulletin is written for executive directors and program administrators of all child care and development contractors: Center-based Child Care and Development (CCTR); California State Preschool Program (CSPP); Family Child Care Homes Education Networks (FCCHEN); Programs for Special Needs Children (Handicapped) (CHAN); California State Migrant Program (center-based) (CMIG); CalWORKs Stage 2 (C2AP); CalWORKs Stage 3 (C3AP); California Alternative Payment Program (CAPP); Migrant

to provide key information about the recent changes to the definition of children and youth who are homeless and to provide guidance on the enrollment of families who are experiencing homelessness.

Homeless liaison positions were created through the amended McKinney–Vento Act to ensure that children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness could receive the supports and services they are eligible for by law.

Homeless liaisons play a critical role in supporting young children—including children in their early childhood years—and their families to secure resources and services. However, interviews with the Office of the State Coordinator in California and homeless liaisons across the state highlight several challenges liaisons face that affect their ability to be advocates for families experiencing homelessness:

- **Turnover is high among local liaisons** due to the stress and intensity associated with the job. This gap makes having a stable contact list for liaisons across the state difficult.
- **There is little coordination across systems, especially in early childhood programs.** For example, in many districts there is little communication between local homeless liaisons and Head Start programs, CSPPs, other subsidized child care centers, or centers that accept voucher subsidies.
- **Most liaisons are more familiar with public school (K–12) than they are with early childhood programs** and the needs of families experiencing homelessness with very young children (e.g., car seats, diapers, strollers, WIC).
- **Many districts do not receive enough funding or choose not to allocate the funding they have to create full-time liaison positions.** As a result, most homeless liaisons must juggle the responsibilities they have in their liaison role with other, often very demanding positions (e.g., assistant principals, directors of student services, social workers, directors of special education, nurses).

Alternative Payment Program (CMAP); and California Resource and Referral (CRRP) programs.

One county homeless liaison described his job in the following way:

I do a lot of outreach, a lot of trainings, get the word out about McKinney–Vento. This year I met at least 320 families. I am the only homeless liaison for the county, which includes over 30 school districts. I host all the quarterly meetings for the various district representatives and I do trainings with all the school district liaisons. I also support early childhood programs. I reach out to the Resource and Referral agencies, and they have community events where I will set up a table where I can bring all my McKinney–Vento resources, and I just go around and introduce myself to everyone and exchange my business cards with some of the child care providers there. When I have direct contact with families, I give them all the information I have from health-care clinics to child care providers and the district liaisons. And I try to create resources that I share with the districts… One of the biggest challenges I face is that we have many district liaisons that will say, "We do not have any homeless students here." Just straight up. So, these districts do not come to anything that I organize and don't respond to my emails, and we know that they do have students experiencing homelessness in their community.

If I internalize the stories and what I see, I would be extremely discouraged. So, I try to keep upbeat, you know, a positive attitude when I meet my families because, yeah, it is tough. I was homeless as a kid with my mom and older brother, so I have a personal understanding of what they are going through.

McKinney–Vento Act: Important Highlights for Early Childhood Teachers

The amended version of the McKinney–Vento Act includes protections and services for preschool-aged children because young children aged birth to five are the age group most affected by homelessness. Unfortunately, specific definitions of preschool are not provided by ED or in ESSA. However, the definition ED uses for McKinney–Vento Act data collection in early childhood includes several criteria.

What Is a Preschool "School of Origin" in the McKinney–Vento Act?
(SchoolHouse Connection, 2017b)

- Publicly funded program for children (aged birth to five) for which an LEA is a financial or administrative agent or is accountable for providing early childhood education
- Preschool program and service operated, administered, or funded by an LEA through the use of Title 1 or similar government grants
- Head Start program receiving LEA funding or for which an LEA is the grant recipient
- Preschool special education service operated or funded by an LEA or mandated under IDEA
- Home-based early childhood service funded and administered by an LEA

The Amended McKinney–Vento Act requires that young children and their families experiencing homelessness do the following[11]:

- **are identified through outreach and coordination** activities (McKinney–Vento Act entitlements are for all children experiencing homelessness, not just children enrolled in Title 1 schools and programs);
- **have access to and receive early educational services** for which they are eligible, including Early Head Start and Head Start programs, early intervention services for infants and toddlers and their families under Part C of IDEA, special education and related services for preschool children with disabilities under Part B of IDEA, and CSPPs administered by the SEA or LEA, as provided to other children;
- **receive referrals to programs and services** for which they are eligible, including housing programs, health care, dental care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, nutrition, early intervention, and other appropriate services (local liaisons must determine whether

11. The Education for Homeless Children and Youths program, authorized by Title VII-B of the McKsinney–Vento Act (42 USC 11431 et seq.), and most recently amended by the ESSA, includes several new provisions related to preschool-aged children. See https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaelguidance10202016.pdf.

children meet the HUD definition of homelessness to qualify for HUD homeless assistance programs);

- are informed of the early educational and related opportunities available and are **provided with meaningful opportunities to participate;** and
- **have the right to remain in their "school of origin"** (for a list of criteria, see the text box, "What Is a Preschool 'School of Origin' in the McKinney–Vento Act?," which includes the preschool or child care program the child attended when permanently housed or in which the child was last enrolled) if the LEA determined that it is in the child's best interest to do so. Transportation must be provided to or from a child's "school of origin," at the request of a parent or guardian, throughout the nine-month school year even if the child and family become permanently housed during that time period.

The McKinney–Vento Act has additional requirements related to early childhood:

- School districts must review their Board policies and administrative regulations and eliminate barriers to enrollment, retention, and success in preschool programs. Enrollment barriers must be removed, including barriers related to missed application or enrollment deadlines, fines or fees, and records (e.g., immunizations) required for enrollment. If it is decided that it is in the best interest of the child to change to a new preschool after the family moves, the child must be immediately enrolled in a new program, even if the family does not have the records normally required for enrollment, including immunizations. Parents and guardians have the right to dispute an eligibility, school selection, or enrollment decision.

- Public notice of the educational rights of children experiencing homelessness, including their eligibility to attend early learning programs, must be shared in locations frequented by families, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to parents and guardians.
- Professional development and technical assistance must be provided at the state and local level for homeless liaisons and other preschool administrators responsible for providing services to young children experiencing homelessness.
- School districts must collaborate and coordinate with other service providers, including public and private child welfare and social service agencies; law enforcement agencies; juvenile and family courts; agencies providing mental health services; domestic violence agencies; child care providers, and providers of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing, including public housing agencies, shelter operators, and operators of transitional housing facilities.
- School districts and preschool programs must maintain the privacy of children's records, including information about the living situation of a child experiencing homelessness, subject to all the protections of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- State report cards must include disaggregated information on the academic achievement of young children experiencing homelessness (NCHE and NAEHCY 2013; ED 2016). Early childhood programs funded by the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) must include a homeless data point (e.g., number of children experiencing homelessness being served and number of children identified with homeless priority) in quarterly reports.

Homeless service systems and agencies using HUD and McKinney–Vento Act funding are now required to create a centralized intake process with prioritization criteria[12] to increase the understanding and building of partnerships to house, shelter, and stabilize individuals and families experiencing homeless-

12. The criteria are part of the 2014 requirement to centralize intake for Continuum of Care: https://bitfocus.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Optimizing-HMIS-Applications-For-Centralized-Intake-White-Paper.pdf.

ness. Because homeless service systems have much greater demand for services than funding or resources to meet communities' needs, they are required to prioritize who they serve in local homeless service system plans. Many counties are beginning to modify their local homeless service systems and to identify service priorities in response to this new federal requirement.

It is important that local homeless liaisons and early education programs learn about their local homeless service system plans, including the:

- agencies and stakeholders involved;
- services and resources provided by each agency;
- individuals prioritized for services in their local plan; and
- access to services (or lack thereof) and eligibility criteria for families with young children.

Homeless service system coordination is immensely complicated. The same is true of child care services coordination. Each system is likely too complex for individuals working with one of these systems to completely understand the other. However, homeless liaisons, early childhood leaders, and system navigators can strive to improve in two areas:

- increase their understanding of the centralized intake process for both systems; and
- strengthen the coordination of services[13] and create "no wrong door" entry points for families (e.g., no matter which entry point a family has, they will have efficient and coordinated access to all services they are eligible for).

An improved coordination of services should lead to an enhanced positive impact that the two systems will have by aligning priorities and cross-system advocacy and improving the success in stabilizing, housing, and supporting young children and their families. Knowing the requirements across programs is a great way to start this coordination. Table 3 provides key information for agencies and programs that draw on ESSA funds.

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13. Homeless liaisons are important stakeholders in local homeless service systems. The level of coordination between homeless liaisons and local homeless service systems (e.g., homeless shelter waiting lists and service intake systems) varies significantly across communities. The new federal requirements to centralize and coordinate services is intended to improve and standardize these coordination efforts.

Table 3. Overview: Key Requirements in Federal Legislation

ESSA	Early Head Start/Head Start	CCDBG Act	IDEA	Americans with Disabilities Act
Amends McKinney–Vento Act Use of Title I for homeless liaison salaries and transportation Increased focus on services for preschool-aged children; includes the explicit inclusion of preschools in the definition of "school of origin" Feeder schools to include preschool	Automatic eligibility for families experiencing homelessness even if they do not meet income guidelines Families can enroll and attend for up to 90 days without required documentation Must coordinate with McKinney–Vento Act LEA homeless liaisons and other community partners Programs must prioritize homelessness based on findings in their regular community assessment of child and family needs Programs may also choose to set aside up to three percent of their funded capacity for children who meet the McKinney–Vento Act definition to help remove barriers to access	Grace period that allows children to immediately receive child care while their families are working to comply with immunization and other health and safety requirements Data point for quarterly reporting that documents the number of young children experiencing homelessness who are served in CCDBG-funded programs Training and technical assistance on identifying and serving families who are homeless Outreach to identify families experiencing homelessness Coordinated services with early childhood programs serving children experiencing homelessness	LEA homeless liaisons can coordinate comprehensive services, including Part B and C, for families that are homeless Child Find is a provision of IDEA that requires each state to have ways of actively seeking children who may need special education services	Prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation on the basis of disability, including emergency overnight shelters and social service facilities

CCDF = Child Care Development Fund; CCDBG = Child Care and Development Block Grant; ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act; IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Act; LEA = local education agency

Foster Care Children Waiting for Resource Families

The 2017 reauthorization of the McKinney–Vento Act removed "foster care children waiting for placement with resource families" as a category included in the definition of homelessness because of their involvement in the child welfare system. Children in the child welfare system are now considered permanently housed according to the McKinney–Vento Act, unless they meet the other elements of the definition of homeless. A separate act was created to serve foster care children (see https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhseffective-datesdcl.pdf).

Head Start: Provisions to Support Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Head Start Act) prioritized children experiencing homelessness for enrollment and for eligibility to receive Head Start services. This commitment is represented in Head Start's 2016 Performance Standards that describe the specific services Head Start must provide to meet the needs of young children and families who are experiencing homelessness (ECLKC 2016). Head Start uses the more inclusive McKinney–Vento Act definition of homelessness. Under this definition, the percentage of children eligible for enrollment in Head Start due to homelessness has more than doubled in recent years, from 1.6 percent in 2008–09 to 3.6 percent in 2015–16, with the vast majority (95 percent) reporting that they are doubling up (HHS 2017).

The Head Start Act requires that grantees coordinate with state homeless coordinators and local homeless liaisons to complete the following activities:

- **Engage in outreach to identify and encourage families experiencing homelessness to enroll in Head Start programs. Engagement includes identifying agencies serving these families, posting information about Head Start in areas where families experiencing homelessness will see the information, recruiting in homeless shelters, and collaborating with homeless liaisons.** *Head Start grantees must enroll children and families experiencing homelessness regardless of their family income level.*

- **Reduce barriers to enrollment and participation for children experiencing homelessness.** For example:
  - Programs are encouraged to reserve up to 3 percent of funded slots for 30 days for children who are experiencing homelessness or in foster care (after 30 days, these slots are considered vacant).
  - Programs must allow families experiencing homelessness additional time (up to a 90-day grace period after they start the program) to obtain documentation required for enrollment, including immunization records.
  - If transportation to the Head Start program is a barrier for families, programs must work with community partners to provide transportation to and from the program so children experiencing homelessness can participate. This is the case for highly mobile families for which accommodations can be made to allow children to remain in the same Head Start program even when they move out of that program's service area.
- **Collaborate with community partners to ensure that children experiencing homelessness are prioritized to receive comprehensive services.** This may include supporting families to find temporary or long-term housing, scheduling appointments for services they need (dental, medical/local public health programs), providing transportation to appointments, attending appointments with them when appropriate, and supporting them to receive financial assistance (e.g., transportation, immunization, and other costs).

Child Care Development Fund Reauthorization: Child Care and Development Block Grant Act

The 2014 reauthorization of the CCDBG also places a greater emphasis on serving young children and families experiencing homelessness, especially increasing access to high-quality child care programs for these families. Grantees must now meet the following requirements (Bires, Garcia, and Zhu 2017):

- A grace period for children experiencing homelessness during which they can be enrolled and participating in CCDF-funded child care programs while their families are working on completing all of the required documentation, including the immunization requirements.
- States must use CCDF funds for training, technical assistance, and outreach to promote access to services for families experiencing homelessness.
- States must develop strategies for increasing the supply and quality of services for children in underserved areas, infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children in nontraditional-hour care. States may use grants, contracts, or alternative reimbursements for these services. Some strategies to build supply and improve quality could include:
    - offering tiered payment rates (e.g., a rate add-on to incentivize child care providers to accept or reach out to families experiencing homelessness) and providing resources to support the unique needs of families while they are enrolled in the program (e.g., transportation, support in obtaining required documents, comprehensive services, case management);
    - offering training and technical assistance to providers on the topic of strategies for reaching out to, identifying, and serving families experiencing homelessness;
    - creating opportunities within quality rating and improvement systems (e.g., Quality Counts California) to acknowledge when programs are structured and staff are trained to serve children experiencing homelessness and their families; and
    - using local planning council information to prioritize where services for families experiencing homelessness should be expanded or relocated when new contracts and funding are released.

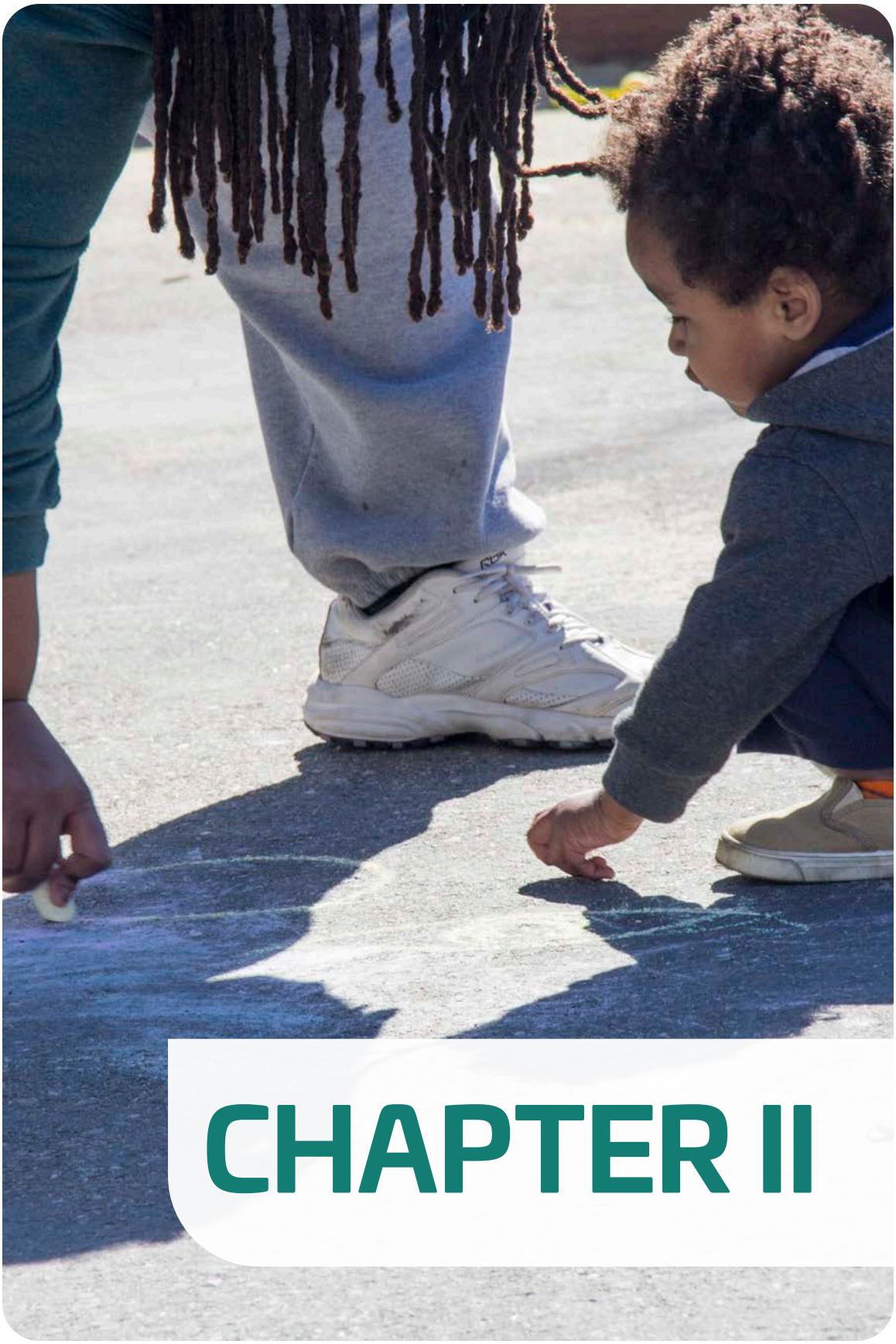
- CCDF reports must include the number of children receiving subsidies who are identified as homeless (using the McKinney–Vento Act definition).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The stress of homelessness places children at heightened risk for cognitive, speech, motor, and social–emotional developmental delays. Despite their increased risk of delays, children experiencing homelessness often have more difficulties accessing early intervention (IDEA Part C) and special education (IDEA Part B) services due to a range of factors, including chronic absenteeism, high levels of mobility, missing documentation, and parents and guardians who decline to consent. Each time a young child experiencing homelessness and receiving Part B or Part C services moves to a new residential location and changes early childhood schools or programs, records and assessments must be transferred to the new program, and this can lead to disruptions in the intervention services. IDEA Part C considers children and families who are experiencing homelessness as one of four traditionally underserved groups prioritized for intervention services (other underserved groups include families from a minority group, low-income families, and families living in a rural area). Since 2011, states have been required to adapt their policies and practices to ensure all four underserved groups are meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of Part C services. One form of oversight is requiring a staff member from each state's Office of the Coordination of Education of Homeless Children and Youth to sit on the Interagency Coordinating Council, the state's primary early intervention leadership and coordination body. Additionally, states must commit to ensuring traditionally underserved families have access to culturally competent services within their local geographic area.

The McKinney–Vento Act also requires that young children and their families experiencing homelessness are identified through outreach and coordination activities and have access to and receive early educational services for which they are eligible, including early intervention services under IDEA Part C. The ESSA requires LEAs to coordinate McKinney–Vento Act and special education services within the LEA and with other involved LEAs. Local McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons are the individuals positioned to do this work for LEAs; however, it is important to note that many liaisons are much less familiar with children at the age 0–5 level than those at the K–12 level, which increases the importance of providing them with information to link families with IDEA Part B and C services.

Early childhood teachers, directors, and program staff will create more responsive and welcoming environments for young children and families experiencing homelessness when they understand the current laws and policies addressing these young children and their families. Learning about the different definitions of homelessness is important because these definitions determine who is eligible for services and which services they are entitled to receive. McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons can provide critical support for early childhood program staff who want to connect families experiencing or at risk for homelessness with critical programs and services in their community.



CHAPTER II

Learning About the Families with Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

VIGNETTE

When Arturo and Elena lost their apartment, they moved with their three-year-old twin sons to the basement of Arturo's grandfather's house. The relationship between Arturo and his grandfather is difficult, and they don't know how long they can stay there even though they pay some rent, but they can't afford any other place. The basement is a one-room space that is not meant for habitation. Since they have moved in, they have seen rats several times, but the grandfather doesn't want to pay to fix the problem. Arturo and Elena clean the space as well as they can, and they try to stay out as much as possible. Elena says that Arturo has been struggling with alcohol addiction for a while and that he is trying to stay sober for the boys, adding: "But there is a lot of tension in the house and it feels like things are hanging on by a thread. We try to plan our next move, but there is never a quiet moment."

When thinking about homelessness, many people picture adults they see living in parks or on the street. However, families often work hard to avoid being unsheltered. They seek safer alternatives for their children, as Arturo and Elena did, even when the options available are not free of problems and stress. Because families with children are often out of sight, it is rare that the word homeless brings to mind the image of a child without a stable home. Yet, in our most recent national count, over 1.2 million children under the age of six were described as experiencing homelessness, in sum, 1 out of every 20 young children in the United States (ACF 2017a). This makes up a significant percentage of the children cared for in early childhood programs. Therefore, it is essential that early childhood teachers expand their understanding of families experiencing homelessness and the life circumstances that lead many families with young infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to find themselves homeless.

This chapter:

- describes the prevalence of homelessness for families with young children in the United States and in California;
- discusses important sources of variability and of shared experience among young children affected by homelessness, including diverse causes of homelessness and various living arrangements among families without stable housing;
- explains some of the common barriers families face when trying to access early childhood programs; and
- offers recommendations for addressing these barriers and working in partnership with families to increase their access to and participation in early childhood programs.

The Prevalence of Homelessness Among Very Young Children

Young children are experiencing homelessness in every city, county, and state in the United States (Bassuk et al. 2014). Young children under the age of one are more likely to be homeless than people from any other age group, including adults, closely followed by children one to five years of age *(SchoolHouse Connection 2018). Approximately half of all children experiencing homelessness have not entered elementary school* (NAEHCY 2016b).

California has one of the highest percentages of young children under the age of six experiencing homelessness in the nation (ACF 2017a; see table

California has one of the highest percentages of young children under the age of six experiencing homelessness in the nation

4). Moreover, the rate of homelessness among children has increased in California by 20 percent since 2014. In California, 246,296 children, from infants, toddlers, and preschoolers up to grade 12 were identified as experiencing homelessness in the 2015–16 academic year (Jones 2017; NCHE 2017). And the actual numbers are likely significantly higher, as many young children are not identified in the official counting methods that rely on public school attendance records (NAEHCY 2016a).

VIGNETTE

"Go sleep in your car, go sleep on the road, have nothing but your blanket and maybe a small backpack. And now double that and add kids that you need to care for. And you need to wonder, how are we going to get to a bathroom? Is a cop going to write us up … because I don't have heat or the air conditioner is not working properly? ***People don't realize how hard it is to be homeless.****"*
–Jacqueline, mother experiencing homelessness with two children under the age of five.

Table 4. Young Children Experiencing Homelessness: National and State Percentages

Children by Population Type	United States	California
Children under age six experiencing homelessness	**5%** 1 out of 20 children	**7%** 1 out of 14 children
Of children served by federally funded early childhood programs*, children under age six experiencing homelessness	**8%**	**6%**

*Including Head Start and Early Head Start and programs funded with McKinney–Vento Act subgrants

National data highlight that a majority of the families experiencing homelessness are headed by single mothers with young children (Bassuk et al. 2014). According to recent estimates by HUD, of those families living in the street or in shelters, 77.6 percent were mothers, 52 percent were African American, 25 percent were white, and 25 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino (HUD 2016). Single parenting adds a strain to mothers already living in poverty. Single moth-

ers experiencing homelessness are often underemployed or unemployed and are at greater risk of accumulating debt (Bassuk et al. 2014). Adding to these stressors, many studies show that the majority of mothers have experienced traumatic events, which often affect their well-being (Swick & Williams 2010).

Despite the fundamental role that high-quality early childhood education could have in supporting children and families who are homeless, only 8 percent of young children experiencing homelessness are served by federally funded programs, including Early Head Start, Head Start, or other early childhood education (ECE) programs funded by the McKinney–Vento Act, and only 6 percent in California (ACF 2017a). There are many reasons for these low participation rates (see table 4). There is not enough outreach to families experiencing homelessness before children enter public schools, and there is a lack of understanding of the child care subsidy system and the benefits of early education for children and families among many homeless service workers. Additionally, there is little to no training available for early childhood teachers and providers about serving families experiencing homelessness and a lack of available space in early childhood programs along with long waiting lists. Several nationwide reports stress the urgency of improving California's identification and support for children experiencing homelessness and their families (ACF 2017a; Bassuk et al. 2014; Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness [ICPH] 2017). Far too few of our youngest children experiencing homelessness in California are receiving the benefits of being enrolled in a high-quality early childhood program.

