

*“...we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:4*

CCE Grade 1: Bath, Face and Hand Towels for the Homeless

Project Overview: Children learn about the needs and rights of homeless persons in our community and how providing towels to dry and comfort them is like wrapping them in God’s love.

Understandings:

- Spiritual:** God asks us to recognize that we are all worthy no matter what our situation or circumstances. As God comforts us, we must comfort others.
- Social:** Young people can make a difference in the lives of those near them. That we all deserve to have basic human needs met.
- Intellectual:** Clear understanding of how people can become homeless, what their many needs are and how we can help them.

**PROGRAM START DATE:
SEPTEMBER 24
PROGRAM FINISH DATE:
OCTOBER 9**

*We will collect new or gently used towels from the 1st graders for the service project. Please deposit them in the collection bin of the AMC on or before October 9th.
Thanks!*

PROJECT BENEFITS:

STAR OF HOPE MISSION
1811 Ruiz Street, Houston, TX 77002

SERVICE PROJECT QUESTIONS:

Contact Elementary CCE @ 281-265-5774 or
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14 Ways to Effectively Explain Homelessness and Poverty to Your Child

“Mom, why is that person sleeping on the sidewalk?”

“Dad, why does Jonah wear the same clothes at school every day?”

Many parents struggle with how to respond to these common questions without an easy answer. If you’re one of these parents, you’re not alone. Talking to children about important social issues like homelessness and poverty can leave even the most experienced parents stumped. At Wellspring, we’ve received many requests from teachers, parents and guardians in our community, seeking guidance on how to navigate these complex issues with children of all ages.

We’re pleased to share the following guide, compiled by Nancy Owen, a Wellspring Counseling therapist, to help you turn these big questions into teachable moments.

Talking with children ages 2-6

At this age, children are quite literal, so your discussions with them need to be simple and to the point. To effectively explain such a complex subject:

- 1. Wait for your child to bring it up.** If you encounter a homeless person, your child may have questions, and this is a good opportunity to teach them.
- 2. Express empathy and sadness for the person.** By emphasizing how you feel sad that some people don’t have a place to live, you provide an opportunity for children to understand the importance of recognizing others’ hardships while modeling empathy.
- 3. Provide a simple explanation to their question.** We’ve all been asked questions by small children about our homeless neighbors (Why? How come?) It’s best to respond with an answer that a small child can understand, i.e. *“Some people don’t have enough money to pay for a house.”*
- 4. Avoid discussing additional components such as mental illness or disability.** Unless your child has specifically asked, adding in this layer will only confuse a young child.
- 5. Encourage your child to discuss how to help.** At this age, donating toys or picking-out items to give to a nonprofit may make more of an impact than donating money, which may be too abstract for some young children. That said, depending on your level of involvement, it may be appropriate to

provide opportunities for your children to give through family activities like hosting a donation drive, or collecting donations in lieu of birthday gifts or holiday gifts.

6. **Assure your child that there are options for those struggling with homelessness.** Young children may have feelings of sadness or worry after hearing that some children don't have a place to live. Assure them that there are organizations who help homeless people find places to live, and reassure them of their own safety and security.

Talking with children ages 7-12

School-aged children are becoming more interested in the world around them and have the capacity for a deeper understanding about homelessness and poverty. They are likely to have more questions and want to really get involved.

1. **Try to gauge what your child understands** by asking them to explain what 'homeless' and 'poor' mean to them. This provides an opportunity for an interactive discussion, rather than a lecture, and will keep them engaged.
2. **Prepare messages you can convey to your child on the spot**, such as appropriate responses to interacting with people who are homeless, and ways your family can be involved with helping those in need.
3. **Be aware that your physical cues are as important as your verbal ones.** A child will pick up on any negative feelings you convey each time you encounter a homeless or mentally-ill person on the street, and will subconsciously learn to emit those feelings without understanding why.
4. **Encourage empathy by talking about your own feelings** and having a discussion about what a homeless person might be feeling. With older children, you can begin talking about some bigger issues that can relate to homelessness and poverty such as mental illness and addictions.
5. **Don't avoid questions.** Use their curiosity as an opportunity to create a conversation around homelessness and poverty. Watching the news or reading the newspaper together may spark conversations and questions, as may walking around in urban areas where you are likely to see homeless people. It is important to address any questions your child may have to emphasize that it is a significant topic that should be discussed.
6. **Talk with your child about your own personal responses.** For example, if you don't give directly to people asking for money on the street but instead choose to donate to a nonprofit, explain to your child about your reasons for doing so in a positive manner (e.g. *"There are several nonprofit organizations that provide services to help homeless people get what they need, so that's why we support places like the YWCA, Wellspring, Seattle Union Gospel Mission, YouthCare, etc."*)
7. **Address your child's concerns by becoming more proactive.** One of the best qualities children have is their ability to become immediately inspired to help others less fortunate. Helping your child identify and connect to a cause they care about is a great next step. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Visitor Center typically hosts several events for children and youth throughout the year to learn more about how they can make a difference in their community, and is a great resource for exactly this purpose.
8. **Encourage your child to take action on their concerns.** Once your child has identified a cause they care about, there are numerous ways for them to take action, from volunteering, to donating new or no longer-used toys, to saving a portion of their allowance to donate to their organization of choice. For example, Wellspring's child philanthropy program, Kids Helping Kids, provides an opportunity for children to give back in a meaningful way, and see the tangible impact of their donation when they drop off their coin jar at Wellspring (more info at www.kidshelpingkidsseattle.org). Volunteering as a family is another excellent way to continue the conversation and develop a lifelong habit of giving back.

<https://wellspringfs.org/blog/14-ways-effectively-explain-homelessness-and-poverty-your-child>