



*helping families stay housed
a toolkit*



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Acknowledgements

The ending of family homelessness is in sight more than ever through the vision and support of the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Their direction on supporting our community has made it possible for families to receive help to prevent them from becoming homeless.

The work toward the goal of preventing family homelessness has been a collaborative effort and we are grateful to all who have contributed to the development of this toolkit created for all communities to use, so that together we are helping families stay housed.

This toolkit was a result of a collaboration between The Children's Cottage Society, Aspen Family and Community Network Society, Calgary Homeless Foundation and the Government of Alberta.

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“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”

--Andrew Carnegie

We would also like to acknowledge the numerous staff at the Children's Cottage Society and Aspen Family and Community Network Society who supported us in the development of this toolkit.



Helping families stay housed: a toolkit

the purpose of this toolkit

Tonight, some families in our community will be sleeping in a shelter and not their own homes. Something has occurred that caused them to lose housing. It could have been a job loss, unforeseen expenses, or a personal crisis and now they are homeless.

Imagine if we could prevent homelessness from happening by providing support to families before a shelter becomes their only option.

Preventing homelessness is possible when we become aware of what the risk factors are and learn how to provide support early on.

This toolkit gives you the knowledge you need to help a family stay housed. You will learn the early warning signs that can lead to homelessness and the steps you can take to support a family so that they do not become homeless.



Three categories of Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness prevention is a big undertaking that requires work on many levels. Stephen Gaetz, a researcher and pioneer in understanding homelessness prevention, has described three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

PRIMARY PREVENTION means 'working upstream' to address structural and systems factors. This type of prevention is designed to reduce risk and build protective factors to help address problems that may eventually contribute to homelessness.

Primary prevention could include:

- information campaigns
- educational programs (like this toolkit)
- poverty reduction strategies

SECONDARY PREVENTION refers to a range of targeted strategies and interventions directed at individuals and families either at imminent risk of homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness – in other words to identify and address a problem or situation at an early stage.

Secondary prevention could include:

- systems level prevention
- **early intervention strategies**
- rapid rehousing strategies



TERTIARY PREVENTION is intended to reduce the recurrence of homelessness. It involves supporting individuals and families who experience homelessness to exit shelters quickly and to assist people experiencing chronic homelessness and those with complex needs to access housing and necessary supports.



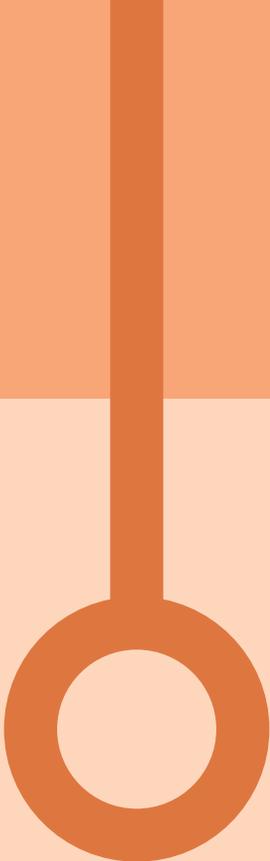


System failures

Examples:

- inadequate support for families experiencing family violence
- correctional facilities, hospitals or treatment centres failing to provide adequate discharge planning

Prevention at this level might mean advocating through government for legislative change.

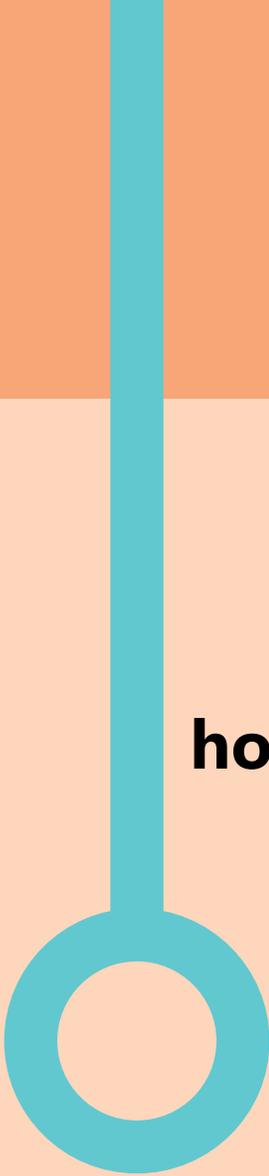


Structural factors

Examples:

- low wages
- unemployment
- low rates of government assistance
- lack of affordable housing

Prevention at this level might mean advocating for social change or legislative change.



Factors leading to homelessness

For more information, see *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention* by Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej.