A Diversity of Experiences

Just as the composition, values, experiences, strengths, needs, and goals of each family is unique, families experiencing homelessness and the circumstances that lead to their lack of housing are equally diverse. Each family has a complex set of life circumstances and challenges that have resulted in the experience of homelessness. And each family experiencing homelessness is not defined by this circumstance. They also have many unique sources of strength, funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti 2005), skills, and capacities, including the development of strategies to cope with regularly occurring, stressful life experiences. The following vignettes highlight an important truth: There is no single experience of homelessness.

> There is no single experience of homelessness.

VIGNETTE

Maya, her partner Melinda, and their four children lost their apartment after the owner raised the rent three years in a row. Although both were working, the increases were more than they could manage. The family moved to Melinda's parents' apartment within a senior residential community thinking they could stay temporarily while they looked for a place to live. Although they could afford a two-bedroom apartment, they could not find anyone to rent to them because it was illegal to rent two-bedroom apartments to families larger than five. Making things worse, they had to move out of the grandparents' apartment when others living in the senior residential community began asking questions and expressing concerns. The family slept in their car for many weeks, had a short stay at a motel, and tried once again to move back in with the grandparents, which did not last long because there were lots of conflicts with the in-laws. Maya became extremely depressed, and experienced suicidal thoughts. With nowhere else to go, the family continued living in their car.

Inviting families to share their story sheds light on the complex circumstances that lead parents to experience homelessness. Circumstances that can be invisible to those who only see a family in a car, without attention to their story. Janet, in the next vignette—as Maya and Melinda in the previous one—illustrates too the amount of emotional work that is required in trying to improve one's situation:

VIGNETTE

Janet and her five children (ages 4, 6, 11, 12, and 13) are survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. Janet had 20 minutes to pack everything and leave because her ex-husband kept violating his restraining order and threatening her. They were highly mobile moving in and out of motels. Janet's oldest is 13, needs significant mental health support, and requires 24-hour care with a trusted adult. Janet was trying to get therapy for him when she heard about a homeless assistance program. The program helped Janet secure a temporary space at a local family shelter.

Janet, like many other single mothers, experiences added challenges: the median income for women is lower than for men and reports suggest that only one-third of mothers receive any child support (Bassuk et al. 2014). In a context where lack of affordable housing is the norm it is not surprising that 71 percent of families experiencing homelessness are headed by a single mother. These stressful conditions also contribute to increased mental health needs. In the next vignette, Mariana shared with us how despite the taxing health and mental health needs of her family, they were able to find joyful moments with their children:

VIGNETTE

Mariana, 38, is sweeping the parking lot of the local Burger King while Sarai, 2, and Faith, 4, runs around her with a pail and the dust pan. Desiree, who is 8 and has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, is looking at the scene from the van where they live. Mariana is teaching her daughters the ABC song and playing freeze: when she stops singing, Faith stops immediately, but Sarai is still trying to figure out how the game works. She wobbles, and they all laugh together. Mariana's family has been living in the van for almost a year. This particular fast-food restaurant has taken kindly to the family, and Mariana feels that keeping the parking lot clean is a way to build a good relationship with the owners and staff, so she and her girls can continue sleeping in the parking lot for the time being. The family lost their apartment after the rent was increased by 50 percent unexpectedly and with little notice. Mariana is a survivor of sexual assault, which she experienced while living in a shelter when she was a teenager. For this reason, she and her husband feel safer living in the van they own than going into a shelter. When Mariana describes her situation, it is clear that things are not easy. She experiences depression and feels overwhelmed by the responsibilities of transporting her children to school and child care. She also makes frequent visits to the hospital when Desiree experiences seizures. Her husband takes any job that is offered to him, but without legal documentation to stay in the country things are complicated. Still, Mariana and her husband find time to add songs and games to their day. "We have been trying to keep it light for the children. We pretend that we are camping. This weekend we went to the beach. They buried my husband's legs in the sand, and he liked it!" Mariana says laughing. Mariana also spends hours daily trying to get housing, calling

VIGNETTE *(CONTINUED)*

different agencies on top of figuring out how the family will eat. "I wake up every day at 5:30 a.m. It is a full-time job to survive, to get food, clothing, and housing." Sometimes the family can't afford gas for the van, and on those days the children miss child care and school. On days when Mariana's depression is overwhelming, she struggles to bring the children to school on time. But this creates additional problems for her. She recalls, "They called Child Protective Services one week when I didn't manage to bring the kids to school. It was scary. One of the teaching assistants told me that I was not a fit mom for my kids, but she doesn't know me!"

Importantly, these stories illustrate the truth about children and families experiencing homelessness in our state and across the United States. They face many complex challenges and stressors and they also have many strengths. Most develop creative coping skills for managing all of the obstacles they face trying to survive on a daily basis. Notice for instance, how Mariana manages to create a stable environment by establishing an unspoken agreement with the fast food restaurant staff, helping to keep the parking lot clean. However, families experiencing homelessness are often judged and perceived through a deficit perspective. Consider the teacher's assistant in Mariana's story. She might have thought that what she was doing was in the best interest of the child in her care; however, by assuming that Mariana's tardiness meant that she was not a caring or "fit" parent, she jumped to a conclusion that was inaccurate and misrepresented this family. Mariana is right: If the teacher's assistant had known more about her family and the realities of their experience of homelessness, she might have been less judgmental and more willing to listen, learn, and have empathy for her and her family. If the assistant had done so, she would have realized the different ways Mariana and her husband were taking care of their children—working hard to maintain a sense of normalcy and safety for the children, dedicating time to look for housing daily, driving and caring for their child with disabilities, and figuring out safe spaces for the family to park their van and sleep at night.

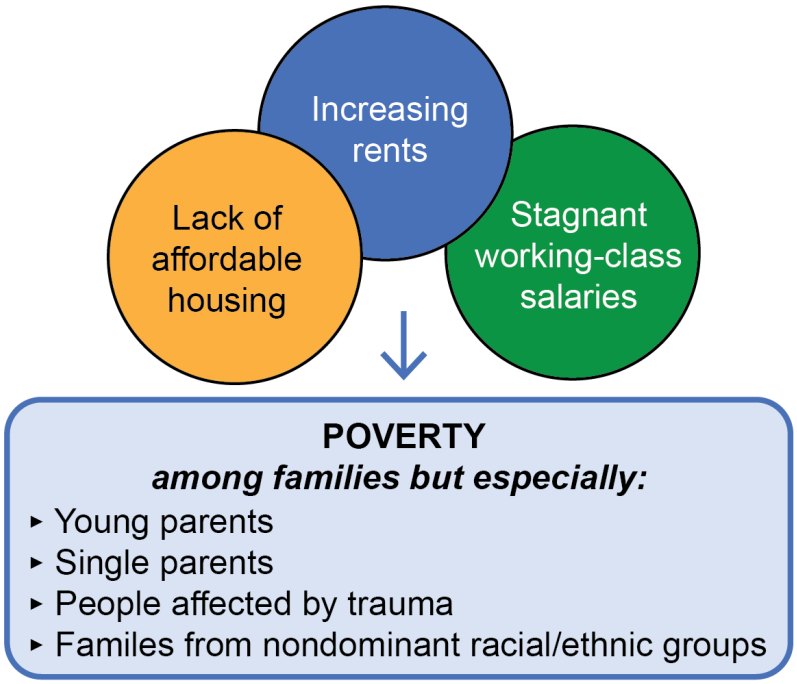
Being aware of the diverse experiences among families and young children experiencing homelessness is an important first step for caregivers who want to be responsive in their approach to working with families.

Causes of Homelessness

The main cause of family homelessness is the large number of young children and their families living in poverty in the United States. The latest Census data show that in 2017, one in five infants and toddlers (19.9 percent of children ages birth through two years) is poor; infants and toddlers are the age group most likely to live in poverty, especially black and Hispanic children (Paschall, Halle, and Bartlett 2018). Specifically, almost one in three black infants and toddlers (32.7 percent) and more than one in four Hispanic infants and toddlers (27.3 percent) live in poverty in comparison with one in nine white, non-Hispanic infants and toddlers (11.8 percent) (Paschall, Halle, and Bartlett 2018).

Another significant cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing (Henwood et al. 2015; ACF 2017a; The US Conference of Mayors 2016), a problem that is severe in California where residents have the highest housing cost burden in the country (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2018; see figure 1). The rising costs of rental housing along with the decline of federal support for affordable housing and low-wage workers' stagnant incomes are significant factors leading to the rising number of families with young children experiencing homelessness in California (Bassuk et al. 2014; Kushel 2018). Thus, even when jobs are available, they may be part-time and minimum wage with no benefits. Parents may hold two or more jobs and still not earn enough to establish economic stability for their families.

Figure 1. Causes of Family Homelessness



The lack of affordable housing. increasing rents, and stagnant working-class salaries are the main factors leading to poverty among families, especially among four population groups: 1) young parents, 2) single parents, 3) people affected by trauma, and 4) families from nondominant racial–ethnic groups.

Homelessness is most prevalent for families with infants and toddlers, especially for young, single mothers and mothers from nondominant racial–ethnic groups (Henwood et al. 2015). Age is also an important factor that intersects with poverty and homelessness. Over 27 percent of families in HUD shelters are headed by a parent who is 25 years old or younger (Gubits, Shinn, Bell, Wood, Dstrup, and Solari 2015).

Mothers experiencing homelessness also often have histories of trauma, which can prevent them from building trusting relationships and seeking resources and support in their communities. This was seen with Mariana whose previous experiences of sexual abuse at a shelter understandably affected her ability to trust the services offered to her from a local family shelter.

The rate at which most ethnic-minority groups experience homelessness is far greater than that of whites and Asians. Measured as the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night per 10,000 people in the population, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have the highest rate of

homelessness. African Americans have the second highest rate, followed by American Indians/Alaska Natives, people who identify as two or more races, and Latinx[14] families (*The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1*). When considering the causes of homelessness, it is important to have a broader view of the societal inequities (e.g., racism, sexism, and poverty) that place some families at increased risk for homelessness than others. Learning about and acknowledging these larger forces at work can prevent patterns of blaming families and communities for their circumstances of homelessness. Funders, policymakers, advocates, and homeless and housing service providers are coming together to shed more light on the urgency of addressing systemic racism as a major cause of homelessness (Funders Together to End Homelessness 2018).

Living Arrangements

Families experience homelessness in significantly different ways because the contexts in which they live are so diverse. Families' educational opportunities, connections to resources and services, and their experiences vary significantly in different *residential spaces* (shelter, doubling up, living with independent accommodations through Rapid Rehousing/Housing First, motels, hotels, cars, or unsheltered) and *geographic places* (urban, suburban, rural) (Pavlakis 2018). Most children and families experiencing homelessness will live in different residential contexts and many move from one context to the other (e.g., from motel to car to shelter). Although there is significant variation between and within different cities, suburbs, and rural areas, the range of residential options available to families experiencing homelessness tends to be greater in urban and suburban contexts than in rural communities (Pavlakis 2018).

Families experience homelessness in significantly different ways because the contexts in which they live are so diverse.

14. A gender-neutral term used instead of Latino or Latina.

Different residential contexts have their own benefits and limitations for family life when parents and guardians are caring for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. For example, in shelters, families have less control over their parenting and home routines because they do not decide what their children will eat for dinner or when they will go to bed; however, they often have access to case workers who can connect them with needed services in the community. In some homeless shelter settings and in single-room occupancy hotels, parents may have difficulty accessing shared bathrooms in a timely way, which can make toilet training for young children very challenging. For families living independently due to Rapid Rehousing programs,[15] the opposite is true. They have control over their parenting and home routines, but families using this residential option are often more disconnected and isolated from support networks and access to community resources. Another example is seen in rural areas where schools are seeing increased mobility among families, and many children are living in housing without plumbing or electricity, conditions that would qualify them as homeless under the McKinney–Vento Act. Whereas urban areas have more social services available, rural areas tend to have stronger relational networks of support, while suburban cities struggle to raise funds or attract funding from nonprofit agencies to serve the expanding number of families who are homeless in their communities (Pavlakis 2018).

Finding a safe space to sleep is a top priority for families with young children experiencing homelessness. Whether they have concerns for their safety, the rules of a shelter are too restrictive, their host when doubling up asks them to leave the home, or other reasons, families who are homeless face multiple challenges on a daily basis that result from uncertainty and, for many, continual mobility. Despite the significant stressors they experience, most of these families develop many strengths and engage in creative problem solving to help them cope and to keep their families safe and functioning. Consider this story shared by a homeless liaison:

15. Previous federal policies addressed homelessness using a Continuum of Care model where families transitioned from having no home into shelters, with the goal to eventually move into independent housing. Since the HEARTH Act of 2009 (part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) was passed, the federal government has incentivized a Rapid Rehousing or Housing First approach (USICH 2015) in which families are immediately provided with independent housing and has discouraged placement of families in shelters. This approach has led to families being more geographically dispersed than in shelter-first approaches in which multiple families would share rooms in shelters or other types of transitional housing (Pavlakis 2018).

VIGNETTE

Last school year, a mom called me, and I was going to drop off her kids for her and meet with her and make sure that everything was good. In the location that she told me to go to, I drove up, but there was a barrier, so I called her and said, "There's some sort of cardboard and other stuff in the way, and I can't get by." She replied, "Okay, I'll come out and move it for you." She came out and moved what turned out to be a makeshift gate, and there were about 25 cars there. I said, "What is this place?" She said, "This is a family camp." There were only families with kids there. I went to all the families and explained that I'm not a housing provider, but if they had education needs or needed clothing, I could help. It seems like it was a secret place. They let other families know about it by word of mouth because families are afraid. Some of the families were undocumented, so they don't qualify for housing services in the county. We can't even do an intake for the database with them. We can't do anything in those cases for housing, but the education laws still apply. We know that education is key, but, if we don't get them what they really need in terms of stable housing, it will be any day now that their education falls apart.

This family camp, where families experiencing homelessness parked together for protection and to pool their resources together, is an illustration of the creative thinking and hard work families go through daily to provide for their children when they are homeless. As introduced before, most young children experiencing homelessness in the United States do not live in tents or in the street but, instead, temporarily share apartments with others (76 percent), live in motels (7 percent), or stay in shelters (14 percent). However, homeless service workers in several urban areas are reporting increasing incidences of families living in cars or encampments and, in some cases, mothers delivering their babies in tents. In California, the number of families experiencing homelessness who are doubling up (86 percent) is higher than in other states, whereas the percentage of families experiencing homelessness living in shelters and transitional housing is half the national average (7 percent).

While it would seem that family shelters are the most logical choice for families with young children experiencing homelessness, shelters are not always available in all communities, and when they are, they often have long waiting lists. In

addition, the restrictive rules at shelters can make them very difficult for families with young children. Eun-jin, a mother of three young children who stayed for two months at the only family shelter in her area describes her experience:

VIGNETTE

To start, you need to call every day from 10 to 11 if you want a spot there. If you miss one single day, you are placed at the bottom of the waiting list. So, if the line is busy or if you are working, it doesn't matter. You have to either call or be there from 10 to 11 every day to get a spot at the shelter. Once you are accepted in, you must pass a drug test, and then they give you a book with all the rules of the shelter. Mind you, this is a 48-page book! To stay at the shelter, you must do chores every day or night: washing dishes, cleaning up the windows, sweeping the floors … and you must have your kids with you while you do it. You cannot leave them in the bedroom. And then, during school days, everyone needs to leave the shelter at 7:30 and not return until 4:00. I was really sick one time, and they didn't allow me to stay in. But the worst is the food. The kids wouldn't eat it. The bread was usually moldy or hard. And I am vegetarian, and there was only lettuce with ranch dressing as a vegetarian option. Every single day for two months.

The strain of the rules exhausted Eun-jin and the children, who could not have as much quiet time and rest as they needed. Because of high demand, many shelters also impose a limit on the number of days a family can stay. Additionally, some shelters require that residents leave during the day which can be very difficult for families with young children. Further, shelters may not screen residents (e.g., complete criminal background checks) so pedophiles and registered sex offenders could be living in the shelters with families and their young children. As a result of these factors and others, for many families, shelters are only a temporary stop in a long string of living arrangements that often include doubled-up arrangements with other families.

When sharing the housing of other persons, or doubling up, children and families experiencing homelessness can be asked to leave at any moment. As a result, doubled-up families often live with a constant state of uncertainty and fear that they will be asked to leave the home. The concept of "doubled-up" is

confusing to some people who wonder why parents and children are considered "homeless" if they have a roof over their heads. A reasonable question many people ask is: how does doubling up differ from other types of cohousing, including intergenerational housing? As Janelle's story highlights, doubling up is very different from other cohousing arrangements:

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Janelle was working full time as an administrator at a nonprofit agency when she became homeless. She and her husband were both in stable jobs, and they were homeowners with a middle-class income. To her surprise, Janelle's husband developed a gambling addiction, which led to the loss of their savings, their home, and ultimately their marriage. Janelle moved to a rental house with her five children; the youngest was four years old and her oldest was 16. This happened during an economic downturn in California, and Janelle was doubly affected. First, the agency where she was working had to downsize and, instead of being laid off, Janelle accepted a pay cut to keep her job. Then, barely six months after moving into the rental house, the owner was evicted for not keeping up with the mortgage payments. Janelle and her five children were given one week's notice to move out. Finding herself without any options and so little time to figure out a solution, she made a very difficult decision to send her two oldest children to stay with their father, her first husband, who lived in another state and had offered to care for them. She was able to find a friend, Crystal, who offered to host her three youngest children and herself on a temporary basis in her apartment. Crystal reinforced that this was not a stable solution: "This will help us both out, since you are paying rent, but it is temporary." Janelle was constantly anxious. She consistently told her children, "Make sure that you clean up after yourselves, no noise! Because, until we figure out what are we going to do next, you need to be on your best behavior." Janelle noticed that her children started struggling in school. They were separated from their siblings, and everything was very uncertain and constantly changing for them. And then Janelle's fears were realized. After a couple months, Crystal told Janelle that she was a single woman and having four additional people in her home was too much for her. So, Janelle had to pack her family up again with no place to go.

Janelle's description of her living arrangement illustrates clearly how doubling up is different from other forms of cohousing (see figure 2).

- First, families move in with others (or double up) because of economic hardship and extreme need. When families double up, they do so because there are no other options and there is no choice: it is either double up or live on the street or in their car.
- A second key difference from other forms of cohousing is that the guest family has no legal right to be in the home and the situation is temporary: they can be asked to leave at any time without much warning.

In doubled-up situations, often the host family is renting too and might be breaking their lease by having the guest family with them, increasing the levels of stress for both families. For many, these stays last only a couple of weeks in one home and then back to finding another home while they try to figure out a more stable solution. For Janelle, her first doubled-up experience lasted three months, but after that, she lived for periods of two to three weeks in different houses "to not burn out the relationships."

WHAT IS MEANT BY "DOUBLING UP"?

"Doubled Up" Experiencing Homelessness	Shared Housing Not Experiencing Homelessness
Loss of Housing: • Eviction: unable to pay bills • Serious damage to home • Unhealthy conditions: pest infestations, domestic violence, drug/alcohol abuse in home	**Fixed, Regular, Adequate:** • Used on a regular, nightly basis • Family has keys to residence and is free to come and go as they please • Enough space for everyone
Sharing due to Hardship: • No legal right to be in the home; host can be evicted • Can be asked to leave at any time without legal recourse • Moved into the home as an urgent measure to avoid being in shelters or on the street • Living situation is intended to be temporary	**Sharing Housing as a Choice:** • Intent of sharing is a long-term arrangement for cultural or economic reasons • Moved in together to share a home and expenses • Sharing home equally—not just guests in home • Family not in fear of being asked to leave/kicked out

Take Away:

Families who are "doubling up" according to McKinney–Vento may not identify as homeless due to a stigma and/or narrow definitions of homelessness. A responsive approach to connecting families with housing services does not require using the label "homeless." Instead, listen carefully to learn how families describe their situations including their needs and circumstances.

Adapted from Fresno County Superintendent of Schools' "Double Up."

It is important to acknowledge that many families who are doubling up according to the McKinney–Vento Act definition may not identify themselves as homeless. These families might fear the social stigma of this label, they might feel uncomfortable with the word, or they might see living with others as part of their cultural practices. Using a responsive approach, early childhood teachers never need to impose a "label" on families. Instead, the goal for early childhood staff and homeless liaisons is to know whether a family can be eligible through the McKinney–Vento Act to receive services. Maria, a local liaison, explains how she works with families to provide them with support when they do not identify themselves as homeless:

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Maria is a local homeless liaison who often works with families on a reservation in Southern California. As a member of her tribe, Maria knows that sharing houses on the reservation is often seen as part of many Native American tribes' values. Thus, when talking to a family that might be defined as doubled-up by the McKinney–Vento Act, she explains, "I talk to them. I listen to hear how they define their situation. If they fit the McKinney–Vento definition, I don't think it's necessary to label the family's situation as homelessness. I just talk to them. I tell them that they might qualify for supports, such as bus transport, or that they have priority for child care. Families appreciate those services so much, there is no need to label their situation one way or another.

As Maria illustrates, listening and learning from each family about how they talk about their family circumstances is essential. It is especially important that teachers are respectful when a family does not identify themselves as homeless. Whether they choose to describe themselves as homeless or not, they can still receive services and resources they qualify for under the McKinney–Vento Act. And respecting each family's choices about the language they use to talk about their family's living situation will help teachers establish trusting and respectful relationships with them.

> It is especially important that teachers are respectful when a family does not identify themselves as homeless.

In contrast, homeless liaisons report that some school districts confuse the circumstances that lead families to double up with a family's cultural practices.

Some liaisons wonder if districts' actual motivation is to save on the cost of providing services to all of the families who would qualify under the McKinney–Vento Act. These liaisons describe that an important part of their job is to advocate for families experiencing homelessness to be acknowledged as homeless when necessary. A liaison explains:

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I believe that there are about 1,000 kids in the district who qualify under McKinney–Vento and the district pushed back on that. This city has a lot of immigrants, a lot of Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese families. The district argued that their living situations were a cultural situation. But when there are 11 people in one bedroom, you can't tell me that it's not an economic thing. If we don't do the count correctly, we don't get the funds to provide for the families who need services.

An important aspect of being housing sensitive is understanding the difference between cohousing arrangements that are made by choice and reflect family cultural traditions and values versus doubling-up situations in which families have no other housing options available.

Barriers That Prevent Families from Accessing and Enrolling in Early Childhood Programs

Families experiencing homelessness often have significant challenges accessing and enrolling in early childhood education programs (Buckner 2008; NCHE and NAEHCY 2013.; NAEHCY 2016c, Perlman 2015; Powers-Costello and Swick 2008). These challenges are reflected in current data reporting only 6 percent of children experiencing homelessness are being served by Early Head Start, Head Start, or McKinney–Vento-funded early childhood education programs (ACF 2017a). Table 5 lists common barriers that lead to these low participation rates.

Table 5. Barriers

Barriers that prevent families from learning about early childhood programs
• Lack of awareness and knowledge among providers across systems. • Lack of outreach by teachers and program staff. • Limited cross-systems collaboration. • "Invisibility" in communities due to unstable living situations. • Stigma and fear of being reported to CPS. • Subsidy terms and conditions in state subsidy-provider contracts (state-subsidized child care and preschool). Whereas Head Start and CCDF require the prioritization of families experiencing homelessness, homelessness is just one of many factors in determining eligibility to Title 5 programs and not explicitly prioritized.[16] • Some families experiencing homelessness lack trust in teachers and providers they do not know caring for their children, particularly parents who have experienced trauma themselves.

16. California Department of Education, Early Learning and Care Division's funding terms and conditions in subsidy provider contracts (state-subsidized child care and preschool) include the following prioritization language: Priority of Services are as follows (EC 8263[1] and [2].

First Priority (EC 8263[b][1]):

- Neglected or abused children who are recipients of child protective services, or
- Children who are at risk of being neglected or abused.

If an agency is unable to enroll a child in the first priority category, the agency shall refer the family to local Resource and Referral agencies to locate services for the child.

Second Priority (EC 8263[b][2]):

- After children in the first priority are enrolled, second priority is given equally to eligible families, regardless of the number of parents in the home, who are income eligible.

Eligible families, regardless of the number of parent(s) in the home, who are income eligible are next and shall be prioritized according to families with lowest gross monthly income in relation to family size as determined by a schedule adopted by the Superintendent. For full requirements see *Admission Priorities.*

Barriers that prevent or delay families from enrolling in early childhood programs
• Lack of slots and long waiting lists • Lack of evening or weekend hours for child care options • Lengthy and complex enrollment processes for subsidized programs • Lack of funding both at the systems level and families level • Lack of transportation to programs and other resources • Lack of documentation or ability to meet enrollment requirements (e.g. being potty-trained before enrolling, etc.) • High rates of mobility: changing phone numbers and phone access makes it challenging to follow up on enrollment and services • Lack of translation or interpretation services for families who speak less common languages • Lack of continuity between "Stages" for CalWORKs recipients • Limited navigation support for families

CCDF = Child Care Development Fund; CPS = Child Protective Services

An important barrier preventing families from accessing early childhood programs is a lack of awareness and understanding of the laws and eligibility requirements related to enrollment in early childhood programs. Many teachers and professionals serving young children and families (e.g., staff at early childhood programs, family shelters, food banks, home visiting programs, mental health agencies) have not received training on the laws, policies, and services for families experiencing homelessness. Homeless liaisons observe firsthand how these gaps in awareness and understanding prevent families with young children from receiving services they are eligible for. See for instance the following two vignettes.

Consequently, to be prioritized for a subsidized child care space, families must be referred to programs by shelters or legally qualified service providers as "at risk of abuse or neglect." Most families experiencing homelessness are concerned about being associated with this priority because many worry about having their children removed by CPS. Using the second tier of prioritization for families experiencing homelessness does not work for many families because families in which the parent(s) are employed may not qualify as a top priority or "lowest income" family.

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A family experiencing homelessness tried to enroll their four-year-old child at a state-funded preschool program in their community. The secretary at that school would not process their application and told them to come back when they had all of the documentation required for enrollment. The following week the family returned with more documents, but once again, they were turned away when they still had a few documents missing. This interaction between the secretary and the family lasted for more than three months and prevented the young child from participating in the preschool classroom. After this extended period of back-and-forth communication, the local homeless liaison heard about the situation through another parent. The liaison located the family and learned that they had been homeless for months. With the help of the liaison, the child was immediately enrolled in the preschool. As a result of this experience, the liaison worked with the center director to organize an information session for the preschool that included not only the teachers but also other school staff, including the secretary and the custodian, so they could all improve their understanding of how to work responsively with children and families experiencing homelessness, beginning with outreach and enrollment.

A family I am supporting tried to enroll their child in Head Start multiple times, but they did not have the documentation that is typically required. They were refugees from El Salvador, and they did not speak English. They also had custody of their niece, a teenager who was attending a local high school. Unfortunately, their niece dropped out of school so she could take care of the four-year-old while the mother was working. If the young child had been enrolled in Head Start, it would have been better for the entire family.

These examples highlight the problems that result when teachers and administrators do not understand the current laws providing young children and their families experiencing homelessness with access to federally funded early learning programs.

- If a young child is determined to be experiencing homelessness, the Head Start Act (2007) and the reauthorized CCDBG Act (2014) prohibit programs from delaying enrollment and attendance of children due

to lack of documentation. Children are allowed to attend a Head Start or CCDF-subsidized program for up to 90 days[17] or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements, without immunization and other records, to give the family reasonable time to present these documents. A program must work with families to get children immunized as soon as possible in order to comply with state licensing requirements.

- If a child experiencing homelessness is unable to attend an early learning program regularly because the family does not have transportation, the program must use community resources, whenever possible, to provide transportation for the child.

By law, schools are required to identify and help children experiencing homelessness using funds at the state level (that is, from the local control funding formula)* and federal level (that is, from the McKinney–Vento Act) to provide resources and services that support the children to succeed in their education.

However, more than a quarter of California school districts report no students experiencing homelessness and provide no services, despite the fact that children and families who are homeless live in nearly every community across the state.

Source: https://edsource.org/2017/homeless-students/588020

*The local control funding formula (LCFF) was enacted in 2013–14, and it replaced the previous kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) finance system, which had been in existence for roughly 40 years. For school districts and charter schools, the LCFF establishes base, supplemental, and concentration grants in place of the myriad of previously existing K–12 funding streams, including revenue limits, general purpose block grants, and most of the 50-plus state categorical programs that existed at the time. For county offices of education (COEs), the LCFF establishes separate funding streams for oversight activities and instructional programs.

Source: https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp

17. California Department of Education, Early Learning and Care Division's funding terms and conditions in subsidy provider contracts (state-subsidized child care and preschool) include the following prioritization language: Priority of Services are as follows (EC 8263[1] and [2].

Another barrier to accessing early childhood programs is a lack of outreach and cross-systems collaboration. Local homeless liaisons are often more familiar with the public school system than they are with early childhood's complex mixed-delivery system. Because liaisons juggle the many responsibilities of their role with other responsibilities (e.g., transportation director, vice principal), they often have limited time to do outreach and training for early childhood programs and staff; some report that they do not have relationships with Early Head Start, Head Start, or other child care and preschool program directors in their area. Unless families experiencing homelessness have older children or young children with disabilities already being served by the public school system, homeless liaisons may have few if any natural points of contact with them. Because families with young children experiencing homelessness do engage with other assistance programs, including rapid housing programs, community charities, and homeless shelters, establishing cross-systems communication and collaboration among these agencies, homeless liaisons, and early childhood programs is essential.

Significant variation in the amount of collaboration between McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons and early childhood administrators exists across California. Increasing the rates of participation for young children experiencing homelessness in early childhood programs will require continued relationship building and improved collaboration (a) between liaisons and early childhood programs, and (b) among homeless service system workers, liaisons, and child care systems staff (e.g., Head Start, Resource and Referral agencies, and Alternative Payment agencies).

Even when families are informed and are able to locate early childhood programs, they are frequently placed on long waiting lists, which can last two years or longer (NAEHCY 2016b; Perlman et al. 2017), or the high cost of programs prevents them from enrolling because they are less likely than other families to receive child care subsidies (McCoy-Roth, Mackintosh, and Murphey 2012). According to a recent report, "Mothers who have experienced homelessness are less likely to have received government subsidies for child care than those at risk of homelessness or those with stable housing. Only 32 percent of ever-homeless mothers received a child care subsidy, while 55 percent of mothers at risk of homelessness and 36 percent of those stably housed received such financial assistance" (SchoolHouse Connection 2017a, 2).

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A mom came to our county fleeing domestic violence and gangs. For a time, she was living with her children in a van. Her four-year-old, Jonathan, was wearing dirty clothes, and he didn't know any words. He did not know how to say "Hi" or anything. All he knew was the van. He was not enrolled in any type of early education program or Head Start. His mother was waiting for kindergarten to enroll him because she did not know that she was eligible to access early childhood programs for Jonathan. It's tough on the parents just to survive. This mother had five kids total and was pregnant. At first, the family stayed at a 90-day family shelter program. The case managers at the shelter are supposed to help the families get stabilized during that time and find an apartment to rent, but they were unsuccessful in finding one for this family. It can be really hard to find housing for families in these situations because of the cost of living in our county. We need more policies to incentivize landlords and rental companies to rent to families. This mother ended up losing the baby she was pregnant with due to stress. It was really awful. Her older children are finishing up at a public school, but we are trying to transfer them to another county so we can enroll the family in a shelter program. Unfortunately, while here, Jonathan was never able to enroll in Head Start. We went all the way up to the Director of Student Services, pointing out that the law says that there must be spaces reserved in Head Start for children experiencing homelessness. But they didn't enroll Jonathan. There was no space.

This example illustrates a missed opportunity to refer Jonathan to the local school district or LEA for a developmental evaluation. If Jonathan were found eligible for special education and related services, a team would have worked with his mother to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to provide special education services and supports, including placement in an early childhood program and transportation if needed.

A common barrier to families enrolling children that could be easily solved is child care enrollment requirements that do not take into consideration the conditions of families experiencing homelessness. A requirement that often acts as a barrier for families is toilet training. A provider at an emergency shelter shared this story with us:

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Edwin is a single father caring for Jason, a three-year-old boy. When this situation happened, they had been at the emergency shelter for about four months, and Edwin had been identified as experiencing chronic homelessness. He was seeking child care when he was awarded a voucher but for him to receive this support he had to enroll Jason in a center in two weeks or lose the voucher. Two weeks only! This is with Edwin not knowing where to look, what schools accepted the voucher, etc. So, that's when I had to send in a referral to help us look for preschools that accept the voucher. But all of the quality preschools required that the child be potty trained prior to starting school. It was a challenge to find a quality preschool nearby that takes vouchers to accept a child who is not potty trained, especially when you are only given two weeks to find a preschool! What I would like for providers to know is that when families are staying at the emergency shelter many of them have to rely on diapers, this is often because they don't have access to a 24-hour toilet; or there are no toilets that are child-sized. It is also often the case that families do not have access to toilet training seats. In these conditions, using diapers is just the only option they have. I would also like providers and teachers to know that children experiencing homelessness often regress in their toilet-training abilities, that it is typical for children to regress when they experience trauma.

Edwin's struggle illustrates the importance of revising enrollment requirements and procedures with families experiencing homelessness in mind. If a child is using diapers or starts having "accidents," exploring the family circumstances and supporting them in this transition, instead of denying access or sending the child home, can make a huge difference.

Transportation to and from early childhood programs is one of the most significant challenges that both families and providers face, especially in rural areas (Perlman et al. 2017). In chapter 1, we talked about Lillian, her mom, Sarah, and her sister, Grace, who had to take two buses and spend four hours round trip each day traveling between the girls' schools and the homeless shelter. Like Lillian's family, many families experiencing homelessness do not own a vehicle or have no money to pay for the gas required to support the daily trips to and

from the early childhood program. States and communities have used a variety of solutions to provide transportation to families with young children, including providing them with gas or bus vouchers or coordinating with IDEA or human services agency buses.

If a child receives services through IDEA Part C (early intervention) or Part B (special education), transportation may be a related service, if stipulated on the child's individualized plan. Likewise, a family member with a disability may be eligible for accessible paratransit services through the local public transportation agency. The ADA protects the rights of individuals with disabilities to access public transportation.

If we want families experiencing homelessness to have more access to early learning programs, addressing their need for transportation to and from the program is essential.

Recommendations for Increasing Families' Access to and Participation in Early Childhood Programs

Working in partnership, early childhood program staff, homeless liaisons, and homeless family services providers can increase the number of families with young children experiencing homelessness who can learn about, gain access to, and participate in early childhood programs and services. Following are several recommendations to support this process:

- **Ensure that staff in early childhood programs have access to resources, training materials,** policy guidance, and research documents related to homelessness, how a homeless status for young children aged birth to five affects eligibility to enroll in early childhood programs, and the program's responsibility for enrolling and supporting children experiencing homelessness.
- **Ensure that accurate information regarding IDEA Part C early intervention and Part B early childhood special education service providers is available to homeless liaisons.** Provide outreach

information from the state Child Find[18] efforts, such as the Reasons for Concern brochure for children under age three,[19] or the list of Parent Training & Information Centers that can provide information on Part C and Part B. Additionally, county-level resources are listed on the CDE-funded MAP to Inclusion & Belonging website (https://cainclusion.org/camap/map-project-resources/county-specific-resources/). This site includes a Guide to County Resource Organizations and a link to each organization within the counties.

- **Establish relationships and regular communication between LEA McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons and local early childhood programs.** Early childhood teachers and program staff should identify their local McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaison as well as their state homeless liaison coordinator and establish regular meetings to share information. Similarly, liaisons should reach out to early care and education programs in their district, including family child care homes as well as federally funded programs and other entities that provide services locally. The relationship building should also work in reverse: early childhood programs enrolling children and families who are subsidized (subsidized slots or families' use of vouchers) should become knowledgeable about their local homeless service system, key contacts, and the homeless liaison in their area.
- **Make sure that information on early childhood program eligibility criteria and enrollment processes is widely disseminated to family shelters, housing assistance programs, food programs, and other emergency assistance agencies and providers.** These agencies are often the first line of contact for most families with young children experiencing homelessness. They are rarely given information

18. Section 300.111(a)(1) The State must have in effect policies and procedures to ensure that—
(i) All children with disabilities residing in the State, including children with disabilities who are homeless children or are wards of the State, and children with disabilities attending private schools, regardless of the severity of their disability, and who are in need of special education and related services, are identified, located, and evaluated; and
(ii) A practical method is developed and implemented to determine which children are currently receiving needed special education and related services. (See https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.111.)

19. See https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/Se/fp/concerns.asp.

to share with the families about early care and education programs. Early childhood program staff and liaisons should identify key community agencies serving families experiencing homelessness; share information about local early childhood programs, supports, and services for agency staff to share with the families; have program applications available on site; and, where possible, establish expedited application processes or designate a contact lead.

- **Use different means of communication with families.** Phones and traditional mail are likely very challenging for families who are highly mobile or unable to keep a stable cell phone number. Using email or social media might be more effective for some families because they may be able to access the internet for free at local public libraries or other agencies in their community. Families may also be hesitant to provide an address or phone number if they may move suddenly or they have privacy concerns. Check with families to learn how they would like to be contacted for follow-up communication. When possible, access translators or multilingual resources to communicate with families whose primary language is not English. When possible, have bilingual staff available or access to translators or multilingual resources to communicate with families whose primary language is not English.
- **Train staff and leadership (including board members and funders) to recognize systemic racism and its impacts on families with young children.** In addition, seek out and provide professional development for emerging leaders of color within agencies. Finally, foster and participate in community conversations about systemic racism and historical trauma, and help people understand its impact on families and young children experiencing homelessness.
    - Think. Teach. Transform., also known as the T^3 approach, by the Center for Social Innovation has excellent resources on race and homelessness: http://us.thinkt3.com/blog/homelessness-is-a-symptom-of-racism
- **Create accurate and up-to-date databases of all early childhood and education programs in the district and the catchment area, including information on quality early-childhood programs,** especially programs that offer subsidized care and are required by law to

prioritize enrollment for families who are homeless. In California, this is the responsibility of local Resource and Referral agencies.[20] Some local Resource and Referral agencies have hired navigators who are dedicated to serving families experiencing homelessness.

- **Designate an early childhood staff member or contact at shelters and other housing programs.** Having a staff person who is familiar with early childhood in shelter programs or a Resource and Referral staff member who regularly visits the shelter and helps with the paperwork on site would facilitate access and enrollment for young children in early learning programs. Additional supports include the following:
  - Housing case managers should know what to look for related to appropriate housing decisions for young children. Here is a helpful resource on this topic: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/childproofing-checklist-for-housing-and-homeless-service-providers/.
  - Housing case managers need to know where and how to find ECE benefits and services and how to access quality ECE programs.
  - Local housing Continuum of Care (CoC) programs or Coordinated Entry (centralized case management) must include a representative of child services and resources. This could be a McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaison or a staff representative from Head Start, the state Resource and Referral network, or other child-serving agency.
- Work with Head Start, CCDF, and other early childhood programs required to prioritize homelessness to successfully implement the new policy requirements and encourage additional early childhood programs to prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment, bumping

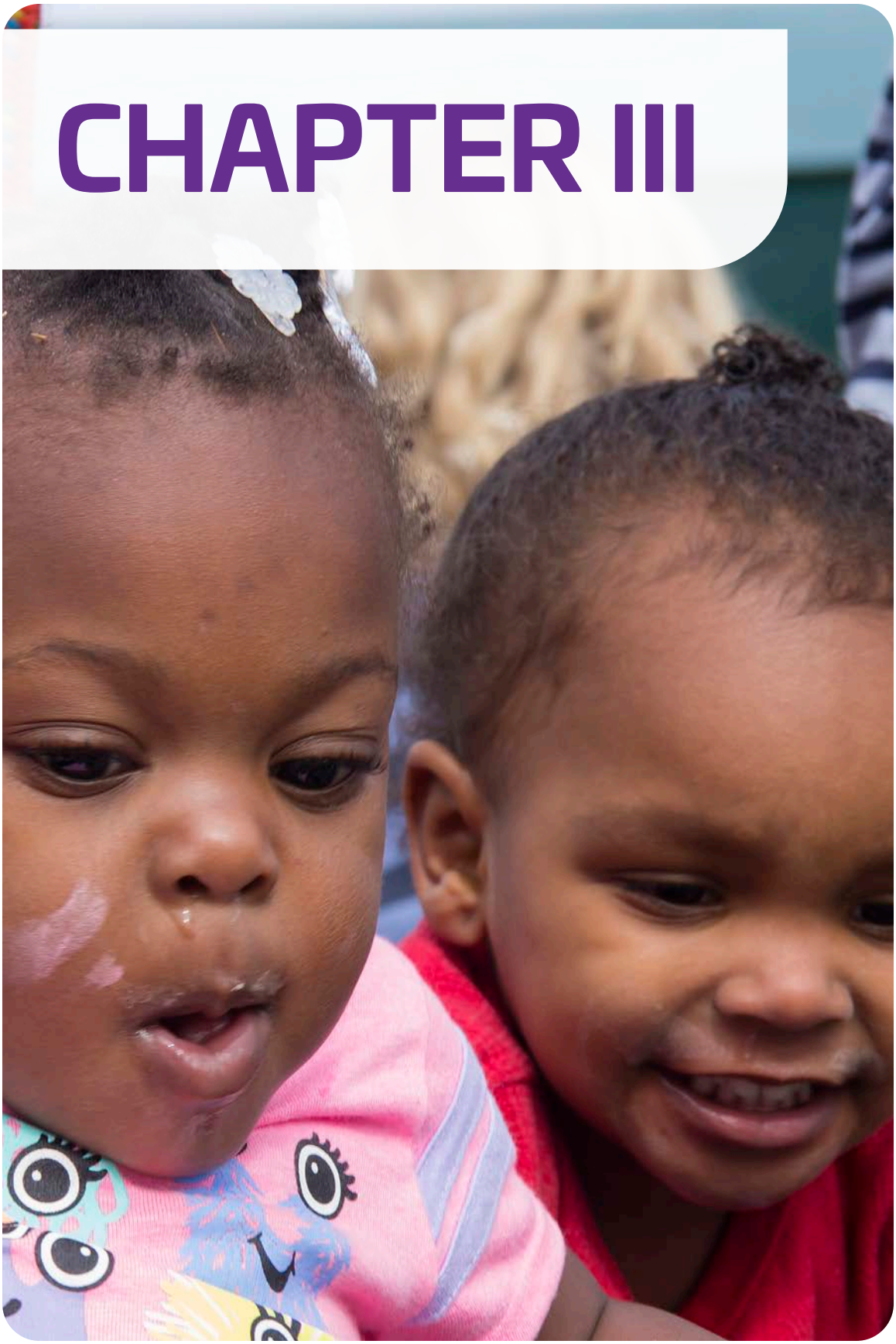
20. CCDF SEAs are required to have central points of contact for ECE programs and services that keep updated lists and services distinguished by funding stream, subsidy, eligibility criteria, and quality rating. The ELCD is the CCDF SEA in California. It partners with the Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD). CCLD has the responsibility for licensing early childhood programs and shares the list of licensed programs with California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, a contractor for ELCD. CCLD has a database that functions as a transparency website for families in search of child care, and ELCD has a contract to standardize CCLD's database to provide quality rating information about programs (as available) on a consumer-friendly database to assist families. The two databases are linked together.

them to the top of the waiting lists, and effectively applying the grace period to ensure immediate enrollment.

- Be informed about transportation resources in the area (bus and gas vouchers, carpools, partnerships with IDEA Part C/Part B service providers and other school bus or human services agency transportation services) and create plans for transportation to support young children and their families who are homeless to attend early learning programs or to continue attending their early childhood school of origin even though they need to move their family to a new location.

A significant percentage of the children cared for in early childhood programs are experiencing homelessness. It is essential that early childhood teachers, directors, and program staff understand how many families in their community are living without stable housing and understand the diverse circumstances of their daily lives. Although early childhood programs cannot solve the complex societal issues that are the leading causes of homelessness, including poverty, systemic racism, lack of affordable housing, and intimate partner violence, they can help ensure that every young child experiencing homelessness has access to and regularly attends a high-quality early care and education program to help buffer the impact of homelessness. They can partner with LEA homeless liaisons to increase access for these families to early childhood programs. Having an opportunity to participate in a high-quality early learning program can be life-changing for children living with the adversity caused by homelessness, providing them with a consistent, safe, and nurturing environment where they can develop and learn, and where their families can feel supported and create the connections with key services that will help them achieve greater stability.

CHAPTER III



Impact of Homelessness on Young Children's Development and Learning

VIGNETTE

Children experiencing homelessness are among the most invisible and neglected individuals in our nation. Despite their ever-growing number, homeless children have no voice and no constituency. Without a bed to call their own, they have lost safety, privacy, and the comforts of home, as well as friends, pets, possessions, reassuring routines, and community. These losses combine to create a life-altering experience that inflicts profound and lasting scars.
–Bassuk et al (2014, 8–9)

As this quotation reminds us, homelessness is a life-altering experience with significant impacts on children's development and learning. This chapter:

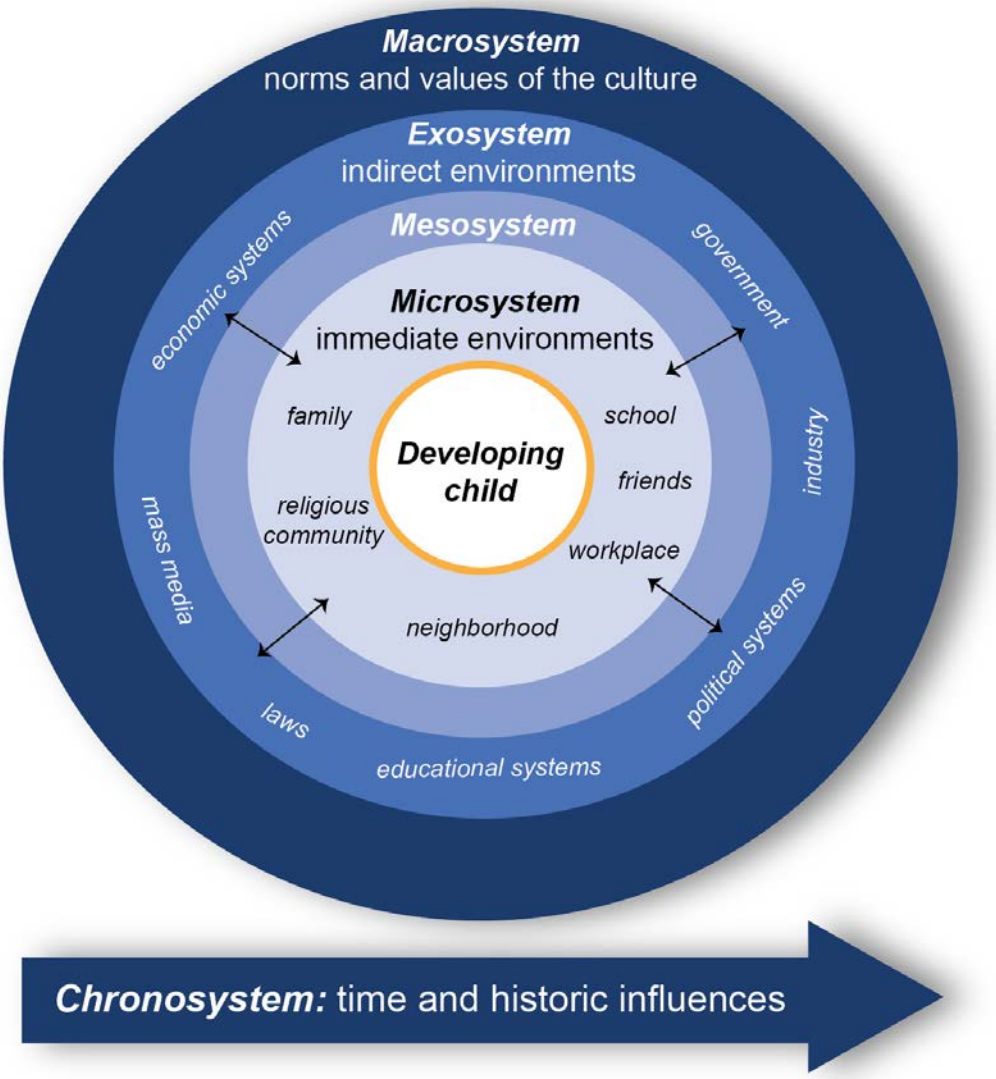
- describes the foundations of healthy child development using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (2005);
- discusses the impact of stress and trauma on brain development and introduce the concept of trauma triggers; and
- talks about the importance of building resilience, including internal and external resilience factors.

Foundations for Healthy Child Development

When we think about child development, we are referring to the cognitive, linguistic, social–emotional, and physical changes that occur from conception and continue throughout life. Each child is born with predispositions, including a unique genetic makeup and rate of development. The child develops through the interaction between genetic, biological unfolding, and experiences in social, cultural, and physical environments. Early experiences change which genes are expressed, particularly in the brain. Social relationships, culture, and the physical environment shape how those predispositions are expressed and modified. Indeed, we are learning more and more from the field of epigenetics about how adverse early childhood experiences (ACEs)—as well as historical, intergenerational trauma—are being expressed in the genes (Cunliffe 2016; McEwan 2016). In addition, each child's predispositions affect how people respond and relate to that child. Thus, the unfolding of a child's biological makeup in combination with experiences in relationships and the cultural and physical environment influence how that child develops, is socialized, and perceives and relates to others.

One useful representation of this idea is provided by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmentalist who encouraged teachers and psychologists to appreciate that child development does not occur in a vacuum, but instead is embedded in larger social structures, including families, communities, societies, and historical and political periods. Figure 3 presents how Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) thought about these different factors influencing the developing child.

Figure 3. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development



Adapted from Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006.

- **Microsystem:** The microsystem includes a child's immediate environments, including family, religious community, neighborhood, workplace, friends, school, and child care, and includes the people in these contexts who interact with the child, the child's relationships with peers and adults, and the environmental factors, such as pollutants or the quality of a preschool program, that affect the child.