Individual factors

Examples:

- sudden illness
- job loss
- family breakdown

Prevention at this level is where community can provide support directly to families to help avoid homelessness.



Your work falls here

Your role

in Homelessness Prevention

early intervention strategies

This toolkit falls into the category of **secondary prevention** under “early intervention strategies.” In other words, the toolkit explains what you as a community member can do to support families to stay in their own homes.

This toolkit will help you:

- identify risk factors that could lead to homelessness.
- understand what your role can be in supporting a family at risk of homelessness.
- provide capacity for you to help families develop a plan.
- be aware of the information and resources available so that you can connect families to the most appropriate service.

Preventing Family Homelessness

In this approach, **community, families, and agencies work together** to prevent homelessness.

The work of homelessness prevention focuses efforts “upstream” so that housing is stabilized before a crisis occurs.

The work of helping families to stay housed **depends on people like you**. We must work together to identify families at risk of losing their housing and provide the right support to help them stay in their homes.

If you connect with families through your work or in the community, you are in an ideal position to notice the early warning signs of homelessness. By following the steps in this toolkit, you can help families stay housed.

Why preventing family homelessness is important

Families are the fastest growing group within the homeless population.



4 steps

to helping families stay housed

1 Notice

2 Connect

3 Ask

4 Plan



what you will learn in this toolkit

Notice *What might you see?*

In this step, you will

- learn the signs that a family might be at risk of homelessness
- find out what you could see or hear

Connect *How do you start the conversation?*

In this step, you will

- learn how to engage with the family
- learn how to prepare for the conversation

Ask *What do you need to find out?*

In this step, you will

- learn some conversation starters
- learn guidelines for helpful conversation

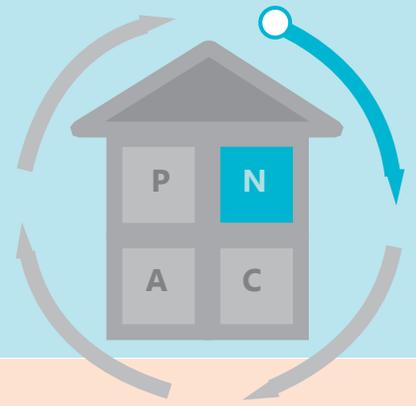
Plan *What will you and the family do about it?*

In this step, you will

- learn about referrals
- find out how to complete a plan with the family



1 Notice



what might you notice?

A family may mention a concern - or you may observe an issue in areas like these:

- rent
- housing
- family changes
- food/groceries
- health
- childcare
- education
- hygiene
- mental health
- transportation
- extra-curricular activities

As you meet families and family members, you may become aware of certain family circumstances that are difficult. For example, family changes or health or transportation concerns.

When considered in isolation, these circumstances may seem unfortunate. But when you consider them as a whole, these issues could indicate a family is at risk of becoming homeless.

These issues could mean that a family is living in poverty and could benefit from support and resources. But keep in mind, the smallest crisis could upset the balance and place them at risk of becoming homeless.

Food or groceries

You might notice...

Parents or children skipping meals or eating low cost items on a regular basis.

A consistent lack of fresh items in a family's diet or a reliance on canned or dry goods.

Why this matters...

Families will often cut down on their grocery budget to have more money to put towards rent.

Canned and dry goods can indicate that families are accessing the food bank which can be an indicator they are struggling to pay their bills.

Rent

You might notice...

A family member may mention an issue with affording rent.

Why this matters...

Families that are unable to pay rent could face eviction and homelessness.

what might you notice?

Health

You might notice...

Family members struggling with frequent colds, allergies or other common health concerns. Family members may also mention being unable to purchase over-the-counter medications.

Why this matters...

Frequent colds could be a sign of poor nutrition, overcrowding, or a simple lack of funds to purchase basic over-the-counter medications.

1 Notice

what are the signs that a family is at risk?

Transportation

You might notice...

Family members missing school or appointments.

Why this matters...

This may mean the family has no reliable means of transportation.

Family Changes

You might notice...

That one parent is no longer a part of the family or a child is "visiting grandma."

Why this matters...

A family change could indicate a change in income for the family that could destabilize housing. A parent who leaves can take their income with them. A child may live elsewhere because the family cannot afford to have them at home.

Hygiene

You might notice...

A family member who appears unkempt or like they may not be paying attention to grooming.

Why this matters...

This could mean that families are unable to afford hygiene items. It could also indicate that they have no hot water or are struggling with mental health concerns related to poverty and risk of becoming homeless.

Mental Health

You might notice...

Signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. Please see Fact Sheet: The signs of Mental Illness for help recognizing signs.

Why this matters...