- **Mesosystem:** The mesosystem includes the connections between a child's immediate environments, for example, the relationship between a homeless shelter where a child is living and the child's Head Start center.
- **Exosystem:** The exosystem includes the external environmental settings (or indirect environments) that indirectly affect a child's development, for example, the educational laws that provide families experiencing homelessness with a right to services and priority for enrollment in early childhood programs. Other indirect environments include economic, educational, and political systems, mass media, laws, industry, and government.
- **Macrosystem:** The macrosystem represents the various cultural contexts that influence the environments a child is growing up within. Aspects of the macrosystem include the norms, values, beliefs, cultural routines, cultural practices, and systems of power that are privileged within a school, early childhood program, parental workplace, or community. The macrosystem has a significant impact on families who are homeless, including inequities and discrimination that many experience related to poverty, single parenthood, being members of nondominant racial and ethnic groups, and regulations associated with qualifying for and receiving subsidies.
- **Chronosystem:** The chronosystem includes time and historical influences, which involves the significant historical and political events and transitions that take place over the course of the lifespan. For families facing homelessness, this could include the impact of historical trauma due to historical and systemic oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, etc.) and discrimination, significant natural disasters, wars, civil rights movements, or major economic recessions. For example, the Great Recession of 2007 has changed the geography of poverty leading to more homelessness in suburban and rural communities than in urban areas (Pavlakis 2018).

These system factors vary not only from child to child but also from moment to moment across a child's lifespan. A child whose parents are evicted experiences a change in the microsystem environments as he or she moves from a family apartment to a temporary residence in a homeless shelter, and a shift from an environment marked by warm family relationships into a context of stress, anxiety, and a focus on daily survival. Factors at every layer of Bronfen-

brenner's bioecological system also influence how children who are homeless will be influenced by this experience. A family's protective factors,[21] including their connection to community resources that can provide them with support, along with the laws, policies, cultural contexts, and political and historical events of the times in which they are living all combine to shape their lived experiences with homelessness on a daily basis and the consequences that result. There are a few factors that are considered fundamental for a child to thrive: well-baby care; early, stable, responsive, and secure relationships; emotional and physical safety; access to nutrition and healthy, safe environments; and an absence of stressors. Homelessness can prevent young children from experiencing all of these important foundations.

Brain Development in the Earliest Years of Life

During the first few years of life, the brain grows faster than any other time of development. At birth, a child's brain is only 25 percent of its adult size; however, by three years of age, 85 percent of the brain's growth is complete (Azevedo et al. 2009). This does not mean that children's brains are almost finished developing by their third birthday, but it does mean that the brain's basic structures and functions are established in early childhood. While infants are born with their own neurobiological and genetic makeup, it is the ongoing interaction between that makeup and the quality of their early experiences that significantly influence the course of their development. Although the brain develops over a long period of time, starting prenatally about two weeks after conception and continuing through early adulthood, it is most sensitive to experiences in the earliest years of development (see figure 4).

See Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child's video on this topic: *Experiences Build Brain Architecture (https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture).*

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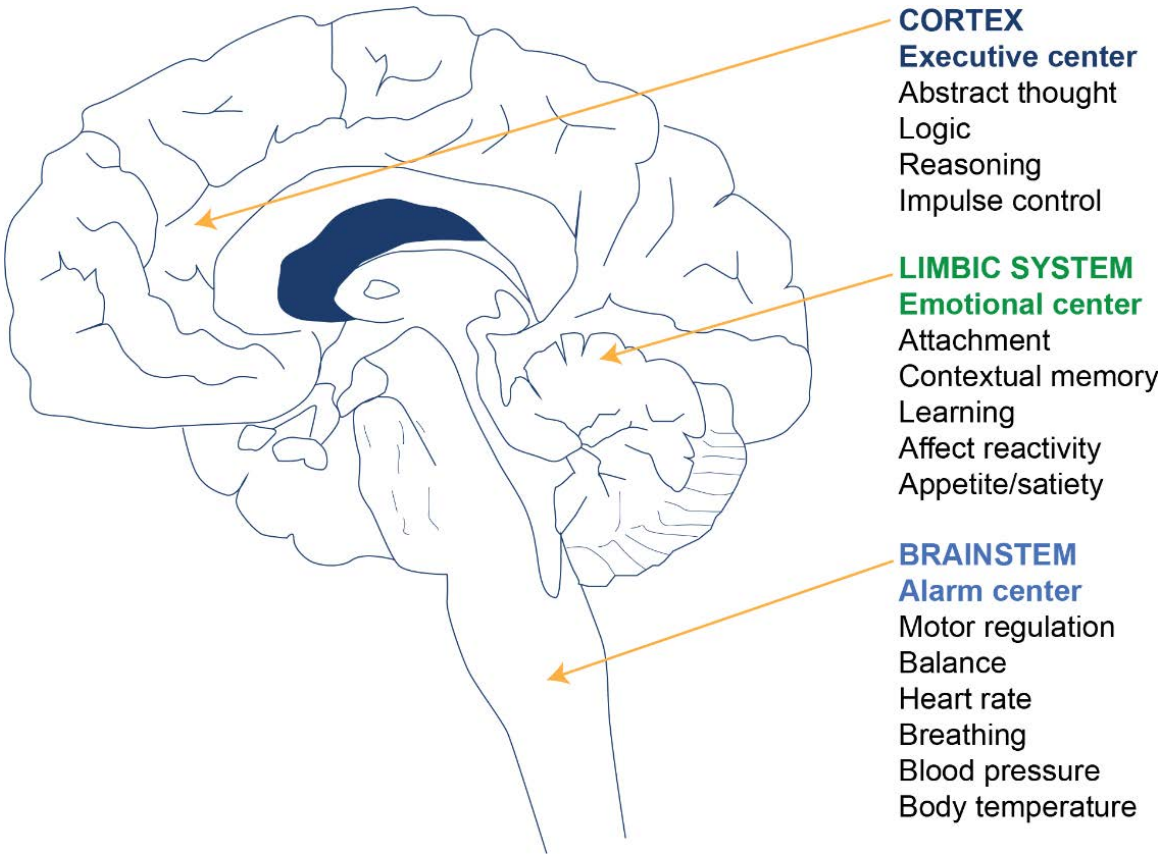
21. The Five Protective Factors in the Strengthening Families Approach include parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children (Center for the Study of Social Policy, see https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/).

Figure 4. Hierarchy of Brain Development



The Hierarchical Nature of Children's Brain Development

Children's brain development occurs in sequence from the "bottom up" (Perry, Pollard, Blakely, Baker, and Vigilante 1995).

- The first area of the brain to fully develop is the **brainstem** and midbrain (the midbrain is part of the brainstem). This part of the brain is the "alarm center" responsible for basic bodily functions like motor regulation, balance, heart rate, breathing, sleeping, regulation of blood pressure, and body temperature.
- The next region of the brain to fully develop is the **limbic system**, which controls our desire to form attachments and our ability to understand and regulate our emotions and behavior. Infants are born with "an experience-dependent limbic system," which means they need lots of repeated positive emotional, social, and cognitive interactions to support the development of a healthy limbic system (Conkbayir 2017). Acting as the emotional center, this system regulates such areas as

attachment, contextual memory, learning, affect reactivity, and appetite/satiety.

- The last part of the brain to fully develop is the **cerebrum, which includes the cerebral cortex**, which includes the neocortex. Also known as the executive center, this area of the brain controls language, abstract thought, logic, reasoning, impulse control, and problem solving.

Because brain development is hierarchical, if one "layer" of the brain's development is interrupted or impaired, the next layers of the brain to form will also not develop properly. For example, if trauma damages the healthy development of a child's brainstem, the child's limbic system and cortex will not develop optimally (Perry et al. 1995; Perry 2001). This may result in developmental delays or disabilities related to children's language development; sensory integration; fine motor control; visual, auditory, and cognitive processing; or social–emotional skills or emotional and behavioral regulation. It is also important to note that any of these conditions may occur for a variety of reasons that are not related to trauma.

Children learn about the world and themselves through their relationships with their primary caregivers. These critical attachment relationships are formed and strengthened through "serve-and-return" interactions between babies and their caregivers. Serve-and-return interactions are the back-and-forth exchanges that shape neural circuits in the brain (Center on the Developing Child 2018). As seen in figure 5, an adult's response with a loving look or a "What do you need?" gesture to a baby's cooing or vocalization supports children to learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors—children express their wants and needs through the serve and learn how their caregivers respond to them through the return. The manner in which caregivers respond to children in these serve-and-return interactions differs depending on families' and communities' diverse cultural beliefs, distinct cultural routines, and the circumstances of families' daily lives. Positive serve-and-return exchanges support young children to develop security and trust in relationships as children learn that their needs matter (Center on the Developing Child 2018; Cozolino 2012; Siegel 2007, 2012). These emotionally attuned interactions between young children and their caregivers lead to the development of healthy and secure attachments, which in turn support healthy brain development (Schore 2000).

See Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child's video on this topic: Serve & Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry

Figure 5. Serve and Return Interaction

As discussed in the next section, it is essential for teachers and providers to understand that positive serve-and-return interactions can be very challenging for parents who are experiencing the daily stressors and trauma associated with experiencing homelessness. Parents' feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and their fears of being judged by others contribute to the cumulative impact of the stress they experience on both the parents and their children. These stressors may contribute to a parent missing subtle cues they previously had responded to, causing the child to react differently.

Impact of Stress and Trauma on Young Children

Half the children in the United States have experienced one or more types of serious trauma (Sacks and Murphey 2018). *Trauma* can be defined as *an actual or perceived danger, which undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of the child's parents or caregivers, overwhelming their coping ability and affecting their functioning and development* (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2018). Traumatic experiences, whether real or perceived, are threatening and create intense feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, or terror and, in the absence of protective supports from an adult caregiver, can have lasting and devastating effects on a child's physical, mental, and

spiritual health (American Psychological Association 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] 2014; DeCandia, Guarino, and Clervil 2014). Infants and toddlers are the most vulnerable age group for trauma and experience the highest rates of child maltreatment (Stevens 2013).

Because disproportionate numbers of families of color experience homelessness, it is also important to frame trauma in terms of historical trauma to gain a clear understanding of how trauma and race are interrelated and affect young children of color. Historical trauma is defined as "a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (Brave Heart 2003, 7). Examples include: slavery, racism, removal from one's homeland, massacres, genocides, or ethnocides; cultural, racial, and immigrant oppression; and forced placement. Key themes in understanding historical trauma in any group include: (1) the historical trauma experience, (2) the historical trauma response, and (3) the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Sotero 2006). The affected group(s) may manifest the historical trauma experience as internalized oppression (when a person comes to believe in and act out the messages circulating in the culture that the identity group to which they belong is inferior), and it is often expressed in parent–child and caregiver–child relationships—often in less than ideal ways (Lewis, Noroña, McConnico, and Thomas 2013).

Learning how to manage stress is a normal part of children's development. In typical circumstances, children receive support from adults when experiencing stress. Children who have supportive adults to buffer or decrease their feelings of being overwhelmed and fearful during a stressful experience are guided in their development of important coping skills that manage the inevitable stress and setbacks they face throughout their lives (Murray, Rosanbalm and Christopoulos 2016). However, when children experience frequent, severe, or prolonged exposure to maltreatment or other forms of trauma and do not have a caring adult available to consistently reduce their distress, their stress becomes toxic and can disrupt and harm their development and ability to learn. Toxic stress is associated with a continual triggering or activation of a child's stress response system. Whenever the amygdala and hypothalamus, two parts of the limbic system, perceive danger (toxic stress or traumatic experience), they automatically sound an alarm to the rest of the child's brain and activate the stress response system, which starts to release stress chemicals (e.g., adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol) throughout a vulnerable child's developing brain and body.

See Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child's video on this topic: *Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development* (https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/). See also the following description of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their relationship to toxic stress: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/.

What happens when a child's stress response system is activated over a long period of time? When stress chemicals like cortisol are continuously released in the body and the level of cortisol in the body is elevated on a persistent basis—as is the case with children who experience toxic stress—young children's developing brains and bodies can be negatively affected. These children can be left with a flood of hormones that never properly release from their bodies, which can cause both short- and long-term negative consequences. The most significant negative impact is a negative impact to the actual structure of their brains. However, early trauma can also weaken children's immune systems; increase their blood pressure and blood sugars; break down their muscles, bones, and connective tissue; and decrease their ability to process information, communicate with others, express their emotions, or manage daily stressors.

Children whose stress response systems are activated on a regular basis often come to live in a hyper-aroused state (Perry 2008). Their brains perceive that they are always in danger when it is not the reality. When children are in this state, seemingly minor unexpected occurrences in their environment (e.g., a bell ringing, an unknown adult entering a room they are in, or a new food at snack time) can activate a survival response in which their brain and body reacts as if they are in serious danger. Survival responses include such behaviors as yelling, biting, hitting, hiding, or running away. These split-second automatic survival reactions can be surprising and confusing for adults because the reactions seem to come out of nowhere or the intensity of a child's behavior (e.g., sudden screaming) appears to be misaligned with the stimulus in the environment (e.g., bell ringing).

Why does this happen? Young children's traumatic experiences are remembered through implicit or unconscious memories (Levine and Kline 2007). These memories are stored in children's brains and bodies through the sensations (e.g., sights, sounds, tastes, and textures) that were present at the time of the traumatic experience when they felt frightened and helpless. After a traumatic experience, children's bodies associate these sensations with danger, which can lead to the development of trauma triggers.

Triggers are sensations that remind a child of a traumatic experience. For example, the sound of a police siren could trigger memories for a child of witnessing community violence, or the color red could trigger memories of a domestic abuse incident in which a man wearing a red coat sexually abused the mother in front of the child. Triggers automatically activate the amygdala's alarm system, and the child's brain goes into a fight, flight, or freeze survival response even if not in danger. Triggers are reminders for the child of the feelings of terror and helplessness experienced in the initial traumatic event. Just being exposed to the sensation (e.g., seeing the color red, hearing a police siren) makes the child feel as if he or she is in danger again just as in the past, even if the child is currently safe. Triggering happens in a split second, and because it is an automatic survival response, it is totally out of the child's control. When triggered, children are not able to express their feelings with words because traumatic memories are stored implicitly, or in sensory memories, not in words or as stories that have a beginning, middle, and end that the child can share with others.

When children's stress response systems are triggered, their brains and bodies shift into a fight, flight, or freeze survival response. What does this look like for a young child? Some examples of the behaviors teachers might see include the following:

- Young children in ***fight*** mode may startle easily, be irritable or fussy, arch away from the caregiver, not want to be held or touched, cry, scream, kick, bite, or bang their head.
- Young children in ***flight*** mode may not want food or to sleep, appear restless, run from a caregiver or out of the room, hide under a table or out of sight, pull a jacket or clothing over their heads to hide, or sit in the corner of the room and watch what is going on.

- Young children in ***freeze*** mode may withdraw from people, cling stronger and longer to the adult, or seem listless or unresponsive to people or any form of stimulation. You may also notice that they do not vocalize or talk and have very limited interest in playing and interacting with others. They may be restricted in their play or interactions, not respond to their name, or tune out or become absorbed with something and seem completely unaware of what is going on around them. These children may also fall asleep when things are noisy, chaotic, and overly stimulating.

Children do not have access to the thinking part of their brain when they are triggered. Only after their brains no longer perceive that they are in danger, their central nervous systems have calmed down, and they have returned to a more relaxed state can they communicate their feelings or ideas, regulate their behavior, or engage in problem solving. This is why it is so essential for teachers to remain calm when children are triggered and dysregulated. Showing anger or frustration when children perceive a threat only reinforces their feelings of fear and being overwhelmed, which increases their fight, flight, or freeze behaviors that are automatically triggered by their stress response systems.

Consider this interaction:

VIGNETTE

*Alex is a five-year-old child at our center. As the staff, we are trying to work with him. It seems like he can't calm himself enough to really engage in much. We tried to talk to his mom to see what might be going on, but she is really quiet and closed off, so we aren't getting much information from her. One day Alex was having a really hard time, and he was throwing everything off the shelves, and I went up and said, "I need you to stop. I can't have you throwing things everywhere. I'm afraid you will hurt one of your friends." He yelled back at me, "You are a f***ing b**ch." And he was trying to hit me, and then he tried to head butt me. I had to take some deep breaths and stay calm. I took his hand, and, as we walked outside of the classroom, he kept repeating, "You're just a b**ch. That's all you are." I slowly and calmly replied, "You may not call me that. That's not who I am. My name is Tracy. I see that you are feeling very, very angry right now. It is ok to feel angry, but you are not allowed to hurt people.*

VIGNETTE *CONTINUED*

I can't have you hurting me." And then I focused on what his behavior was communicating to me about how he was feeling inside (likely scared and sad) and what he needed from me at that moment. I asked Alex, "Do you need a hug?" He looked up at me and then he grabbed me and he hugged me for like five minutes. I just held him tight because I knew this reassurance that he was safe and cared for was what he needed. I talked with his mom later that day and said, "Things are escalating for Alex, and I don't know what is happening. I know you are very private. I really want to help your child, but I don't know what to do." She started crying and she opened up and told me that, while she was pregnant and during the first three years of his life, they experienced really bad domestic violence in the family and now they were at the shelter and safe but living with the fear of where they would go when their 90 days were up. Through her tears she told me that, although Alex was only a little boy, he had already been through a lot of trauma in his young life.

By staying calm and self-regulated, Tracy was able to support Alex to feel safe, which allowed him to calm his stress response (fight, flight, or freeze) system and connect with her. Tracy's calm approach also allowed her to build trust with Alex's mom, which led her to open up and share critical information about her family situation. With this information, Tracy has more understanding for Alex's behavior. She has empathy for stress he has experienced in his young life, and she understands that his behaviors are a result of his stress response system being activated and reflect his brain's hard work to keep him safe.

Young children whose stress response systems are continually activated need caregivers who remain calm and communicate messages of empathy, safety, and protection. Supportive, responsive relationships with caregivers is the most important way to prevent or decrease the negative impact of toxic stress and trauma for young children. Teachers like Tracy who learn about trauma can use this knowledge to help them remain supportive and respon-

Young children whose stress response systems are continually activated need caregivers who remain calm and communicate messages of empathy, safety, and protection.

sive with young children when they experience trauma reminders and their stress response systems are activated. Trauma-informed early childhood programs can offer this type of safe and healing environment for young children.

Impact of Homelessness on Young Children's Development

When young children live in families experiencing homelessness, they are often affected by many sources of toxic stress and the effects are cumulative: economic hardship, substance abuse, unemployment, mental health challenges, interpersonal and community violence, immigration status, and others.

VIGNETTE

Recently, I was working with an Early Head Start program when some of the teachers expressed their concern for eight-month-old Jonell, who had recently begun crying more than was typical for him. After his crying had been going on for two weeks, the staff decided to meet with Jonell's mom, Keisha, to learn whether she had noticed any changes that might help explain what was distressing Jonell. Keisha shared that, due to family violence, she and Jonell had recently moved in with friends. Money was tight, and they had little food where she was staying. Because she was so focused on finding a job, Keisha had not been able to apply for any assistance yet. Keisha was still breastfeeding Jonell; however, she was not eating and could tell Jonell was unsettled whenever she tried to feed him. What the Early Head Start staff in conversation with Keisha discovered together was that Keisha was not producing enough milk, and Jonell was hungry. Both Keisha and Jonell were not getting the nutrition they needed. Working in partnership, the Early Head Start staff supported Keisha to start receiving nutritional assistance, and soon Jonell was eating and settling down, though they all continue to monitor Jonell's development and health. The Early Head Start program staff continue to be available to assist Keisha to connect with community resources.

–Monica, a pediatric nurse practitioner and health consultant working with an Early Head Start program

Even though Jonell was only eight months old, he had already experienced stress and trauma, including family violence, hunger, and housing instability, experiences that affected both him and his mother.

Children experiencing homelessness are at the high end of the "continuum of risk" (Haber and Toro 2004; David, Gelberg, and Suchman 2012; HHS 2016a). That is, experiencing poverty and homelessness increases children's exposure to intimate partner violence—physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017)—by 75 percent, with the greatest risk for children under the age of six (ICPH 2015). Additional risks associated with homelessness include:

- lower birth weight;
- higher levels of childhood illness;
- behavioral and mental health problems;
- inadequate nutrition;
- delayed development;
- poor educational outcomes;
- child welfare involvement; and
- toxic stress and complex trauma.

Experiencing homelessness significantly increases a child's risk for developing a mental health condition. A review of the research literature suggests that 10 percent to 26 percent of preschool children who are experiencing homelessness require clinical intervention for mental health support. These numbers increase for school-aged children, with 24 percent to 40 percent of children requiring therapeutic supports—a percentage that is two to four times the rate of children experiencing poverty in a similar age range (Bassuk, Richard, and Tsertsvadze 2015). These findings reinforce that the significant levels of toxic stress associated with homelessness can lead to significant mental health consequences for children.

Mothers experiencing homelessness have higher incidences of severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and various anxiety disorders (Bassuk et al. 2014; Hayes, Zonneville, and Bassuk 2013). This finding is significant because a child's relationship with the parent or primary attachment figure is the most important factor affecting their early growth and development.

Parents' histories with trauma and their mental health challenges can interfere with their ability to be emotionally responsive to their children and to effectively buffer them from the disruptions and stress that homelessness causes in their lives. Severe food and housing insecurity causes many adults to focus on meeting those basic needs with less time and energy to be available to their children.

Protective Factors and Building Resilience

Although it is essential that teachers learn about how children's brains can be affected by the impact of traumatic stress, it is equally, if not more important, to understand that a child's brain has a remarkable ability to build new neural connections—to reorganize and rewire itself—when the child has the opportunity to experience supportive and nurturing environments. Because children's brains are developing most rapidly in the early childhood years, this is the time when the impact of trauma can be most significant; however, it's also when the ability to restore and heal the impact of adversity is most possible. Therefore, it is critical that early childhood teachers create trauma-informed environments that build children's protective factors and strengthen their resilience.

Resilience can be defined as the ability to bounce back after negative things happen. Resilience is evident in young children when their development progresses positively despite being confronted with negative experiences, including trauma. Research indicates that fostering young children's capacity for resilience is strengthened when children have access to protective factors.

The most important protective factor that supports young children to develop resilience in the face of sustained stress and trauma is experiencing a consistent relationship with a supportive caregiver who is responsive to the child's needs. Especially during a time when a child's relationship with their parent(s) may be stressed due to homelessness, teachers' attunement and responsive relationships with children can buffer children's stress and serve to support healthy brain development (Center on the Developing Child 2018). When a nurturing adult calms a child's internal feelings of fear and helps them feel safe, the child has a better ability to build relationships, focus, pay attention, play, and learn.

The most important protective factor that supports young children to develop resilience in the face of sustained stress and trauma is experiencing a consistent relationship with a supportive caregiver who is responsive to the child's needs.

Both internal factors (internal to children) and external factors (those in a child's environment, such as the family and community) support the development of coping skills and the ability to bounce back from stress and trauma:

- **Internal resilience factors** include children's "internal" strengths or characteristics that help them cope with adversity and bounce back more quickly. Examples of internal resilience factors include a sense of confidence in one's strengths and abilities, the ability to relate and connect with others, problem-solving skills, and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses (American Psychological Association 2018).
- **External resilience factors** are factors that can be intentionally created within environments to support children's capacity to develop coping skills and resilience (Center on the Developing Child 2018). External factors include nurturing and responsive relationships with trusted adults, a safe and predictable environment, and an adult who teaches social and emotional skills. Examples of building external resilience factors would be providing consistent routines that can be shared with a parent and used in any setting, such as singing a specific song before napping and bedtime, an adult teaching a child names for emotions and how to name or identify their own emotions, take deep breaths when their stress response systems are triggered, or learn how to take turns with other children. With support and guidance from early childhood teachers, children can learn many healthy coping skills and strengthen their ability to be resilient and bounce back from stress and trauma, including their experience of homelessness.

See Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child's video on this topic: *What is Resilience? (https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience).*

Homelessness and the toxic stress and trauma this experience can create for young children compromises their healthy development and ability to learn. Understanding how significant and sustained stress and trauma affect children's brain development and parents' and children's behavior is essential for early childhood teachers and program staff so they can create environments that help buffer children's stress and reinforce feelings of safety, protection,

Homelessness and the toxic stress and trauma this experience can create for young children compromises their healthy development and ability to learn.

attunement, and care. Implementing trauma-informed practices will support children and their families to develop resilience and positive coping skills that manage the challenges they face, including their experience of being homeless.

CHAPTER IV

Impact of Homelessness on Young Children's Development and Learning

VIGNETTE

Kali was in the "Early 3's Room" at her early childhood program. She had been coming to this center for about six weeks now, but she still was having difficulty settling each morning and would often cry at the classroom door. The top half of the door was a large window that Kali was just tall enough to see out of. She would put her hands on the rim of the window and look out at the hallway and cry or whine quietly. Staff were concerned and thought perhaps she was having difficulty separating even though Kali's mom was warm and took her time with drop-off. Though staff tried to engage Kali, it was not working. She would be distracted for a minute, but then return to the window. They decided to invite Kali's mom to remain in the classroom for longer for the next few days as they began the morning routine to see if they might all work together to help Kali adjust. The next day, staff welcomed Kali and her mom and joined them as they selected an activity. But to everyone's surprise, after a while Kali ran to the door, grabbed onto the window and began to cry. What was Kali trying to say? Kali's mom and one of the staff got up and walked over to the door. Kali turned to her mom and said "juice" as she hit the window. Kali's mom took Kali's hand in hers and opened the door. Outside in the hallway one of the staff was wheeling the squeaky food cart with snacks that would be distributed later. Kali led her mom to the cart and again said "juice." Kali's mom understood what was happening. When Kali and her mom were on the street and moving from place to place, they had little food. In fact, Kali was thin and small for her age. Now Kali seemed to be especially sensitive to being hungry. She ate a good breakfast at the shelter, but perhaps she still needed more. Staff discussed having a place in the classroom where Kali could keep a pitcher of water and a plate of crackers. Kali could practice pouring and take a snack whenever she felt she needed to. After a few days they noticed Kali no longer went to the window and did not even go to the table. She knew that if she wanted something, it was there.

An early childhood program might be the only place that offers stability to a child and family experiencing homelessness. There are many ways that early childhood teachers, program leaders, and other staff can create early learning environments that are responsive to, and inclusive of, young children and families experiencing homelessness.

Kali's story illustrates how important it is that early childhood educators attend to each child's needs. Because children and families who are homeless endure high levels of sustained stress and trauma, early childhood programs and staff striving to be responsive to the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and strengths of these families must be trauma-informed. Supporting children to feel safe and protected while in early learning programs so they can focus their emotional energy on interacting, exploring, creating, playing, and learning, instead of worrying whether their basic needs will be met, is a critical foundation of a trauma-sensitive early learning program, which is illustrated in the example—Kali's mother and the center's staff were able to attune to the child's worries and needs and make accommodations that allowed Kali to reduce the activation of her stress response system and enjoy her time in the classroom. Additionally, early childhood programs that partner with and support parents communicate important messages to children and families that they are welcome and valuable members of the classroom community and program.

This chapter:

- describes the foundations of a trauma-informed early childhood program;
- provides a range of suggested trauma-informed practices for teachers to implement in their classrooms;
- discusses how homeless liaisons can partner with early childhood programs and other community partners to connect families experiencing homelessness with services and resources; and
- spotlights promising practices and programs serving young children and families experiencing homelessness in communities across California.

Foundations of Trauma-Informed Early Childhood Programs

VIGNETTE

Barbara is the family services manager at a local Head Start program. Malik, a child enrolled in her center, is concerned about his door being locked and talks about the many colors of doors he now goes to. He wonders what color the door will be today when he leaves the program and "goes home" with his mom. Malik and his family were evicted from their apartment. He and his family have been staying with various friends and relatives for several weeks now. It is fortunate that the family has continued to have reliable transportation and that Malik has still been able to attend the Head Start program on a regular basis while his family struggles to save enough money to rent their own apartment again.

Trauma-informed programs recognize that individuals' histories of trauma affect their development, learning, emotions, and behavior. Organizations that are trauma-informed use strength-based and relationship-based approaches that emphasize the importance of doing no further harm, not further traumatizing, when interacting and caring for a child or adult with a history of trauma. The goal of trauma-informed programs is to buffer (reduce) a child's stress by creating an environment that reinforces the child's feelings of safety, predictability, and personal control. When teachers use a trauma-informed approach, their goal is to disrupt the pattern of negative outcomes for children who have experienced trauma in their young lives. As seen with Kali's and Malik's stories at the beginning of this chapter, teachers who are trauma-informed strive to understand the children they are working with, including the stories the children are communicating through their behavior and the underlying reasons they are behaving the way they do. By using a trauma lens to inform work with young children, teachers have the following commitments in their teaching practice:

- They work hard to create a relationship and connection so the child learns that adults can be safe and supportive.
- They seek to understand the meaning of a specific behavior in a specific moment for an individual child.
- They look for patterns of behavior for an individual child, including individual triggers that activate children's stress response systems.

- They understand that what they perceive as "challenging behavior" is children's need to communicate and have control because they carry with them previous experiences that left them feeling helpless or powerless. The child may be sharing a story of what has happened to her and how she feels about it. The child wants the adults to listen to this story and respond with empathy and a desire to help her feel safe. Regina describes what she would like all early childhood educators to know about the experience of homelessness:

VIGNETTE

A lot of the teachers need to realize that, despite how you end up without a permanent home, whether it's my case with domestic violence, not being able to afford rent because of price hikes or whatever the situation, these kids are coming from a lot, a lot of trauma. I mean, they may hide it, but these kids are so traumatized; it's not easy.

A willingness to learn about children's experiences—which increases understanding and leads to empathy—is at the core of trauma-informed practices.

- They strive to create an environment that communicates to the child a feeling of safety and predictability.
- They engage in self-care so they may have enough restored energy and internal resources to support these most vulnerable children and families—and develop empathy for their experiences of trauma. This can help rebuild their sense of safety, support their healing, and create experiences that strengthen resilience.

Establishing trusting, supportive relationships is the foundation of a trauma-informed early childhood program. All children who have experienced trauma need supportive and responsive caregivers who help them feel safe. Children experiencing homelessness need caring, responsive, and self-regulated caregivers who

Establishing trusting, supportive relationships is the foundation of a trauma-informed early childhood program.

attune to them. Attunement is seen when an adult focuses so intently in communication with a child that the child comes to believe that what he or she thinks and feels matters and "feels felt" by the adult (Levine and Kline 2007). The adult's attentiveness and interest in the child helps the child develop a sense of belonging and supports feelings of safety and protection. Consider the way the staff at Kali's center attuned to what the child was trying to communicate by first valuing her behaviors as communication and continuing to listen and observe her behavior until they understood what she needed. Attuned interactions are the foundation for building self-esteem and a strong sense of self for any child, and with children experiencing trauma, attunement is vital.

Tuning in to the child's perspective begins by taking time to mindfully focus on the child and show genuine interest in understanding the emotional state or behavior being communicated. Attunement is characterized by careful observation of children and responding to children's behavior by asking, "what is this child communicating to me about how he or she feels and what he or she needs to feel safe?" Attunement is supported when teachers focus on children's emotional state—what they say or express nonverbally through their play, art, gestures, and behavior—without judging or reacting to it but, instead, showing interest, curiosity, empathy, and a desire to understand, connect, and provide support. When teachers attune to a child, they carefully observe and pay attention to the messages children are conveying and trying to make sense of or work out.

Sometimes children communicate their worries and fears through complex and puzzling behavior, whereas, other times, the stories they share about what happened to them and how they feel about it are conveyed through appropriate and nondisruptive behavior. For example, a teacher might observe a young child quietly playing out a scene in which a mommy doll is sleeping in a car while her daughter is crying in a bed in her grandmother's house. While attuning to this child, she pays careful attention to her play and what it means. She wonders to herself, "what is she communicating to me? How can I help her to feel safe and supported?" She might provide an encouraging smile, a reassuring gesture, or a quiet reminder to the little girl that she is safe and her teacher will take care of her while she is at school. Attuned teachers respond to children's range of feelings and behaviors by remaining inquisitive, caring, calm, and supportive.

This response helps children calm their stress response system, develop trust by making them feel safe, and better engage in the learning process.

Another critical approach used in trauma-informed programs is an emphasis on *co-regulation*. Co-regulation refers to the assistance provided by a caregiver to soothe a child's emotional distress. It is essential that young children experiencing homelessness whose stress response system is triggered frequently have caregivers who can support them to re-regulate their stressed bodies and dysregulated behavior. Very young children cannot do this on their own. They need their caregivers to support them through co-regulation. By staying with a child and communicating messages of calm, empathy, care, and safety, teachers support children to calm their nervous systems, which reinforces feelings of safety and protection for the child. Caregivers use their state of calm to regulate and guide a distressed child back toward self-regulation.

Co-regulation is strongly influenced by the quality of the relationship between the child and the adult. It is most effective when the adult and child share a trusting relationship with one another, are responsive to one another's emotional states, and interact back and forth in positive serve-and-return communications together. The key for early childhood teachers to remember is that co-regulation is a powerful strategy that can be used to comfort and calm children who are triggered and dysregulated. When a child's stress response system has been triggered, caregivers can either mirror the child's distressed emotions and behavior (communicating in a way that feels frightening and unsafe to a child), which will lead the child to even more dysregulation (acting out or shutting down), or use co-regulation to guide the child back into a regulated emotional state by calming the reactive brainstem, interrupting the release of stress hormones in the body, and reinforcing feelings of safety and protection. Using co-regulation is important for all children and a strategy many teachers may already be using. With children who have experienced trauma and loss, it is particularly important for teachers to be responsive to their emotional states, especially when these children are distressed. Each time children who are experiencing homelessness encounter attunement and co-regulation from a responsive caregiver, they are being supported to heal, develop resilience, and build capacity to cope with the stress in their lives.

It is important to note that the specific types of interactions for co-regulating children may look different in different families and cultures. For example, in many Native American families and communities, adult–child interactions may

place less emphasis on direct communication and verbal expression. Instead, communication may have more focus on observing, listening, modeling, and practicing, and guidance and support are more likely to be provided through expressive looks, touch, and other nonverbal forms of communication (Bigfoot 2011; Tsethlikai et al. 2018).

Being aware of and addressing discipline disproportionality for young children of color is essential. One of the most glaring examples of disparities in early care and education settings is in exclusionary discipline (especially suspensions and expulsions). Research to date has demonstrated that young children of color experience harsher discipline for the same behaviors than their white peers (Kirwan 2015; Raible and Irizarry 2010). Specifically, African American and Latino boys in preschool have higher rates of expulsion than their same-age white and Asian peers (Gilliam 2005; ED, Office of Civil Rights 2014). When children experience harsh disciplinary practices, they are at risk of further (and perhaps cumulative) negative developmental outcomes. Expulsion may increase negative impacts on young children's academic and social–emotional outcomes and predict a lack of engagement in school, decreased educational opportunity, and eventual school dropout—all of which may increase the risk for unemployment and lack of economic self-sufficiency (Academy of American Pediatrics 2013; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008; ED and HHS 2014). Researchers have identified several factors associated with suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings, including teachers who report high levels of job stress and depression, classrooms with larger group size and low teacher–child ratios, teachers with inadequate knowledge of child development, racial discipline disparities, early childhood trauma and lack of access to supports and resources (e.g., early childhood mental health consultation) (Gilliam 2016; Meek and Gilliam 2016; McCann Shivers and Means 2018). Some scholars and policymakers hypothesize that *implicit and explicit bias* are some of the mechanisms leading to these discipline disparities (Adamu and Hogan 2015; Priest et al. 2018; Okonofua and Eberhardt 2015; HHS and ED 2014).

Young children of color experiencing homelessness are at particular risk of experiencing disproportionate discipline. Early educators can play a role to prevent and address these disparities by engaging in reflective professional development that helps them (1) increase their knowledge of children's social–emotional development, (2) increase their ability to understand and become aware of their own biases, and (3) enhance their capacity to reflect on the meaning of children's behavior by using a cultural and trauma lens. Early Childhood Mental

Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a promising strategy that may be effective in reducing the racial disparities in discipline practices (Davis, Shivers, and Perry, in press; Gilliam 2005; Hepburn et al. 2013; Shivers and Steier 2016).

Building trust between caregivers and children with histories of trauma is essential for children's healing. It is essential that caregivers understand that children's experiences of trauma make it very difficult for them to develop trust in their relationships with others. This is why it is so important for teachers to be trauma-informed. Understanding trauma and its impact on young children's brains and behavior will allow teachers to have understanding, empathy, and patience with young children who struggle to build trusting relationships. Children will learn to trust over time with caregivers who communicate to them continually that the adults will make sure they are safe, protected, and that all of their basic needs will be taken care of while they are in the early childhood program. This trust can lead to healing and well-being in the child.

Building trust between caregivers and children with histories of trauma is essential for children's healing.

Being a trauma-informed early childhood teacher means the following:

- having an understanding of the neurobiology of trauma and its impact on young children's development and ability to learn;
- acknowledging the existence and prevalence of many different types of trauma in young children's lives;
- recognizing your responsibility to learn about trauma-sensitive strategies for supporting the young children and families you work with so you support their health and healing instead of further traumatizing them;
- engaging in systematic self-care to replenish your energy and sustain your ability to work with the extra demands of children and families with trauma histories; and
- committing to engaging in ongoing reflection, inquiry, and continuous professional learning to improve your ability to develop sensitive, caring, responsive, and attuned relationships with children exposed to trauma and their families.

Source: Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2018

The Importance of Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection

VIGNETTE

An underlying challenge for providers working with families experiencing homelessness is that talking about homelessness… brings up their past issues, and they don't want to talk about it because it hits too close to home. I've had adults start to cry during meetings and need to leave the room to calm down. So part of the trainings that I've started to offer include how to engage in self-care for the early childhood educators. We need to be able to look at how our own life circumstances shape the ways that we think about children and families experiencing homelessness. We need to know when to take a break from the work, when to hand a situation over to someone else. But we also need to think about how much it would have meant if someone had stepped up for us when we faced similar circumstances. It's a balancing act.

–Aaminah, Homeless liaison

Like Aaminah has recognized, research studies have documented that some teachers have negative perceptions of families experiencing homelessness because their personal experiences with individuals who are homeless are very limited and their perceptions are influenced by stereotypical or distorted images in the media (Milenkiewicz 2005; Swick 1996). These images might invoke the idea that homeless parents are lazy and don't take good care of their children or that their children are poorly behaved and uninterested in learning or being successful in school. These studies also documented that, as the teachers acquired more accurate information about families who are homeless, they developed more positive, strength-based, and supportive beliefs that replaced their initial deficit-based impressions (Kim 2013; Powers-Costello and Swick 2011). This research reinforces how important it is that all teachers and adults working with children build self-awareness about their own assumptions and beliefs about families experiencing homelessness. Everyone has unconscious biases that influence how they perceive others (Staats 2016; Van den Bergh et al. 2010). Although we cannot eliminate bias from our perceptions, through self-reflection and dialogue individuals can build self-awareness of the assumptions and beliefs they hold so they can interrupt deficit thinking

that could interfere with the quality of their caregiving practices. Such a skill is essential for caregivers striving to be responsive and respectful toward families experiencing homelessness, especially because a large percentage of these families are from nondominant racial and ethnic groups and many of the lead teachers and program directors serving them are white women. These demographic differences add more layers of potential bias due to societal forms of oppression related to race and ethnicity, immigration status, linguistic preference, disability, and other sources of diversity.

Depending on teachers' backgrounds and life experiences, what they focus on in building self-awareness and engaging in self-reflection may differ:

- Teachers who have no prior experience with homelessness and the many stressors and forms of trauma associated with it would benefit from building self-awareness about and reflecting upon any biases, deficit beliefs, and inaccurate assumptions they have related to children and families experiencing homelessness. Building awareness of any stereotypes, biases, or misunderstandings they have is a foundation for developing empathy and providing responsive and respectful care.
- Teachers who do have histories or current experiences with homelessness and forms of trauma often associated with it (e.g., domestic violence, sexual abuse) may be triggered by children's verbal and nonverbal behaviors that adults might find challenging or families' difficult circumstances that remind them of their own traumatic experiences. Teachers in this situation will need to build awareness of their own emotional triggers and receive support so they can be emotionally available to the children and families in their care. Having personal experiences with homelessness can present a range of challenges for teachers, from over-identification with the children in their programs that can trigger and re-traumatize them to a lack of empathy or responsiveness (e.g., feelings like "I got through this, so you can too").

How can teachers strengthen their self-awareness about the beliefs, assumptions, or potential biases they have about children and families experiencing homelessness? Reflective practice with a focus on critical reflection can support this process.

Reflective Practice with a Focus on Critical Reflection

Reflective practice allows teachers to think about their practice. Reflection-in-action (reflecting during the process of teaching and caregiving) supports teachers to notice what they are doing, to think about why it is happening, and to respond by making different choices (e.g., to stop themselves from being reactive, to consider another perspective, to reframe an initial assumption they have). Reflection-on-action (reflecting that happens outside of a teaching or caregiving context) allows teachers to think back about their practice and to consider the situation again. Teachers might think alone or in dialogue with others to gain awareness about their personal reactions (how a professional situation makes them feel) and their professional actions (how they choose to respond professionally in actions and words) as two separate things, while acknowledging how they affect one another. Reflection supports teachers to think about, analyze, and evaluate their practice to improve it and become more effective, caring, and responsive with the children and families in their care (Schön 1983).

Critical reflection is a combination of reflection and an explicit examination of the role of equity and power in teaching practice (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). *Critical in this context does not mean* criticism. When teachers engage in critical reflection, they not only reflect back on their practice, but they also strive to question their assumptions by inviting other perspectives and experiences to inform analysis of their practice. The process of inviting alternative ideas happens by asking such questions as, "What is another way of thinking about what is going on here?" "What values or cultural beliefs does my perspective represent?" "Whose values, perspectives, and stories are missing from the way I am

thinking about this situation and what are the consequences?" Critical reflection is most effective when teachers have opportunities to discuss their practice with colleagues or intentionally ask a diverse range of people to share their input to expand the points of view about the topic. Through conversation or going deeper in learning about an issue, the different ideas that surface might reinforce the teacher's original perspectives and taken-for-granted practices, or they may guide the teacher to broaden or critique his or her opinions and approach to working with children and families.

Reflective practice that includes critical reflection has many benefits:

- Teachers are encouraged to think and learn about children and their families as individuals; as a result, they learn about the diverse values, cultural beliefs, needs, strengths, abilities, and vulnerabilities of the children and families they serve.
- Teachers strengthen their understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of their perspectives and teaching practices.
- Teachers are provided with an opportunity to notice, acknowledge, and reflect on the range of feelings they have when they are working with children and families. Having awareness of their feelings is a first step in learning to manage them and having the ability to notice them without being reactive or dysregulated.
- Thinking about, talking about, analyzing, and evaluating their practice supports teachers to improve and become more attuned and responsive to the children and families they serve.

Tonya Burns, executive director of Children Today (a nonprofit organization that provides trauma-informed child development and support services to children and families who are facing homelessness or maltreatment in Long Beach, California), shared an example of her staff using critical reflection to challenge and revise their initial deficit-oriented assumptions about a mother experiencing homelessness. This mother's behavior appeared to be disengaged and uncaring. Although the teachers had an initial reaction of blaming her, they used critical reflection to stop and ask themselves, "What is another way of understanding what might be going on here?" This response led to a transformation in their perspective as they listened to her story:

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Teresa, a 23-year-old mother, enrolled her 22-month-old son, Mario, and her 10-month-old daughter, Marisol, into our program. Our teachers observed that Mario cried throughout the day and appeared distressed when his primary teacher was not available to provide comfort (while taking care of another child, or on her break). After several weeks, the teachers spoke to Teresa about their observations. Teresa appeared unconcerned and had a flat affect. The teachers also immediately noticed that, at 10 months, Marisol was showing some extreme physical developmental delays. They shared their observations and concerns with Teresa and asked questions about Marisol's development. Teresa once again appeared unconcerned and withdrawn. The program staff provided Teresa with a phone number to make a referral to early intervention services for Marisol. Teresa showed no response when this information was provided. After several attempts to discuss the concerns and how to make a referral for Marisol, Teresa became very upset and yelled at the teachers and the program staff, "I know," and she walked away.

Even though we are a trauma-informed organization, our staff made some assumptions about Teresa, including what appeared to be her lack of concern about her child's development, possible lack of attachment, and possible neglect (for failing to follow up regarding the baby's developmental delays). After several more weeks of trying to connect with Teresa, everyone took a step back and reflected that something else must be going on. They respected Teresa's personal boundaries and slowly built a trusting relationship with her. They told her how great she was with the children when she was at the center. Slowly, she began to share her personal trauma history and the challenges she was currently facing.

Teresa told the staff that, as a child, she experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse. And now, like her mother, she was a victim of domestic violence, which led to her experience of homelessness. She was also in the middle of a CPS investigation because her children were witnesses to the domestic violence in their home. Teresa also confessed that she avoided taking her daughter to the doctor because it scared her that she might find out that there was something wrong with her. She explained,

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"So much was in my head; I just shut down, and I forgot about a lot of things." She also shared, "It was hard for me to accept that I failed, because of my promise to myself." She explained that, when she was younger, she promised herself that the day she had children, they wouldn't live as she did and go through what she went through as a child. Teresa cried and said, "I broke my promise."

Over time, the program staff had built enough trust with Teresa that she allowed them to help her secure permanent housing, and she recently moved to a new apartment. They supported her in making a referral to early intervention and Marisol began to receive services at the center. Teresa is now excited about her life. She is in her own home, and, after not being able to cook for herself or her family for more than a year, she is now once again able to make meals. The first thing she wanted to cook for herself was a fried egg.

Teresa taught our staff (again) how important it is to be mindful, patient, and welcoming and not to make judgments about families. We were reminded that, whenever we make judgments and jump to conclusions, our negative assumptions don't help and can make the situation worse. Our goal is always to help, and not hinder, families.

A reflective practice that focuses on critical reflection can support teachers to build awareness about the quality and sensitivity of their communication and interactions with all children and families. The staff at Children Today took a step back to reflect on the negative assumptions they were making about Teresa's parenting. They understood that taking time to learn about how Teresa was experiencing the situation was fundamental to support the family. By thinking about their practice with a "critical eye," teachers can identify how to continually improve their early learning programs to become strength-based, welcoming, inclusive, and trauma-informed for all families, including children and families experiencing homelessness. ECMHC is emerging as a promising intervention and prevention strategy that can enhance teachers' reflective capacity (Hepburn et al. 2013). ECMHC programs are available in communities throughout the state of California.

Specific Trauma-Informed "Housing Sensitive" Practices for Early Childhood Programs to Implement

Early childhood teachers, program leaders, and other staff who work directly with young children and their families can work together to create programs that take the unique and diverse needs of families experiencing homelessness into consideration. In this section, we describe a range of strategies that early childhood staff can implement to create responsive, inclusive environments that support children and families experiencing homelessness to access and fully participate in.

Support Children to Have Their Basic Needs Met

Working in partnership with parents and guardians, staff can support children to have food, clothing, and basic hygiene needs met; for example, some programs offer the use of washing machines for families to clean their clothes. Food insecurity is common among many families experiencing homelessness as we saw at the beginning of this chapter with Kali's story. Allowing children to have access to snacks that they can eat whenever they feel hungry will greatly reduce their discomfort from hunger and the fears and concerns and triggers they may have associated with their family's experience of food insecurity. Additionally, some programs offer donated food items in food pantries or send backpacks with food home over the weekend. This is, for instance, the case of Children Today:

VIGNETTE

At meal time, Children Today offers two helpings of food to each child. This minimizes a lot of the anxiety that some children exhibit at meal time. Additionally, to further help with meeting tangible needs, the agency partners with the general community to offer hygiene products to families, including shampoo, deodorant, soap, combs, brushes, lotions, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and other items of need. Children Today provides all diapers and formulas for every child, so that this is one less thing families have to worry about. The agency hosts an annual "holiday store" where countless gifts, including toys, clothing, blankets, coats, and hygiene products, are donated from the community, and families are invited to select up to five gifts for each of their children enrolled in the program, as well as their siblings. Each year the community is more generous than the previous year. In 2016, more than $20,000 worth of gifts were donated from the businesses and private citizens in the Long Beach community.

Because life in the shelter, sleeping in their car, or living doubled up may not be conducive to healthy sleep, children experiencing homelessness frequently arrive at the child care center exhausted. Normalizing this experience, such as allowing children to sleep whenever they are tired while in your care, is important so they don't feel ashamed or judged. This flexibility will support them to feel safe and protected because they see their caregivers being responsive to their needs.

Create Trauma-Sensitive Environments

Early learning settings that are trauma sensitive create feelings of predictability, consistency, safety, and belonging in children's lives (Sorrels 2015; Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2018). Creating this type of environment for families experiencing homelessness can buffer the stress from the uncertainty, constant change, and lack of control they too often experience outside the classroom. The following practices are recommended:

Focus on the "whole child." This focus includes emphasizing all domains of a child's development: social, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and physical, and understanding how these domains are all interconnected. Some cultures (e.g., many Native American communities and indigenous cultures) emphasize interconnectedness as "being aware of one's connections to others, to the land, the water, ancestors, and the spirit world and behaving in ways that preserve these interconnections" (Harcharek and Rexford 2015; Tsethlikai et al. 2018, 2). A tribal child care leader in California spoke about the importance of the "whole child/whole spirit" aspects of healing and the importance of igniting a child's spirit to help carry them through trauma and healing (Wood 2018).

Provide stable, predictable routines and environments. It can be traumatic for young children experiencing homelessness to have to experience continuous change, including change in the type of environments they live in and the rules they must live by. Creating an early learning environment with stable, predictable, and consistent routines will help them feel safe, which will allow them to focus and learn new skills. If children feel unsafe, their ability to relax their sensory system and engage their focal attention necessary to learn is affected. Any time the routine or environment changes (e.g., a substitute teacher or change in daily schedule), it is helpful to communicate it to the children in advance, because sudden changes may trigger their stress response systems. For example, a teacher can use picture cards to show the order of activities for a day when there is a change in the planned routine.