Stress, anxiety and depression can often co-exist with housing concerns.

For more information see [Canadian Mental Health Association at cmha.calgary.ab.ca](http://cmha.calgary.ab.ca)



1 Notice

what might you notice?

Childcare

You might notice...

The family is not able to access childcare.

Why this matters...

If income is stressed, parents might not be able to afford childcare and so miss work, appointments, or social activities.

Extra-Curricular Activities

You might notice...

Children who don't play sports or take music lessons.

Why this matters...

When families are struggling to pay for basics like rent and food, "extras" aren't options.

Housing Concerns

You might notice...

Family members describing homes that are cold, have mold or poor lighting. Family members may talk about more people living in the home than it can really accommodate.

Why this matters...

This means a family may be precariously housed or in illegal housing. These types of situations can fall apart easily.

Education

You might notice...

That children may show up at school without the required items - or families may access resources to assist in obtaining these items. You might see children who can't participate in field trips or other special events if there is an additional cost.

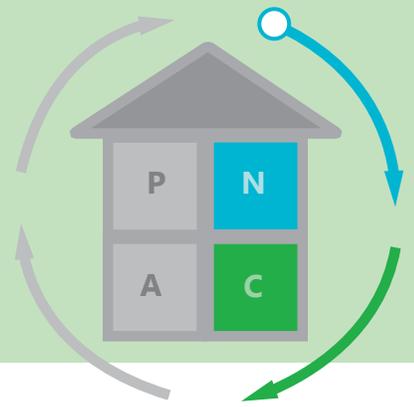
You may also notice that a child is missing a lot of school.

Why this matters...

Money for "extras" often just isn't in the budget for families living paycheque to paycheque. Children may miss school due to costs for transportation.



2 Connect



how do you start the conversation?

Before you can find out more about what might be going on for a family and help them find the support they need, you must find a way to open the door to a conversation.

Here are some steps to follow:

1. Reflect on what you have learned during **Step 1: Notice.**
2. Craft a conversation starter. See p. 17 for ideas.
3. Share with the family what you have noticed.

It may feel awkward to talk with family members about the possibility of losing their home, but it is important to find a way as doing so could help prevent a family from becoming homeless. By building on your existing relationship with the family you will be able to find a way to begin this conversation.

A strategy that you may want to consider is “normalizing.” For example, you could mention a statistic around number of households that are living paycheck to paycheck in Calgary, or say that you’re checking in because it’s so common for families to run into housing difficulties during tough economic times. See Fact Sheet: Family Homelessness by the Numbers.

how to prepare for a successful conversation

Before you jump into the conversation it will be helpful to prepare yourself to make the conversation feel helpful and productive.

Consider the following suggestions:

- Before you begin, mentally practice the conversation.
- Imagine various responses and picture yourself being supportive.
- Anticipate the ending you are hoping to achieve.
- Consider your relationship with the family. Are you the best person to approach them or might a colleague be a better fit?
- Find a safe, private, comfortable space to hold the discussion.
- Offer tea, coffee, water, or tissue to support the family.
- Find something to occupy children so grownups can speak freely.



3 Ask



what do you need to find out?

Now that you have started the conversation, you can talk with the family to find out what is placing them at risk of homelessness.

Your goal is to help them identify the strengths and resources they already possess that can help prevent homelessness from happening, what risks they are experiencing, and what additional resources they require.

Use **“My Plan”** on page 28 to complete a basic assessment that will help you understand how you can support the family.

During the conversation, it is important to maintain a respectful, non-judgemental approach.

RESOURCES

See **“My Plan”** on page 26 for ideas about what questions to ask to find out if a family is at risk of homelessness

A few tips

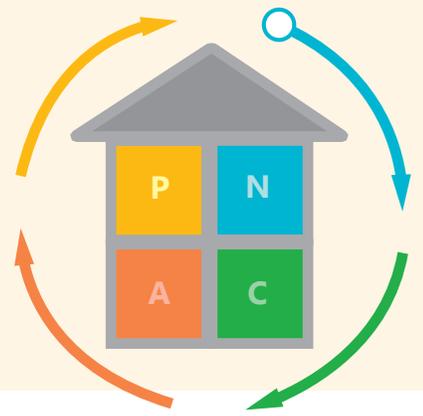
1. Demonstrate that you have listened and understood the issues and concerns offered to you during the conversation.
2. Explain back to the family what you think you heard them express.
3. Ask for clarification if you are unsure.