VIGNETTE

It was naptime at the Magic Carousel Preschool and Academy in Ventura, but two-year-old Justin was having none of it. "Are you ready for a nap, Justin?" asked child development specialist Maria McDaniels gently as another preschool worker dimmed the lights and other children in the class moved toward cots laid out on the floor. The little boy turned his head sharply and squealed. He looked worried. Remaining calm and caring, McDaniels grabbed a pinwheel from behind a bookcase and sat down next to him. "Ready?" she said. "Smile. Take a deep breath." The two began blowing on the little wind turbine to make it spin, and Justin's face softened. After a couple of minutes, he walked with her to his cot. Naptime struggles are not unusual for this age group, but Justin had good reason to feel anxious about going to sleep, as he currently lives in transitional housing and frequently has trouble falling asleep because he has moved around a lot, often sleeping in different beds each night and in environments he doesn't feel safe in.
–From "Specialized Preschools Help Toddlers Counter the Trauma of Homelessness," by Claudia Boyd-Barrett (2017). Retrieved from http://www.calhealthreport.org/2017/11/13/specialized-preschools-help-toddlers-counter-trauma-homelessness/.

In this example, Maria is clearly aware of the effect of the stressful events Justin is experiencing so instead of insisting on directly going to nap, she offers a choice. Inviting him to participate in the pinwheel activity, while modeling calmness and care, buffered his stress and supported him to participate in the classroom routine in a positive and consistent way.

Minimize the number of adult-initiated or whole-group transitions throughout the day. Too many changes and transitions can be disruptive and scary for children who have experienced trauma and experience homelessness with constant change and disruptions. Because moving from one activity to another, particularly when done as a group, can cause some children fear and anxiety, minimizing the number of transitions throughout the day can reduce the triggering experiences a child has in your care.

Create a visual schedule to reinforce predictability and reduce children's worries about what is going to happen throughout the day. A visual schedule includes photos that represent each of the daily routines. It is really impactful if the photos feature the children in the class. Teachers can help children know what is next by going to the visual schedule, pointing to the photo, and saying, "Now it is time to [fill in activity]." You can also use photos to provide support during transitions by pointing to photos of the activity you are transitioning to and connecting each photo to words that describe these activities (for example, snack time and sleep time). This strategy reduces uncertainty for children with histories of trauma. It also supports their vocabulary development.

Evaluate the sensory stimulation in the environment. Teachers and providers arrange their early learning environments to support young children's regulation of emotions and behavior by reducing sensory input that could overwhelm them and activate a stress response. The physical environment can be made more visually calming by dimming the lights or using soft lighting, reducing clutter on the walls or around the room, and using natural colors, textures, and materials. It is really important to include a quiet or cozy area where children can rest or get away from other children if they need to take a break or calm down if their stress systems are activated. Some children may actually seek sensory stimulation and can again be provided with a space to jump or play at a sensory table. Minimizing unexpected sounds and loud noises is also important because these can be a trigger for children and lead them to dysregulated behavior. Other sounds can help calm young children's stress. Nature sounds, calm classical music, white noise machines, humming, or quiet singing can be soothing and regulating for young children. Other children respond well to silence and may appreciate headphones. Soft blankets, water and sensory tables, and objects with a tactile stimulus (textured balls, textured blankets) that children can touch might also be helpful. Pedro, a preschool teacher, describes why it is important to create calming environments for young children exposed to trauma as too much sensory input can be overwhelming:

VIGNETTE

All that they've been through, coming into an environment like ours, where there's consistency and routines, it is sometimes hard for them because they've never experienced that. Many of these children have seen violence, even if they're at the homeless center; there's still a lot of domestic violence that they witness. Having 3,000 things in the art area is completely overwhelming for kids. It's too much. It's over-stimulating, and they can't even engage. We have kids who walk in and they are so overwhelmed because they are like, "I can touch all this stuff!. They've been through three or four houses before they come to us where they were in someone else's home and they were told, "you can't touch this and you can't touch that." So they come in and they can be really overwhelmed if we don't contain things for them.

The arts and repetitive rhythmic movements, including singing, dancing, walking, swinging, trampoline work, drumming and most musical activities, yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, and deep breathing, are also helpful for calming children's sensory systems (https://attachmentdisorderhealing.com/developmental-trauma/). Dr. Bruce Perry describes the importance of the arts and play for regulating children's brains at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVRO7PdYRnM.

Take advantage of outdoor natural environments. Sensory input that children receive from being outdoors can soothe their sensory systems and calm their stress response. Teachers can also bring elements of the outdoors inside their classroom or child care home: leaves, branches, water, sand, or other loose parts that children can safely explore with curiosity can be soothing and regulating (Sorrels 2015).

Allow children to keep personal items they bring to the program close to them. It is important that teachers not insist that children place a special toy, blanket, or lovey they bring with them out of their sight (e.g., into

a cubby). This item might provide essential security for a child and represent a source of connection and consistency for the child with his or her family when almost everything in the child's life is unstable and changing. And, if possible, provide a space for children to have as their own and connect with to increase their feelings of safety.

Create opportunities for children to communicate their fears and worries and express their anger and big feelings in constructive ways through pretend play, expressive arts (drawing, painting), sensory play (water, sand, clay, etc.), active play, and storybooks that help them see aspects of their life experiences acknowledged and learn through the characters how to cope and solve problems. This is clearly illustrated in Angelina's experience in preschool:

VIGNETTE

Angelina is an active and healthy four-year-old who attends a public preschool program. She engages easily in classroom activities and enjoys working with her peers. However, her teacher has noticed that she seems to be spending more time focused on activities that provide an opportunity to dramatize family relationships and routines. A persistent theme for her is bed time. Angelina makes sure she "reads" a book and says her prayers and always puts a car next to the bed she creates for herself. The teacher is aware that Angelina's mom is very young, has not finished high school, and has had trouble keeping a job because of her poor health and periodic drug use. Angelina and her mom stayed in a shelter for a while and moved in with Angelina's grandmother several months ago, around the time that Angelina enrolled in the program. It is Angelina's grandmother who keeps in touch with the preschool, and drops off and picks up Angelina each day.

Angelina's teacher spends individual time with each of the children in her program on a regular basis. She is curious about Angelina's dramatization. She sits with Angelina one day and learns that, although Angelina and her mom are staying with Angelina's grandmother, Angelina sleeps in the house while her mother must sleep in the car. By placing the car close to where she sleeps, she is able to be close to her mom, at least in her dramatization.

How fortunate that Angelina's teacher makes such dramatization possible and takes the time to learn from Angelina the meaning of her play. While staff may not be able to change how the family is dealing with the issues at hand, they can better address the way these challenges are affecting Angelina. They have begun tailoring their family support to the specific needs of both Angelina's grandmother and mother. They have introduced the family to a supportive housing program in the community, which can provide the multiple services needed, and have offered their preschool center as a place for the family and community service workers to meet so that Angelina is in a familiar space with familiar adults while these meetings take place.

Support children to release the extra energy charge that accumulates in their bodies when their stress response systems have been triggered. Children who live with high levels of stress need opportunities to engage in large motor activities that allow them to release the additional energy in their bodies that results from the activation of stress chemicals. The early learning program may be their only opportunity to run, climb, jump, stretch, swing, ride a tricycle, or otherwise engage in big body play and release of energy. Not only are these opportunities supportive of children's physical development, but they also reduce the chances of long-lasting impact resulting from the stress chemicals released after a triggering event.

Support children to have choices and reinforce their sense of control. Because the experience of homelessness can create feelings of helplessness and being overwhelmed, it is helpful to provide children with opportunities to have a sense of control in their lives. With young children, this approach can be supported by offering them small choices throughout their day (e.g., "Do you want the yellow car or the blue ball?"), integrating their interests into the curriculum, and providing open-ended materials that allow children to explore, discover, and create (e.g., blocks, art materials, "loose parts").

Support children to feel pride in their families and not be defined by their experience of homelessness. Encourage children to talk about the special people in their lives (e.g., friends, family members, people they know in the community, and people they have met), places they have been, and experiences they have had. It's also important to normalize—rather than stigmatize—their residential living circumstances. By welcoming children to speak about their families and living conditions honestly, teachers are expressing respect for the child by incorporating the child's family and culture into the curriculum. By including stories that reflect the children's experiences, teachers can create early learning environments that become safe places for them to simply be themselves and not feel as though they are so different from everyone else. Consider the following example:

VIGNETTE

Michele was four years old and living on the street when she came to our agency. She was living with both parents who had many complex and challenging issues that contributed to their situation. One day, Michele was in the preschool class, and after the children drew pictures, they were asked if they wanted to share their drawings. Michele enthusiastically raised her hand and asked to share her drawing. She very proudly began to describe the contents, pointing and saying, "This is a box. This is where I sleep. At night, I get to see the stars in the sky." She was very comfortable sharing her story and the circumstances of her life. The other children began to ask questions, and she answered them very clearly. In another preschool, teachers may have been embarrassed for or may have pitied Michele. Or they may have tried to redirect the story. Or, her peers may have laughed at or made fun of her. That did not happen in this case. Michele was allowed to tell her story, just matter-of-factly, as it reflected her real-life experiences.

Bridge discussion of popular movies or television programs. Children living in temporary living situations often do not have access to a television, and, if they do, their families usually have little or no choice in specific programs or channels. To avoid creating experiences in which children experiencing homelessness feel left out, limit references to movies and television programs. When such references come from other children or are related to artwork on back-

packs, t-shirts, or other items, teachers can help bridge the information for the children. For example, when a child says he or she loves watching a specific character and points to his or her shirt, the teacher can say "Oh, I think he is on TV sometimes. He is a funny bear, isn't he?"

Refrain from asking children to bring things to the classroom from "home," including extra clothing, photographs, potluck items, or birthday treats, because this request may create feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, or shame for young children experiencing homelessness and difficulty for their parents and guardians. Have sensitivity when planning field trips or special projects that require fees or transportation because some families may be pleased to have a scholarship for their children to participate while others will feel uncomfortable. It is important to work with each family individually to be sensitive to their unique needs, preferences, and circumstances. Do not send materials home with a child if they do not need to be returned. Teachers may need to adapt classroom practices they have used in the past, such as sending home a stuffed bear to take turns spending the night with each child in the class, because this may create a hardship for a family living in a shelter or in their cars. What is essential is not singling out or making any family feel disadvantaged because of their experience of homelessness.

Actively support children to develop social–emotional skills. It is absolutely essential that teachers recognize that children experiencing homelessness will likely need additional emotional support and will need lots of guidance and explicit teaching to learn a range of social–emotional skills, including naming and managing strong emotions, practicing friendship skills, expressing what they want and need, making choices, and applying problem-solving skills. Having social–emotional skills is a foundation for developing resilience and coping capabilities that will help children experiencing homelessness navigate the sustained stress they face on a daily basis.

Share information with families about child development and invite the families to share their child-rearing beliefs as well. Collaborate with families to create strategies they can use to support their child's social–emotional skills, which will build and strengthen their children's coping skills and resilience. In the following example, a child care center associated with a homeless shelter facilitates family groups for parents and guardians to have support and space to learn about healthy parenting practices:

VIGNETTE

Our programs are based on social–emotional learning. That is what we've always done here. ABCs and 123s doesn't really matter if you can't stop punching your friend in the face. There's things we need to do. A lot of support for self-regulation. "Let's talk about our feelings," that type of stuff. And we have a counselor who comes in once a week and runs a group called "A Window Between Worlds," which is a domestic violence art curriculum. They work with the kids and talk about feelings and being a Super Friend and using some of the Teaching Pyramid stuff just to give the children words for their feelings because our parents struggle with that too. We also do nurturing parenting groups to help parents with parenting skills and child development. It's a support. That has been really impactful for our parents; sometimes they haven't had really strong role models. They've had a hard run. So we're trying to give them some tools to have a healthy relationship with their children and, hopefully, break the cycle with knowledge and some education.

–Director, child care program associated with a homeless shelter

Partnering with parents, as this program did, honors their role as their child's first teacher and the one who knows their child (and their child's culture) best. Positive teacher–family partnerships can also increase continuity for children between their life within their family and the experiences they have in the early childhood program.

Prevent and reduce harmful disciplinary practices. Because such a high percentage of children experiencing homelessness have experienced trauma, and such a high proportion of children of color in early education are the recipients of exclusionary and disproportionate discipline interactions with their teachers, it is essential that programs use trauma-informed strategies when responding to any stress-related behaviors the children display (fight, flight, or freeze behaviors after a triggering event). This approach requires a focus on de-escalation and support for calming children's nervous systems so they are guided back to self-regulation. It also requires more reflection from teachers. It may also require referrals for therapeutic interventions. It is crucial that the children not be further traumatized by harmful disciplinary practices, including suspension and expulsion, or frightening dysregulated behavior from

their adult caregivers. It is also important to review attendance policies to make sure that families experiencing homelessness do not face unnecessary consequences for arriving late or missing the program due to circumstances out of their control, including lack of transportation or challenges related to their housing instability.

Support Self-Care for Teachers

Maintaining a consistent, caring, and calm presence with young children is an intense and demanding job. Remaining attuned and co-regulating a child in distress requires a caregiver who has enormous energy reserves. Children with histories of trauma or who live with constant stress and uncertainty—as is the case for children who experience homelessness—spend a lot of time with their stress response systems triggered. As a result, they need early childhood teachers who can be physically and emotionally available to continually reinforce feelings of safety, protection, and calm with them, so the teachers can be guided back to a regulated and calm state themselves. Working with children and families who experience such intense and ongoing levels of stress can take a toll on teachers' health and well-being. Teachers can develop self-care practices to buffer their ongoing stress and restore their energy. If ongoing stress persists without quality self-care to heal and restore teachers' energy, persistent stress can lead to burnout. Burnout is a special type of stress—a state of physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion combined with doubts about one's competence and value (Gottlieb, Hennessy, and Squires 2004). People who are experiencing burnout

- feel emotionally exhausted and overextended by their work;
- think they no longer make a difference, which results in negative, critical, and reactive attitudes toward the children and families they work with; and
- have a sense of diminished personal accomplishment. That is to say, they feel they are not competent and can start to feel like they're not making a difference. (Maslach and Leiter 1997)

Self-care is the best prevention for burnout. We know from research that caregivers who are stressed are more likely to use harsh discipline, and chil-

dren with caregivers who are under high stress tend to have more dysregulated behavior (Horen 2015). This is not surprising when thinking about co-regulation in reverse. Teachers are communicating their stress unintentionally as they interact with children who are very tuned in to adult emotions. Teachers can learn to detect warning signs that communicate to them that their stress levels are increasing to an unhealthy level (e.g., they notice they are less patient, more irritable and easily reactive, more critical of self and others). With increased self-awareness, they can engage in self-care strategies that restore their energy and allow them to avoid making choices that feel scary or unsettling to children. Teachers can also build in deep breathing and focusing on being calm as they move toward a child in distress displaying dysregulated behavior. This self-calming routine can start the de-escalation or co-regulation action with a child.

Self-care strategies are individualized and unique to each person. What feels stressful or triggering to one teacher will not be to another. The same is true of self-care practices. Each individual has to act as a detective to discover what activates their own stress response system (a crying or clingy child? an unresponsive parent? concern about a child's exposure to violence? feedback from a supervisor? one's own economic insecurity?). And each teacher will have to explore the self-care and restorative activities that can support his or her own mental and physical health and well-being. Breathing exercises; meditation or prayer; stretching, walking, running, or other movement; talking with a colleague, family member, or friend; drinking a hot cup of tea; completing a crossword puzzle—the possibilities are endless. What is essential is that all teachers build awareness of their stressors and make an intentional plan with two or three explicit strategies they can use on a regular basis to support their own self-care.

Supporting Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness Requires a Comprehensive Approach

Addressing the complex needs of young children and their families experiencing homelessness requires a comprehensive cross-disciplinary approach. Although housing assistance is their primary need, these families also require or benefit from case management and a range of additional comprehensive services and other supports that contribute to family stability, positive outcomes, and the ability for families to remain together—such services as employment assistance, child welfare, mental health, health care, substance abuse, domestic violence, and legal programs. Additionally, home visiting, infant mental health

services, and mental health consultants who address trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and mental health challenges for parents and children experiencing homelessness along with intervention to address children's developmental delays are all important forms of support for families.

Supporting young children and their families experiencing homelessness requires a comprehensive approach that includes

- safe affordable housing;
- employment assistance, which requires addressing education, job training, and workplace skills in addition to child care and transportation, so parents can hold a job;
- comprehensive needs assessments of all family members, which is required in HUD's CoC-coordinated intake, assessment, and referral system, to determine the level of risk and need for services for children and adults;
- trauma-informed programs and services that use a strength-based approach in which staff understand child development, the importance of healthy attachment, and the impact of traumatic stress on children's learning and development and family functioning;
- understanding and addressing systemic racism as a key factor in homelessness;
- attention to identification, prevention, and treatment of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, anxiety, and substance abuse by parents, especially mothers;
- screening parents for depression, including maternal and post-partum depression, trauma—and its mental health consequences—and substance use;
- parenting supports that identify trauma triggers, treat post-traumatic stress disorder, and support parents to be more attuned and responsive to the needs of their children;
- evidence-based programs and services; and
- screening and referrals to identify and address developmental delays, as well as disabilities and the impact of trauma that requires. therapeutic interventions.

McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons are building effective collaborations with early care and education programs across the country to increase the number of young children experiencing homelessness who have the opportunity to participate in early childhood programs. Offering comprehensive services to families is most effective when a group of committed early childhood service providers and partner agencies work in collaboration together (Bassuk et al. 2014, 7; Whitney 2016):

- McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons
- Head Start and Early Head Start program staff
- Early childhood specialists from SEAs
- Staff working in subsidized programs (state pre-K and CCDF)
- Staff working in IDEA Part B (LEA/early childhood special education) and Part C (early intervention) programs
- Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (state and county)
- Early childhood councils
- Technical assistance providers in child care settings (e.g., coaches and early childhood mental health consultants)

And

- Housing and shelter providers
- Child welfare staff
- Domestic violence and substance abuse staff
- Residential treatment staff
- Family support, parenting, mental health, and addiction staff
- Employment and work assistance staff
- Health-care providers

Some promising practices increase access to early learning programs for young children experiencing homelessness (Bassuk et al 2014):

- Prioritizing children who are homeless for enrollment in public pre-K programs and providing transportation to children to the closest program with an opening if needed to support the child's participation.

- Blending Title I funding with McKinney–Vento Act funds to support an early childhood advocate and a parent consultant at local emergency shelters. The early childhood advocate ensures that young children experiencing homelessness are screened for developmental delays, referred for developmental evaluations as needed, and connected with early childhood programs. The parent consultant works to encourage parents to become more involved in their children's early education and care.
- Requiring every Head Start and Early Head Start program to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their LEA. Similar MOUs can be created with state preschool programs. These MOUs can establish collaborative activities designed to provide supports and services for children and families experiencing homelessness (e.g., events or services developed to increase preschool access for children experiencing homelessness).
- Requiring collaboration between the McKinney–Vento Act program and state parent training and information centers and early intervention and early childhood special education programs to conduct joint trainings about the needs and rights of young children experiencing homelessness and to encourage local program coordination within communities.
- Authorizing, by the state department of education, a number of child care slots for children experiencing homelessness who qualify for services.
- Communicating among early education providers, support services programs, and state-funded Resource and Referral agencies who keep a database listing of preschools and child care centers in a district or community with information about sliding scale costs, openings, and availability of transportation. Homeless liaisons and providers can use this information to connect families experiencing homelessness with early learning programs.
- Creating opportunities for state-level staff (McKinney–Vento Act state coordinator, CCDF state administrator, and Head Start state collaboration director) responsible for the three major federal funding platforms, which now have aligned policy language for homelessness and require assessment of service needs, to coordinate and align planning and implementation efforts. *Although previously no framework for this type of collaboration existed, this is now required in the CCDF Final Rule (2016).*

Many additional accommodations are being piloted or implemented by states, counties, and cities across the country. For example, some states are waiving copayments and employment or training requirements. Others are allowing time spent searching for housing, work, or training to count as employment and training requirement hours or extending eligibility (e.g., to two years) for receipt of child care subsidies.

Self-Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Programs Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness (ACF 2017b)

HHS' Administration for Children and Families and The Ounce have created a very helpful tool that early childhood programs (child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, public pre-K) can use as a guide to ensure their programs are safe, developmentally appropriate, welcoming, and responsive to the unique needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families experiencing homelessness. This tool provides recommendations in five areas: identification and support; removal of barriers; responding to family needs; engagement in strategic collaboration; and improving collection, reporting, and utilization of data. Early childhood program staff can use this tool first to do an initial assessment of their program, rating each recommendation as "accomplished," "improving," or "needs action." Using the initial assessment results, program staff can then create goals and identify strategies to improve their responsiveness to children and families without housing stability.

For more information, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/final_self_assessment_tool_for_early_childhood_programs_serving.pdf.

A Spotlight on California: Promising Practices and Programs Serving Young Children and Their Families Experiencing Homelessness

Communities across California have developed different approaches for coordinating the complex supports and services needed for families experiencing

homelessness. One approach is a "one-stop shop" at which families can learn about a wide range of community agencies and supports at a single event. Another approach is to engage family resource navigators to coordinate and connect families experiencing homelessness to resources.

Project Homeless Connect: One-stop shop event for community services and resources. Families experiencing homelessness do not have time and often lack transportation to go to various community agencies for resources and services (early childhood education, food stamps, employment assistance) for which they qualify, given the demands they face while trying to find or maintain employment and a temporary living situation. In Contra Costa County, Project Homeless Connect coordinates a one-day event each year that serves as a *one-stop shop* for families who are experiencing homelessness. This event brings together over 250 service providers that offer such free services as substance abuse and mental health counseling, hair cutting, legal assistance, medical care, Department of Motor Vehicle services, and housing. Project Homeless Connect also provides transportation for families to support their attendance. A similar event is being planned by the homeless liaison in Santa Clara County whose goal is to hold it on a monthly basis. He shares:

VIGNETTE

Families with children experiencing homelessness ages birth to five need access to services. Having community events where child care providers are saying to families, "This is the application, this is what you need to do to enroll in the program," would be really helpful. Those events don't really exist. I've never come across one where there are providers all together, saying, "Family, community, come learn about our services." This summer I am working on putting together a big back-to-school event for McKinney–Vento families where we will bring in all these resources and service providers together for a nice fun event with clowns, music, and food. I need to bring this collection of services to a one-stop shop every month and invite housing providers, health-care providers, and others who provide resources for these families.

The Family Resource Navigators program. The Family Resource Navigators program, in the city of San Leandro, is a parent-directed and parent-staffed agency that was created to serve families who have children with developmental delays or special health-care needs who meet the eligibility criteria for IDEA Part B and Part C or the Maternal Child Health Title V/California Children's Services program (http://familyresourcenavigators.org/). A large percentage of the families that it serves experience a lack of permanent housing. The agency functions as a central office that offers a parent-to-parent, culturally responsive approach with 12 languages represented on staff to serve children and their families in the linguistically diverse Bay Area. "We are the people we serve," explained a staff member. Empathy and the belief that all children and families deserve the services available to them inspires their approach to connecting families with a full range of social services, including health care, medical and behavioral therapies, housing services, insurance, transportation, and child care. Navigators also help families understand the various social service systems while understanding how challenging it is for families whose energy is expended trying to meet basic needs every day.

The staff uses a strength-based approach. When families move away or are unable to continue working with them, the navigators actively work not to be judgmental, understanding that parenting is very difficult under such circumstances. When a family is able to return for support, they all pick up where they left off. The staff's firsthand knowledge of the cultural practices and vulnerabilities that various populations face directly shapes how they interact with families. For example, Siddhi explains:

VIGNETTE

When we make the first initial contact, we schedule a face-to-face meeting; it helps for the family to know who they're working with. It's important that what we do is culturally appropriate. Families feel so happy as soon as I walk in, and I'm wearing a scarf like them; they feel very comfortable. I speak with the moms. We share our stories and encourage them. We give choices to the family because, at first, we don't know the circumstances. We say, "Do you want to meet in your house? I can do a home visit. Do you want to meet in a public place?" I can tell you, less than 1 percent want to come to the office because the moms don't drive.

Our Families Navigators and Pilot Program. Another approach based on the "no wrong door" concept (e.g., families receive coordinated services no matter which agency they initially connect with, as seen with the CoC and other initiatives) to using Family Resource Navigators, was developed and is currently being piloted by the Employment and Human Services Department in Contra Costa County. In this community, four navigators were recently hired, and, instead of being located in a central office, they have been placed in existing social service centers and community organizations.

One example is the Family Justice Center, a support organization for survivors of domestic violence. If a woman contacts the center, after leaving a situation with domestic violence, she will be connected to housing services for herself and her children should she need them, in addition to the services she initially sought at the Family Justice Center. The purpose is to connect families who are accessing one service, often food stamps, for example, to other services that they or their family members may be eligible for (hence, the "no wrong door" approach). They fill out an intake form and may indicate that they have an elderly household member or are experiencing housing insecurity. They will then be tagged for other services. The navigator follows up with the family, reminds them that they have an appointment coming up, and confirms the specific paperwork they need to bring with them. The navigators also provide ongoing support for the families to ensure that they receive the services that they are eligible for and to help coach them in learning how they can navigate the system. They are learning that families experiencing homelessness may be accessing one service (food stamps), yet they are not accessing other services that they or other family members may need and qualify to receive. As a result, the family navigators are functioning as cross-sector coordinators who not only inform families of different services that are available to them but, once families are connected to the services, also provide support throughout the application process. For example, if a family experiencing homelessness comes in requesting support to find housing and child care assistance for their young toddler, a navigator can also assist them to apply for CalFresh and bus vouchers from the county office of education for the older siblings.

Many communities across California have developed early childhood programs that are responsive to young children and their families experiencing homelessness. Five examples of the diverse range of programs that exist across the state to serve families facing homelessness are briefly described.

Many communities across California have developed early childhood programs that are responsive to young children and their families experiencing homelessness.

Children Today. Children Today is a nonprofit organization that provides trauma-informed services to children and families experiencing homelessness or maltreatment in Long Beach (http://www.childrentoday.org/). It recognizes that families experiencing homelessness have a multitude of challenges to overcome. Although finding housing is first and foremost, it is often just the start of what is needed to help stabilize families. They experience homelessness for a variety of reasons, including the loss of a job and family income, domestic violence, mental health or substance use issues, and so on. Often, by the time families become homeless, they have exhausted all of their resources and supports. The instability that results from homelessness, coupled with other factors, can result in children and their parents experiencing a lot of anxiety or other problems, which can manifest into behavioral or mental health issues for the parent and child and also developmental delays for the child. As a trauma-informed child care and development agency, Children Today partners with many organizations to provide a wide array of mental and behavioral health and early intervention services to address the comprehensive needs of children and their families. These organizations often come directly to the facility to assess and treat children and their families. The partnerships—which include three separate children's mental health organizations, the local regional center, and the Long Beach Unified School District—provide early assessment and early interventions for children under age three, and developmental evaluations and specialized programs for children ages three and older that focus on specific developmental delays, such as autism services. Children Today also has a partnership with the dental school of a major university that provides yearly dental screenings and assessments for every child and the social work staff who provide case management services. Families are connected to additional resources, including medical treatment, food banks, transportation services, and counseling services.

San Francisco ACCESS (Accessible Child Care Expedited for the Shelter System). In 2005, San Francisco, using local funds, developed a child care subsidy program providing guaranteed access for families experiencing homelessness in shelters or having had a shelter stay within the last six months who have at least one child aged birth to three years. This program was developed to address multiple needs:

- Families experiencing homelessness and refusing a label of "at risk" to be prioritized into state subsidy programs;
- Lack of available infant and toddler subsidies; and
- Lack of available subsidized slots with supports and reimbursements reflective of the need for spaces to serve families experiencing homelessness.

San Francisco leveraged local resources and invested in family child care home and centers and built a network of providers who were supported with health and mental health consultation. Providers received subsidies ranging from 5 percent to 10 percent based on their program's quality ratings. Families were provided enhanced referrals and child care case management, including a staff member to accompany families to visit providers and support them through the application process.

Alameda County's Social Services Agency Office of Policy, Evaluation and Planning is currently piloting a local homeless child care initiative, **Alameda Childcare Access Referral Ensured (Alameda CARE)**, with a contribution from the Board of Supervisors. The seed funding has allowed key partners to join at a table and build collaborative relationships, which have increased cross-system understanding and referrals between the child care system and the homeless family services system for Oakland (Family Front Door). Having homeless outreach teams understand the importance of child care referrals and having child care systems staff (housed at the child care resource and referral agency, BANANAS, for this pilot) understand the parameters and flow of families experiencing homelessness and identifying how families are eligible for existing child care subsidies has resulted in important systems changes. For instance, BANANAS staff regularly make child care presentations at Family Front Door orientations, Family Front Door staff ask about child care needs at intake, and Alameda County Social Services Agency looks to align and leverage existing resources, such as the statewide Emergency Child Care Bridge Program, which offers a navigator and trauma training for providers in the county, including

those involved in the CARE program. Outcomes are already positive, including a number of families experiencing homelessness being enrolled in subsidized care, the development of a data system sharing agreement across agencies, strengthened coordination, and an increased number of successful cross-agency referrals. First 5 Alameda County provided initial funding and is helping fund a Homeless Child Care Navigator at BANANAS. The pilot program steering committee convened by the Alameda County Early Childhood Education Program regularly meets and has brought diverse community partners together, including Oakland Head Start, which was already a key provider for children who are homeless (aged birth to five), Alameda County Social Services, as well as other key public and nonprofit community partners.

Step Up Ventura is one of several preschool programs for children experiencing homelessness in California (https://www.stepupventura.org/projects/). The mission of Step Up Ventura is to provide therapeutic services and access to child care and preschool for children ages birth to five who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Step Up Ventura is funded through private donations and county-administered child care vouchers for low-income families. Families who enroll in the program either pay nothing or a small fee. Step Up Ventura has two outreach coordinators with knowledge of mental health and early childhood education who provide specialized support to parents and children, including developmental screenings and behavior and developmental skill building (e.g., learning how to trust adults and feel safe and secure at school and strategies for managing their strong emotions). Step Up Ventura also provides support for parents and caregivers to build positive relationships with their children, to heal from trauma, and to guide their children in developing social–emotional skills.

Storyteller Children's Center. The Storyteller Children's Center in Santa Barbara has served children experiencing homelessness and children with histories of trauma for almost 30 years (https://www.storytellercenter.org/). The Storyteller Children's Center provides therapeutic preschools for approximately 100 children at two sites. It provides a range of services to the children, including speech and language therapy, dental and vision screenings, and nutritious meals. It also provides support services, such as therapy for children and families that includes the providers, employment training, assistance if parents want to go back to school, life skills training (e.g., learning about managing finances), coaching sessions during parent nights, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing, and transportation assistance. The Storyteller Children's

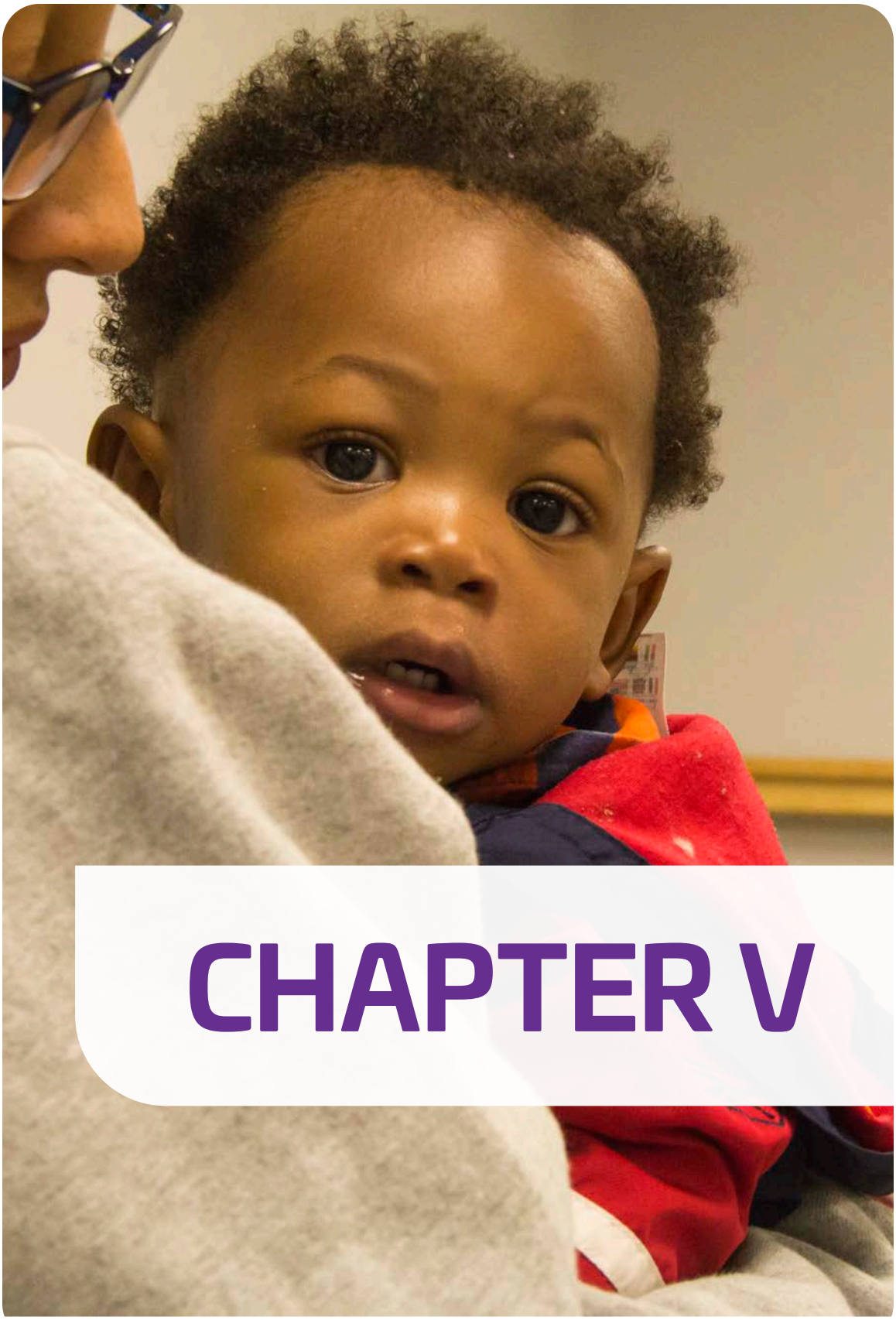
Center is funded through state, federal, and foundation grants and private donations. Executive Director Donna Barranco Fisher explains that the children they serve experience homelessness and other forms of trauma that affect their development and ability to learn:

VIGNETTE

The children we serve may be living in parks, in cars, or in substandard housing with multiple families crammed into a one-bedroom apartment. Some have witnessed extreme domestic violence or have been abused. The effects of these experiences on the children can manifest as aggressive or inappropriate behavior, withdrawal, speech delays, and difficulty socializing with others.

The preschool teachers at Storyteller Children's Center are knowledgeable about trauma and create trauma-sensitive environments for the young children in their care to support their healing and resilience.

Many young children and their families are facing homelessness in California. These programs and others are creating welcoming, inclusive, and responsive environments for families experiencing homelessness that strive to address their complex and unique needs for support. Despite these bright lights across the state, there is a significant need for more programs that are inclusive of families with young children who are homeless and in which staff are knowledgeable about homelessness, have the skills and passion to support families, and help young children feel safe so they can learn and thrive.



CHAPTER V

Responsive Relationships and Partnerships with Families

Quality early childhood programs support teachers and program leaders to build respectful and strength-based partnerships with families. Consistent, caring, and responsive relationships among teachers, administrators, and families make up an important protective factor to buffer the stress associated with homelessness for young children and their families.

This chapter:

- describes significant stressors families experiencing homelessness report;
- discusses the importance of using a strength-based, housing-sensitive approach in communication with families; and
- introduces several concrete steps teachers and program leaders can take to engage in responsive, strength-based relationships with families and children who are homeless.

Understanding Families Experiencing Homelessness

Developing positive, strength-based relationships with families experiencing homelessness is most likely to happen when there is a trusting relationship and teachers listen to, and learn from, families about the experiences they face as a result of being homeless. While understanding the challenges and stressors of the families is fundamental, it is also important not to view parents as defined only by "risk" or stressors. All families show fundamental strengths,

skills, capacities, and knowledge. Emphasizing and paying attention to a family's strengths will help teachers build positive, trusting, and responsive relationships.

As described previously, a majority of the families experiencing homelessness are headed by single mothers with young children (Bassuk et al. 2014). In evaluating their situation, mothers experiencing homelessness report the following as the most difficult challenges they experience:

As described previously, a majority of the families experiencing homelessness are headed by single mothers with young children

- Stereotyping and degrading images (Gultekin 2015; Moore 2013; Smith 2006; Swick, Williams, and Fields 2014). Mothers in several research studies signal that they are often perceived through a deficit perspective in which their strengths, their abilities, and even their successes are overlooked. Two parents experiencing homelessness explain what they wish their children's teachers could understand and acknowledge about them.

VIGNETTE

*Mother: For ECE teachers, it would be great for them to really open up, to see us as moms and dads who are busting our a** to do something for our kids.*

Father: For my wife, it is almost a full-time job, just looking for any type of resources or anything. I am working, and as soon as I return from work, I keep them distracted so she can continue doing what she needs to do, doing the calls and everything.

Countering This Barrier: A Strength-Based Approach is based on the notion that all families are competent and have valuable knowledge and skills, also called funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti 2005). This approach is grounded in attitudes or predispositions to see the strengths of an individual or family first and to believe that all families have things to offer. Many immigrant and refugee families experiencing homelessness speak two or three languages and navigate different cultural and linguistic rules when they are speaking with their family members versus communicating with staff at agencies and schools.

These skills are important sources of family strengths. Additionally, families in challenging situations often have to develop strategies, skills, knowledge, and complex coping abilities to navigate stressors and barriers. This was seen with Mariana in chapter 2, who created an educational game to clean the parking lot where her family was temporarily parking their van. Mariana managed to accomplish several goals at once despite the complexity of their everyday lives (e.g., she managed her relationship with the owners of the parking lot, she kept her children entertained and safe, and she taught them about counting and the alphabet).

- Lack of privacy. Another challenge commonly mentioned by mothers experiencing homelessness is a lack of private time to be with their family and to nurture relationships with their children (Mayberry et al. 2014; Swick and Williams 2010; Swick, Williams, and Fields 2014). For instance, families living at shelters need to follow many rules that might limit their ability to parent in the way they desire. Many family shelters have strict hours and require that families leave the shelter early in the morning and not return until late afternoon. For parents without child care, they have no choice but to spend their days in public spaces. And families doubling up need to adapt to the rules of the house where they are living; they also often may have to endure comments and judgment about their parenting from the host individuals or families (Mayberry et al. 2014).
- Isolation. Mothers experiencing homelessness frequently highlight the isolation they experience, specifically, the lack of support from family or friends and feelings of being disconnected from resources (Gultekin 2015; Swick, Williams, and Fields 2014). Supportive family members, friends, and acquaintances are not only a source of emotional support and relief for these mothers, but often they are also a source of resources. Consider Celia's story:

VIGNETTE

Celia is really happy with the child care center she was able to enroll her child in. Marcus, the homeless liaison coordinator for the county, told her about child care vouchers and helped her

VIGNETTE *CONTINUED*

obtain this form of support. When asked what she likes the most about the center, Celia says that she shares the same values as the teacher, Mary. Mary has set up an online text-message system to communicate with all of the families. Celia explains that, whenever her family needs something, Mary sends a text to the other families saying, "Someone from our community needs jackets for the winter" without naming who. Celia says, "Ms. Mary always keeps it private, but she helps us with things. In fact, we were able to move out of the shelter because of her."

For Celia, Mary's messages create a sense of belonging that she truly appreciates. Mary also organizes events at which all parents gather to socialize. Celia shares that these events are really important for her and her family because they can be out of the shelter and enjoy a sense of friendship with others that she does not usually have.

This section has summarized three common experiences of single mothers experiencing homelessness, not the full range of challenges they face. Although these are common experiences, it is important to always remember that each family has unique histories and strengths.

Creating Responsive, Strength-Based Relationships with Families

There are several ways to engage in responsive, strength-based relationships with families. Most important is to express genuine interest in getting to know families and partnering with them to support their child. Ask them about the goals and dreams they have for their children, any concerns they have, the forms of support they would like their children to receive, and what they want their children to learn while attending the early childhood program. Following are several recommendations that will help early childhood teachers, program leaders, and other staff serving young children create programs that are responsive and welcoming to families experiencing homelessness.

- **Know the different definitions of homelessness** (e.g., HUD and McKinney–Vento Act) as well as relevant laws and entitlements. This knowledge helps ensure that children considered homeless under ED's definition receive appropriate educational services (Whitney 2016).
- **Use person-first language when communicating with families.** Place the person and family first: "Thank you for confiding in me that your family is experiencing homelessness. That is very helpful for me to know. Let's talk about how I can support your child while you are living in the shelter" (Byfield 2018).
- **Avoid referring to families as "homeless" on school forms or in conversation with families.** Many families do not want to be referred to as "homeless" due to the stigma that is often associated with this term. For these families, talking about "families living in transition" might be a better way to discuss the issue. However, listening to each individual family, noticing the way they phrase their situation, and using the same words is important because this approach communicates respect and care for the family. Many families may not consider themselves homeless even though their living arrangement meets the official definition (NCHE 2017; Whitney 2016).
- **Consider housing in family engagement practices.** Include consideration of housing in planning for and implementation of all family engagement efforts. Make sure housing is considered whenever families are being engaged and served and that it is included as teachers and others individualize supports for them. Ensure that resources used in family engagement strategies and activities are responsive for families facing housing challenges. For example, certain parenting curricula are better suited to specific emergency housing settings.
- **Communicate messages of inclusion.** Place informational posters about services (e.g., California Department of Education's Homeless Education Program poster: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/cy/documents/homelesspostereng.pdf) in visible areas where families will see them and post them online as well. Additionally, ensure that enrollment forms are sensitive to the possibility of families being homeless (ACF 2017b). These examples demonstrate the concrete ways early childhood programs communicate to families experiencing homelessness that they are welcome and valued as members of the classroom

or program community. Having children's books representing families experiencing homelessness through a strength-based lens is another way to reinforce this message (see the list of recommended children's books on families experiencing homelessness at the end of this book). Finally, it is important that teachers do not disclose a family's status as homeless; although it is appropriate to talk about diversity and acknowledge hardship openly so families have their lived experiences acknowledged. Specific children and families should never be named or identified with these topics.

- **Be aware that adults with histories of trauma may not respond to teachers' initiations to build a relationship or communicate about their child. They may also be dysregulated in their communication as a result of the many stressors in their lives.** Teachers need to be informed about how trauma affects children, adults, and families. Understanding trauma allows teachers like Mary to not take parents' lack of responsiveness as a personal rejection. Instead, teachers can have empathy and realize that parents' lack of engagement may be a survival strategy that has helped them cope with sustained stress and trauma. With this knowledge, teachers can reinforce messages that they welcome the family and see strengths in the child and parents, and that the family is an important part of their classroom community. Be patient with the adults, respond to any dysregulated behavior they display with a calm and regulated non-reactive tone, and reassure them that their children will be safe and protected in the early childhood program. Request parents' perspectives as often as possible to encourage their contributions and support their sense of belonging in the program. Make sure that all communication with families—written and verbal—is trauma-informed.

VIGNETTE *CONTINUED*

*I had a parent that I had to talk to one day, and I thought she was going to punch me. I don't even remember what it was about, but I remember approaching her asking her to have a seat so we could talk together. And she said, "I'm not sitting down!" and I was like, "Okay, I'll stand too." I came to find out that she was an addict and she was trying to get sober and she was p***ed off*

VIGNETTE *CONTINUED*

because she was struggling staying sober. So her attitude was just awful. And I told her, "I get it. I really understand. But you can't scream and yell at people. I can't have you doing that." And after that day, she was totally fine with me. She worked through her addiction and did all her steps and now she's fine. But when I first met her, I'm like, this isn't gonna go good.

–Director, Early Childhood Program for Children Experiencing Homelessness

- **Recognize the signs of insecure housing.** Some examples of these signs (note: these are only potential warning signs and do not equate to homelessness) include a family leaving the program and going in a different direction every day, a child who arrives wearing the same clothing several days in a row, a family that is hesitant or unable to bring in documents to confirm where they live, multiple moves, food insecurity, a history of homelessness, family members in fair or poor health, changes in children's behavior, such as heightened separation anxiety when they have not shown this behavior previously, parents or guardians finding it difficult to bring basic supplies, such as diapers, or sudden problems with attendance ([ECLKC] 2018; Whitney 2016).

- **Learn how to initiate respectful discussions with families** about their housing situation, understanding that families may not self-identify as homeless if they are doubling up. McKinney–Vento Act homeless liaisons are a great resource, as is the NAEHCY, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the ECLKC. For example, teachers could check in with a family that has moved several times to see if they need any specific support during their time of mobility and change. It is important to remember that many families in which one or both adults are employed still experience homelessness, so it is important not to assume that families have stable housing if they have secure employment.

The Office of Head Start ECLKC provides modules on its website as an interactive learning series to support and assist professionals in the early childhood field to learn how to identify and provide outreach to children and families who are experiencing homelessness. Two modules focus specifically on sensitive identification of families experiencing homelessness and providing supports to families. The information and modules can be found at https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-support-well-being/article/supporting-children-families-experiencing-homelessness.

- **Additional resources may be useful:**
  https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/familypartnerships.pdf
  https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf

- **Provide culturally and linguistically responsive communication.** Because many families experiencing homelessness are immigrants or have a primary language other than English, it is important to have available written materials in multiple languages or a staff person who is able to communicate with the family in their native language. Referrals made to community services should ideally be available in a linguistically and culturally responsive format, or, when not possible, interpreters should be available for families to support their communication. Within their programs, early childhood teachers can integrate families' cultural practices and home language. Ensure that all communication—written and verbal—is understandable to families in their home language and respectful of their culture and their circumstances of homelessness (California Department of Education 2016).

- **Create a plan for communication with families that is flexible and assumes they may experience mobility** (ACF 2017b). Ask the families how they would like to remain in contact if they have unexpected changes in their living situation. Planning with them in advance will help normalize mobility when it happens and prevent families from feeling uncomfortable about revealing their circumstances.
- **Build community.** As described at the beginning of this chapter, many families experience isolation from social networks that could offer material, emotional, and relational support (Swick, Williams, and Fields 2014). Early childhood programs have the opportunity to strengthen the social networks of support for families experiencing homelessness. For example, programs can link families to community resources (e.g., offer links to not only housing services but also playdate groups or educational opportunities for parents). They can also reinforce the sense of community within the program. For instance, Molly, a family child care provider, organizes family events once a month at which she cooks for all the families and invites friends to play live music. Molly knows that some of the families in her program are currently experiencing homelessness, and she has heard from them that these events have been really important for them. Molly explains:

VIGNETTE

I think these events are important for all families. Everyone benefits from connecting with one another. But for families that are going through a period without home. … Last year, one of the families that was doubling up and that was new to the area met another family at the dinner, and they just hit it off immediately. Now they meet sometimes for playdates at parks and such. I saw a huge change in the way that family became part of the community, more engaged with everything.

- **Remove barriers to enrollment** (ACF 2017b; Perlman 2015; Perlman et al. 2017). Another important step for creating a welcoming and responsive environment for families experiencing homelessness is to

remove unnecessary barriers that prevent their enrollment in early childhood programs.

- **Understand that producing documentation is challenging for families.** Understand that families have grace periods as described in the McKinney–Vento Act, Head Start Act, and CCDF reauthorization. Create a plan for this situation so children can be enrolled and participate during the grace period.
- **Identify a staff member who can assist families to obtain the necessary documentation.** This might require early childhood staff to become familiar with the different systems and agencies families experiencing homelessness are often in contact with (e.g., local family shelters, public schools, housing agencies, CPS).
- **Adapt enrollment forms that include options for families' diverse living arrangements** (e.g., a check box if the listed address is temporary, an open-ended question allowing adults to describe their living situation, or forms that provide a range of living situation options without explicitly using the label "homeless").

- **Refer families to resources and community services when needed.** Some children may require additional intervention and support to address developmental or mental health needs. Teachers can ensure that families are aware of their rights and the services their children are eligible for to support their children (e.g., IDEA Part C early intervention, IDEA Part B early childhood special education). Homeless liaisons can support families to arrange transportation to some appointments and can accompany them if requested.
- **Support children and families with transitions.** As discussed previously, transitions within a classroom can be very challenging for children, and transitions to a different class or teacher can also be challenging for children and adults affected by trauma and specifically the constant sense of stress and uncertainty that homelessness creates. Teachers and supervisors can work with families to provide support before, during, and after transitions. Thoughtful transitions can reinforce feelings of consistency, familiarity, and predictability, and buffer stress for children and families facing continual disruptions in their family life (e.g., new waiting lists, living environments, early childhood programs, and employment).

It is essential that early childhood teachers, program directors, and staff build respectful and strength-based partnerships with families experiencing homelessness. Creating opportunities for families who are facing homelessness to have consistent, caring, and responsive relationships that buffer their stress and daily challenges supports these adults and children to build resilience and coping skills that manage the hardships they endure during their period of housing instability. As outlined previously, early childhood teachers can take many steps to create welcoming, inclusive, and trauma-informed programs that respect families who are homeless by acknowledging their individual strengths, skills, and capacities in addition to their challenges and vulnerabilities.

It is essential that early childhood teachers, program directors, and staff build respectful and strength-based partnerships with families experiencing homelessness.