guidelines for helpful conversation

<h1>A</h1> Ask	<h1>A</h1> Acknowledge	<h1>A</h1> Act
<p>HOW TO ASK</p> <p>Cultivate an attitude of compassion and inquisitiveness. Assume you don't know anything (you really don't yet), and try to learn as much as possible.</p> <p>Let the person talk until finished.</p> <p>Be comfortable with silent moments while they collect their thoughts.</p>	<p>HOW TO ACKNOWLEDGE</p> <p>Demonstrate that you've listened to and understood the family's issues and concerns.</p> <p>Describe back to the family what you think you heard them express.</p> <p>Ask for clarification if you are unsure.</p>	<p>If it appears that the family is at risk of becoming homeless and is agreeable to proceed, you are ready to move to the next step: PLAN.</p>
<p>CONVERSATION STARTERS</p> <p>Hi. I've noticed Would you be open to chatting with me?</p> <p>I heard you mention that things have been tough since things changed at home. How are things going for you right now?</p> <p>You have seemed really stressed lately. Is something bothering you?</p>	<p>TRY THIS . . .</p> <p>Just to make sure I am clear, I think I heard you say ... Do I have that right?</p> <p>Thank you for sharing all of that with me. It must be very difficult to open up such a personal issue. I'm wondering if you would let me try to help you.</p>	



4 Plan



what do you do about it?

Now that you have discovered what the concerns of the family are, you are able to support them in finding possible sources of support.

In many instances, the planning process involves helping families to problem solve and identify what is needed to get through a temporary set of difficulties.

It is important to start with their strengths and resources and to understand what they themselves can access to stabilize their situation.

RESOURCES

See **"My Plan"** on page 26 to document information about the family's situation, courses of action and and accountabilities.

is family support available?

You may ask if this problem can be solved in time with the support of family and friends. If this is an option, ask if there is any support that the family needs to put this into place. If personal relationships are not an option you will need to explore more formal resources.

referral process

4 Plan

Work with the family to identify the resource that might be best able to meet their needs. See “**Resources for You**” for resource options.

It is best to support the family through the process of getting help. Your advocacy on their behalf can help the receiving agency better understand the importance of the need and help to minimize the family’s stress. The family should actively participate in this process to ensure that they are comfortable with everything being done on their behalf.

Remember, when a family is in crisis, it can be hard to remain organized and missing appointments can be commonplace. Supporting families through this process can ensure they follow up as needed to receive the resources they require.

Steps for success

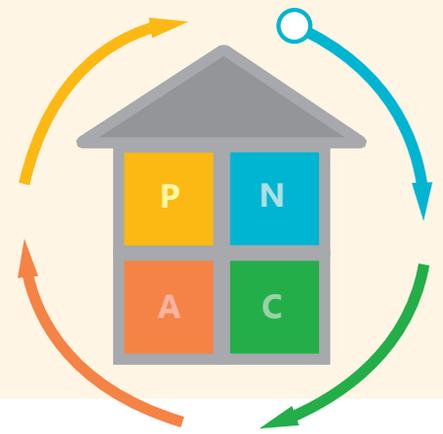
1. Work with the family to identify the most appropriate resources.
2. Before making a referral, make sure the family meets the criteria of the resource. Call ahead of time to ensure that the resource matches the family’s needs.
3. Ensure that you are providing support and encouragement to the family. This is likely a stressful process for them. Knowing they have your assistance will make it feel more comfortable for them.
4. Remind the family of scheduled appointments the day before.
5. Record all the details and decisions in “**My Plan.**”
6. Ensure that the plan has names, dates and accountabilities so that it is clear who is doing what.
7. Make sure that both you and the family have a copy of the plan.

Important!

Remember the need for informed consent. Ensure the family is fully aware of their right to privacy and has given you the permission to access resources and make referrals on their behalf. Refer to your own organization’s or professional body’s protocols.



4 Plan



Resources

Each community typically has a range of supports available which can include financial support, referrals to basic resources, and case-management-type support.

Often the availability of local resources changes frequently so knowing how to connect and staying informed will be an important aspect of being able to help families.

It is important that you know how to:

1. Identify the most appropriate resource.
2. Understand the criteria for accessing that support.
3. Be aware of the guidelines around making referrals.

Attached to “My Plan” we have included an Effective Referral Checklist. This checklist will ensure you are making the best referral for the family.

RESOURCES

See “**Resources for You**” for ideas about which programs, resources, and referrals are available for common needs and concerns.

For an up-to-date list of “Resources for You” see

**www.homebridgeyc.com
www.aspenfamily.org**

or call 211 to speak to an Information and Referral Specialist.

Follow up

Follow up is essential to the success of the referral. This will help the family to feel supported in their next steps.

It is possible that the family may need more help but may feel hesitant to ask.