CONCLUSION

California has the third highest number of young children and their families experiencing homelessness across the nation, and the number of families at risk for homelessness in our state is increasing. Families who are homeless face a range of stressful circumstances that create vulnerabilities and negative consequences for the developmental health and well-being of very young children. Early childhood teachers can play an important role in the lives of young children and families experiencing homelessness by creating environments that are strength-based, culturally responsive, and responsive to their unique and complex needs. By striving to understand the individual strengths and vulnerabilities of each family experiencing homelessness and connecting them to community resources and services they need, early childhood staff can make a positive difference for these families. This book offers early childhood programs a window into the many challenges that families experiencing homelessness with infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children must face on a daily basis. The range of strategies and practices introduced throughout the book offer teachers and all early childhood staff actionable steps they can take to reduce the stress and negative consequences of homelessness on young children's development and the entire family's health and well-being.

GLOSSARY

Bias. Attitudes in favor or against one person or group of people (e.g., based on race/ethnicity, gender presentation) that are based on unexamined stereotypes and overtly generalized assumptions. These biases can be negative (e.g., women are not good at math) or positive (e.g., Chinese children are math geniuses) but are always problematic because they define a person or a group based on generalized simplistic assumptions, not facts.

Buffer. A person, practice, or thing that reduces the effect of something. For instance, participating in a caring, trauma-informed early childhood program can act as a buffer, and reduce the negative effects of trauma.

Deficit-thinking or deficit beliefs. Refers to beliefs that blame a child, their family, culture, or community for a child's poor academic performance or other negative outcomes without considering the role of institutional and structural forms of oppression (e.g., historical trauma, poverty, inequities in school financing) that placed the family at a disadvantage. Examples of these beliefs are, for instance, thinking that families experiencing poverty do not have enough motivation to support their children or the right culture to succeed, or that Latino parents don't care enough about education, or that children cannot thrive without two parents.

Disaggregated information. Data—from studies or from tests—that is presented broken into subgroups, for instance, presenting test scores by age, geography, racial or ethnic groups instead of all children aggregated or added up.

Discrimination. Refers to the unjust treatment of a person or group based on biases and preconceived assumptions about that person or group. Discrimination can be person-to-person or it can be at the social and institutional level.

Disproportionality. Refers to both overrepresentation and underrepresentation of children from non-dominant racial/ethnic groups in a specific condition, service, disability classification, etc. While the issue is complex, research has shown that, for instance, African American children are consistently overrepresented in special education and Asian students tend to be underrepresented (Skiba et al. 2016).

Dysregulation. Refers to an emotional state where children are not able to manage their emotions or to conduct tasks that require executive function, and where children's emotional displays seem to not match what is expected in that circumstance. Children that have experienced trauma, for instance, might either react with fight/flight responses, such as irritability, or with "freeze" responses, such as withdrawing from social interactions.

Hidden homelessness. Children who are staying temporarily with friends or extended family or another household due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason are experiencing a form of homelessness described as doubling up. Children and their families who are doubling up are often described as the "hidden homeless" because they frequently move between the homes of different family members and friends and many do not self-identify as homeless. Because of this, providers, teachers, and other professionals focused on providing support to children and families are often unaware of these families.

Implicit bias. Refers to unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. These are activated involuntarily and without awareness and can be either positive or negative. Research has shown that deficit-based biases negatively impact children of color in early childhood education, with teachers perceiving these children as less innocent, less intelligent, and older than they truly are (Gilliam, 2016). Importantly, research has shown that everyone has implicit biases but that racial/ethnic biases need to be brought to consciousness in order to limit their negative influence on educators' behaviors.

Inclusive education. An education practice that ensures "The full and active participation of children with disabilities or other special needs in community activities, services, and programs designed for typically developing children, including child care. If support, accommodations, or modifications are needed to ensure full, active participation, they are provided appropriately. The participation results in an authentic sense of belonging for the child and family" (CDE 2009, 80).

Internalized oppression. "Believing in and acting out (often unwarily) the constant messages circulating in the culture that you and your group are inferior to whichever group is dominant in relation to yours and that you are deserving of your lower position." (Adams and Bell 2016)

Racial discipline disparities. Children of color, especially boys from African American, Pacific Islander, and Latino racial and ethnic groups are expelled and suspended from educational settings at disproportionate rates. Research has shown that racial bias, and not actual child behaviors, is at the root of this problem.

Reflection and self-reflection. A critical aspect of reflective practice and reflection overall is teachers' raised awareness of their feelings and reactions and the meaning of these as the first step to learning how to self-regulate and manage them. This process can lead teachers to discover that their discomfort may, in fact, be a personal trigger from their own life experiences. Reflective practice can result in teachers gaining greater understanding of the meaning behind their own and children's behaviors. This increased understanding can lead to developing greater empathy and more attuned and responsive relationships with children and families. With more understanding, teachers can make accommodations in the environment that increase children's and adults' feelings of safety, which are foundations for supporting learning and healthy development.

Stakeholders. A person, group or organization that is interested in, who is involved in, concerned about, or is affected by a course of action.

Strengths-based. A strength-based approach assumes that all children and families have resources, personal characteristics, and relationships that can be mobilized to enhance their learning, development, and well-being, no matter how many risk factors or challenges they face (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2012). A strength-based approach is the opposite of a deficit-based approach.

Systemic oppression. Refers to the discrimination of one social group against another backed by institutional power at all levels of a society, including institutions like the educational system, the economy, or legislation and regulation among others.

Title I. Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. (https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html)

Toxic stress response. Toxic stress refers to the prolonged activation of a child's stress response system and a significant release of stress chemicals throughout a child's developing brain and body due to frequent, severe, or prolonged exposure to adversity with no caring adult available to buffer the distress for the child. Physical or sexual abuse, extreme poverty, unreliable caregiving, and exposure to violence are examples of the types of stress that without the support of consistent caring adults, can lead to toxic stress. Toxic stress can result in damage to the developing circuits in the child's brain and impaired functioning for the child across all domains of their development (physical, social–emotional, and cognitive).

Trauma: Trauma is defined as an actual or perceived danger, which undermines a child's sense of physical or emotional safety or poses a threat to the safety of the child's parents or caregivers, overwhelming their coping ability and affecting their functioning and development (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2018).

Trauma-informed practices. At its foundation, trauma-informed practice (TIP) recognizes that a child's history of trauma impacts their development, learning, emotions, and behavior. TIP is not a specific theory, but instead an integration of various strengths-based and relationship-based approaches and theories that all aim to do no further harm—i.e., not to re-traumatize a child—and to guide a child toward health and healing (Nicholson, Perez, and Kurtz 2018).

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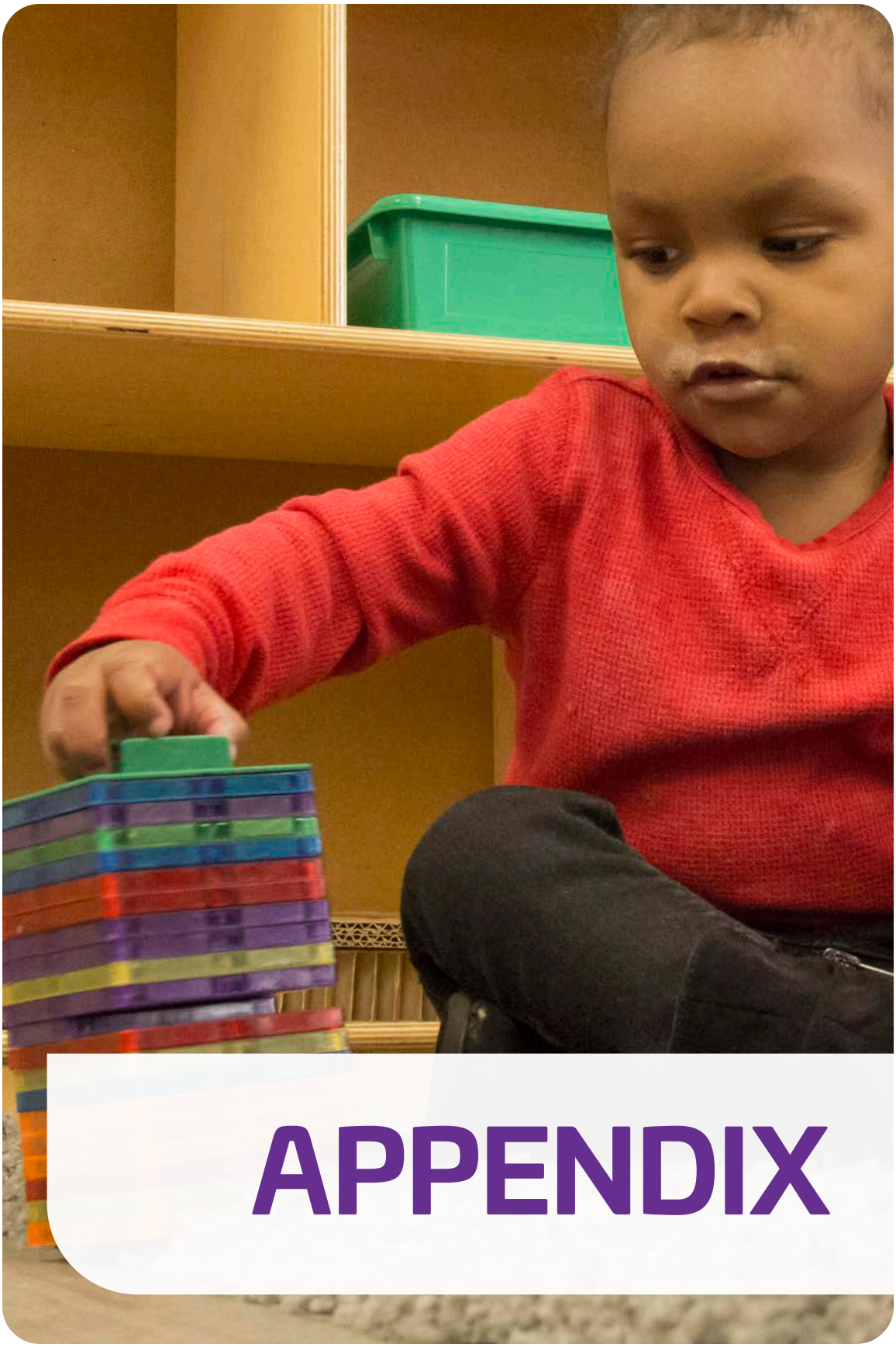
Abbreviations

ACCESS = Accessible Child Care Expedited for the Shelter System
AIR = American Institutes of Research
CANRA = California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act
CCDBG = Child Care and Development Block Grant
CCDF = Child Care Development Fund
CCLD = Community Care Licensing Division
CoC = Continuum of Care
CPS = Child Protective Services
CSEFEL = Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
CSPP = California State Preschool Program
ECLKC = Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center
ECMHC = Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation
ED = United States Department of Education
ELCD = Early Learning and Care Division (formerly EESD = Early Education and Support Division)
EHCY = Education for Homeless Children and Youth
ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act
FERPA = Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
GED = General Education Diploma
Head Start Act = Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007
HEARTH Act = Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act
HHS = United States Department of Health and Human Services
HUD = United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
ICE = Immigration and Customs Enforcement
ICPH = Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness
IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
LEA = local education agency
McKinney–Vento Act = McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act
NAEHCY = National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
NCHE = National Center for Homeless Education
PIT = Point-in-Time
pre-K = prekindergarten
SEA = state education agency
USICH = United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.



APPENDIX

Appendix A. Children's Books on the Topic of Homelessness

These recommendations for children's books support strength-based conversations about young children and families experiencing homelessness. Each story conveys respectful and authentic living situations. These books represent individuals experiencing homelessness without idealizing middle- or upper-class living situations and without using common stereotypes, biases, and deficit perspectives that shape opinions of homelessness and those experiencing it.

Including books on homelessness in the early childhood program is important for all children. Rudine Sims Bishop explains why in her well-known essay titled, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors":

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (Sims Bishop 1990, ix)

When children experiencing homelessness do not see themselves in media (books, movies, online) or when the only images they see are based in deficit or are laughable, they learn to feel that they are not valued in their communities and feel ashamed about themselves and their families. Our classrooms need to be inclusive environments where all children can find a mirror of their lived experiences.

Title	Author	Comments
A Chair for My Mother	Vera B. Williams	A young girl, Rosa, visits her mother at her work. Her mother's boss gives her jobs, too. All the change and half of Rosa's earnings go into a huge jar to buy a big, soft chair for Rosa's hardworking mother to rest her feet in at the end of the day because all of their possessions had been destroyed in a fire. Ultimately, they save enough money and buy their dream chair. This book describes how the family has to stay with relatives after the fire and then slowly move into a new apartment. With the help of family, friends, and community, they slowly begin to furnish their home together.
A Family of Five or Six	Pat Van Doren	In this story, a family loses their home in a hurricane that floods their neighborhood. A mother and her children are rescued in the storm and move several times before finding a mobile home to live in. The family fears that the father was killed in the storm, but at the end the family reunites. The story shares honest details about the experience of losing a home in a natural disaster.
Fly Away Home	Eve Bunting	This book describes the less common situation of living in an airport to avoid living on the street. It captures the child's fears and frustrations toward his family's living arrangements and the financial precarity through his eyes.

Title	Author	Comments
The Lady in the Box	Ann McGovern	This is a story of a woman who lost her job and then her apartment because she could not pay rent. After having her clothes stolen in a shelter, she moved out onto the street. Two sisters start to leave food for her and worry when it starts to freeze and snow outside. Their mother advocates for the woman when a store owner tells her to leave. The girls volunteer at a soup kitchen and see her come through the line. The story emphasizes compassion for those experiencing homelessness and serving individuals who are homeless in the community.
Last Stop on Market Street	Matt De La Peña	A child and his grandmother travel across town via bus to work in a soup kitchen. The story doesn't explicitly discuss people experiencing homelessness, but it does focus on honoring all parts of a community one is part of.
A Place of Our Own	Pat Van Doren	A young girl describes her life in a shelter with her mother. The story provides many authentic details about life in a shelter, the benefits and the challenges. The story defines terms like doubling up for readers and ends with the family moving into a home of their own and the girl growing up to be a doctor who cares for families who are homeless.

Title	Author	Comments
A Shelter in Our Car	Monica Gunning	A child and her mother hit a series of struggles while experiencing homelessness. In the mornings, they use the restroom in a park before the child sets off to school and her mother goes to school and searches for a job. The girl's classmates call her "Junk Car Zettie." The book ends with the mother and child making clear their gratitude for each other and the promise of a new job and a place to live.
Where Can I Build My Volcano?	Pat Van Doren	This story is about a girl who lives in a shelter with her mother. She gets invited to a birthday party for her best friend and she is not sure if she can go. Her mother asks her not to tell anyone about where they live, so she hides her experience of homelessness from her teacher and her friends. The book describes the emotions that children face while living in a shelter with the lack of privacy and the rules that families have to live by but also the meaningful relationships she and her mother develop. The book ends when the girl tells her "secret" and feels better by being open about her situation. The shelter director helps her find clothes and a present so she can attend the birthday party.

Appendix B. Resources

National and State Organizations and Websites

California Department of Developmental Services

https://www.dds.ca.gov/

The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is the agency through which the state of California provides services and supports to children and adults with developmental disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and related conditions. DDS is also California's lead agency for services for children birth to three years of age, as defined under Part C of the IDEA. California's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families is called Early Start. Early Start services are available statewide and are provided in a coordinated, family-centered system.

There are several websites for agencies and services related to Early Start (Part C early intervention):

California Early Start: https://www.dds.ca.gov/EarlyStart/

Family Resource Centers: https://dds.ca.gov/services/early-start/family-resource-center/

Regional Centers: https://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/

California Department of Education

http://www.cde.ca.gov

The federal McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act (https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/index.asp) requires schools to enroll new students who are homeless even if their immunization records are missing or are unavailable at the time of enrollment.

Access the California immunization requirements at the following link: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/cefimmunization.asp

California Department of Health Care Services, Children's Medical Services Branch, California Children's Services

http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Pages/default.aspx

California Children's Services
www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/ccs/pages/default.aspx

Child Health and Disability Prevention Program
http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/chdp/Pages/default.aspx

The Children's Medical Services Branch provides a comprehensive system of health care for children through preventive screening, diagnoses, treatment, rehabilitation, and follow-up services. It is a full-scope management system for California Children's Services and the Genetically Handicapped Persons Program.

California Department of Mental Health

The California Department of Mental Health administers several programs for children and youth. The programs' services are directly provided at the local level by counties and their contract providers. To obtain local mental health services, contact your local county mental health agency.

Head Start Program Performance Standards (2016)

In September 2016, the U.S Department of Health and Human Services issued final regulations to implement the Head Start Act. These regulations, known as the Head Start Program Performance Standards, apply to Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

These new standards include important regulations regarding attending to families experiencing homelessness.

Regulations:
https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/06/2016-19748/head-start-performance-standards

Summary:
https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Head-StartRegsJAN25.pdf

HEAR US

https://www.hearus.us/

HEAR US gives voice and visibility to children and youth experiencing homelessness. This organization produces films and books to call attention to the invisible crisis of millions of families with children and young people who struggle without a place to call home.

The short videos at the following link present firsthand experiences from families that can be used as an introduction to team meetings to discuss the ways your center can support families that are experiencing homelessness: https://www.hearus.us/understand-homelessnses/videos.html

Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness

http://www.icphusa.org/

The ICPH is a policy research organization focused on families experiencing homelessness throughout the United States.

To assist educators and policymakers in gauging their own efforts in serving students experiencing homelessness, ICPH presents *Out of the Shadows: A State-by-State Ranking of Accountability for Homeless Students:* *http://www.icphusa.org/national/shadows-state-state-ranking-accountability-homeless-students/*

UNCENSORED: American Family Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness portrays the realities of family homelessness and the effect of policy and practice on these vulnerable families through pointed and informative articles and personal stories from real families and service providers: *http://www.icphusa.org/uncensored/*

McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

The McKinney–Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program entitles children and youth experiencing homelessness to a free, appropriate public education, including a preschool education: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-101/pdf/STATUTE-101-Pg482.pdf

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

http://naehcy.org/early-childhood/

The NAEHCY is a national membership association dedicated to ensuring educational equity and excellence for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The following link provides a list of key public early childhood programs and provides space for users to record information about local programs, including the name and contact information for accessing the program and services: https://naehcy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ECE-Landscape-9-26-2016.pdf

This series of briefs discusses selected issues pertaining to the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act and offers strategies for implementation: https://nche.ed.gov/resources/

National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE

http://nche.ed.gov

The NCHE operates the US Department of Education's technical assistance center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. NCHE works with schools, service providers, parents, and other interested stakeholders to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness can enroll and succeed in school.

Contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org for assistance with:

- understanding the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness;
- determining how the McKinney–Vento Act may apply to particular situations; or
- locating contact information for State Coordinators for Homeless Education and local homeless liaisons.

National Center on Family Homelessness

https://www.air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness

The following link provides state profiles using more than 30 measures related to children experiencing homelessness for each state, including:

- number of children experiencing homelessness over time;
- measures of well-being of children;
- risk for children experiencing homelessness; and
- summary of the state policy environment.

https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Americas-Youngest-Outcasts-Child-Homelessness-Nov2014.pdf

Preventing Suspension and Expulsion of Young Children in Child Care & Early Education Settings

https://preventingchildcareexpulsionca.org/

This website, created by the California Collaborative on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CA CSEFEL) state leadership team, provides resources that may be helpful to prevent suspension and expulsion. Included are links to websites and tools for program self-assessment, informative webinars and articles, and training and technical assistance projects from California and national sources.

SchoolHouse Connection

https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/learn/early-childhood/

SchoolHouse Connection is a national organization working to overcome homelessness through education. It provides strategic advocacy and technical assistance in partnership with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

The following link provides access to instructional webinars that will help in supporting children and families experiencing homelessness:
https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/learn/webinars/archived-webinars/

US Department of Health and Human Services
US Department of Housing and Urban Development
US Department of Education

On October 31, 2016, HHS, HUD, and ED issued a joint Policy Statement on Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness.

In the policy statement, HHS, HUD, and ED provide research and recommendations on ways in which early childhood and housing providers at the local and, in some cases, state levels can intentionally collaborate to provide safe, stable, and nurturing environments for pregnant women and families with young children who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness:
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/echomelessnesspolicystatement.pdf

Research, Reports, and Fact Sheets

American Institutes for Research

https://www.air.org/

AIR is one of the world's largest behavioral and social science research and evaluation organizations.

America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness looks at children experiencing homelessness nationally and in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, ranks the states from 1 (best) to 50 (worst), and examines causes of children experiencing homelessness and solutions: https://www.air.org/resource/americas-youngest-outcasts-report-card-child-homelessness

CBS News

Friends Defend Joshua Tree Couple Accused of Child Cruelty, Abuse

Friends outside a courtroom Friday said the couple were good parents. They described them as poor, not neglectful. CBS Los Angeles reports, "I don't think they are guilty of anything other than being poor."

Full story: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/friends-defend-joshua-tree-couple-accused-of-child-cruelty-abuse/

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

The Office of Head Start provides grant funding and oversight to the programs that provide Head Start services in communities across the country.

This interactive learning series is intended for professionals in Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs, including early childhood and school-age child care providers, Child Care Development Fund lead agency or designated entity staff, and other key stakeholders. Learn how to identify families experiencing homelessness, conduct community outreach, and much more: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-support-well-being/article/supporting-children-families-experiencing-homelessness

The Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is a guide to learning how family engagement promotes positive, enduring change for children, families, and communities.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement

National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE

https://nche.ed.gov/

The Coordinated School Health and Safety Office and the Coordinated Student Support Division (California Department of Education) provide the most recent US Department of Education's fact sheet and summaries:
http://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/StateProfile.aspx?StateID=6#

National Center for Homeless Education's Early Care and Education for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

https://www.serve.org/nche

Early Care and Education for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness presents a brief series on the best practices in homeless education:
https://nche.ed.gov/resources/

SchoolHouse Connection

https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/learn/early-childhood/

SchoolHouse Connection is a national organization working to overcome homelessness through education.

The following document explains the concept of "feeder schools" as they apply to preschool programs under the Every Student Succeeds Act amendments to the McKinney–Vento Act:
https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PreschoolFlowchart.pdf

The flow chart in this document provides a guide to understanding the McKinney–Vento Act:
https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/flow-chart-to-determine-preschools/

The following webinar provides a brief overview of policies as well as practical suggestions for implementing them at the local and state level. School district

and state education agency leaders describe the steps that they have taken to put policies into practice and offer suggestions for adapting and replicating these practices to support our youngest children experiencing homelessness: https://vimeo.com/223997134

SchoolHouse Connection – Childproofing Checklist for Housing and Homeless Service Providers. Many housing and homeless service systems and programs are ill-equipped to provide the resources and support that infants, young children, and school-aged children and their families need. This tool describes the 10 S's for Safety. It is designed to help housing and homeless service providers make their spaces safe for children to help promote their health and well-being:
https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/childproofing-checklist-for-housing-and-homeless-service-providers/

US Department of Health and Human Services

https://www.hhs.gov/

The following infographic shows that US individuals are most likely to enter shelters or transitional housing when aged birth to one year, followed by ages one to five. Homelessness during pregnancy and in the early years is shown to be harmful to children's development:
https://aspe.hhs.gov/execsum/research-early-childhood-homelessness

US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning

The HUD Office of Community Planning and Development seeks to develop viable communities by promoting integrated approaches that provide decent housing and a suitable living environment and expand economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income persons.

The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress examines families with children who are experiencing homelessness:
https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf

US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research

https://www.huduser.gov

The HUD undertook the Family Options Study to gather evidence about which types of housing and service interventions work best for families experiencing homelessness.

The study examines the short-term impacts of housing and service interventions for families experiencing homelessness:

https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptions-Study_final.pdf

Best Practice Documents

Continuum of Care Program, US Department of Housing and Urban Development

https://www.hudexchange.info/

The CoC program is designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers and state and local governments to quickly rehouse individuals and families experiencing homelessness while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; optimize self-sufficiency; and promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by individuals and families experiencing homelessness: https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/

Deeper Dives (SchoolHouse Connection)

https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org

This document series, Deeper Dives for Schools, is created in partnership with David Douglas School District in Oregon. It is designed to provide school and district staff with practical strategies to serve young children experiencing homelessness.

The following link connects to a one-page fact sheet of tips on strategies and best practices for teachers and educators: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/deeper-dives-for-schools-practical-strategies-to-serve-young-children-experiencing-homelessness/

Pathways to Partnership (SchoolHouse Connection)

https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org

The following guide is designed to help local education agency homeless liaisons and homeless service providers develop a basic understanding of, and build partnerships with, five early childhood programs that have specific requirements to serve children and families experiencing homelessness: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PathwaystoPartnership_EarlyChildhood.pdf

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success, SRI Institute

https://preventexpulsion.org/

This guide is primarily written for early education program leaders in center-based settings who implement policies and procedures and promote practices. However, all early childhood professionals interested to learn more about strategies for eliminating suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings can benefit from using the guide.

Videos

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/

Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child provides several videos that illustrate current knowledge of the fundamental themes of this book, for instance: brain development and the importance of social–emotional development; trauma and adverse childhood experiences; or how early experiences shape learning and development.

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/video-building-core-capabilities-life/

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