If you have an **attitude of service and compassion**, they will likely become more comfortable with ongoing assistance.

Ask the family if you can follow up with them and determine when and how the follow up will happen and what you will do if you are unable to reach them.

You may also want to discuss how to best follow up with the resources and agencies that the family has been connected to.

Follow up with the family - check in and see how things are going.

Is the family's situation stable? Or, is the family still struggling?

If needed, discuss additional referrals with the family.

Wrap up the development of the plan by reviewing what you have been told and asking if there is anything remaining to address. You could try something like: "Thank you for sharing your story and letting me help you. Is there anything you'd like to add?"

In closing . . .

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. We appreciate that you are interested in preventing family homelessness.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation, through the Family Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Initiative, has provided funding for **two agencies to provide information, consultation, client services, diversion funding, and further training for community members** on how to prevent family homelessness. We invite you to contact us.

The Children's Cottage Society

www.childrenscottage.ab.ca

HomeBridge

www.homebridgeyc.com

403-242-8575 ext 230



Aspen Family and Community Network Society

www.aspenfamily.org

Home Stay

403-219-3477, option 2





Terminology
References
My Plan Worksheet



Terminology

There are a significant number of terms that are employed in the homeless sector. It may be useful to understand these terms to inform your work with families. The following glossary of terms has referred to Calgary's Family System Planning Framework (March 2017) prepared by the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

At-risk of homelessness – an individual or family that is experiencing difficulty maintaining their housing and has no alternatives for obtaining subsequent housing. Eviction, loss of income, unaffordable increase in the cost of housing, discharge from an institution without subsequent housing, fleeing domestic violence are some of the circumstances that often contribute to level of risk.

City of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness – was first published in January 2008 with a commitment and plan to end homelessness by 2018. In January 2011, the Calgary Homeless Foundation in partnership with the Calgary community prepared an update to the plan, including identifying families as one of the priority populations on which to focus prevention and rehousing efforts as well as an increased emphasis on homelessness prevention.

Chronic homelessness – continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Episodic homelessness – homeless for less than a year and fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. Typically episodically homeless have reoccurring episodes of homelessness as a result of complex issues such as family violence or addictions.

Family unit – are not necessarily defined by lineage or traditional relationships and may include biological families as well as informal social support relationships. The family unit may be defined as one's primary social group.

Homeless – individuals and families that do not have safe, stable, affordable, appropriate, permanent housing to which they can return whenever they choose, or the immediate possibility, means and ability to acquire housing.

Transitional homeless – homeless for the first time and usually for less than three months, or less than two episodes in the past three years.

Warm referral – contacting another service provider on the family's behalf and may involve a three-way conversation in the presence of the family (whether face to face or by telephone) in which the referring organization introduces the family, explains what has already been done to assist the family and why they are being referred.

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My Plan

My Plan can be filled out by you and/or the family - both you and the family must be offered a copy.

Exploratory questions

Begin by sharing what you have noticed and then ask some of the following:

What is going on for you?

How is this affecting you and your family?

Are you worried about your housing?

Do you have what you need?

Are you worried about bills?

Do you have any family or friends we can call for assistance or support?

What services have you tried already or in the past? How did that work for you? Can you try that again?

Are you working with any other professional in Calgary? Can we try to reconnect with them? Do you have a name of a worker?

Notes:

Exploratory questions

Date:	
Name of family:	
What is going on for you?	
How is this affecting you and your family?	
Are you worried about your housing?	
Are you worried about bills?	
Do you have any family or friends we can call for assistance or support?	
What services have you tried already or in the past? How did that work for you? Can you try that again?	
Are you working with any other professional in Calgary? Can we try to reconnect with them? Do you have a name of a worker?	

My Plan

My Plan can be filled out by you and/or the family - both you and the family must be offered a copy.

Date:	
Name of family:	
Contact info for family:	
Contact info for interviewer:	
My family's biggest strengths right now are:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.
My family's most immediate or urgent need right now is:	
We will address that need by:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.

<p>Family is responsible for:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>Interviewer is responsible for:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>Next steps:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>Date for follow up:</p>	

My Plan

Referrals

Date:	
Name of family:	

Referral 1

Reason for referral:	
Agency family is being referred to:	
Consent obtained?	Yes No
Contact information	Date: Name:
Actions/Comments	

Referral 2

Reason for referral:	
Agency family is being referred to:	
Consent obtained?	Yes No
Contact information	Date: Name:
Actions/Comments	

Referral 3

Reason for referral:	
Agency family is being referred to:	
Consent obtained?	Yes No
Contact information	Date: Name:
Actions/Comments	

Referral 4

Reason for referral:	
Agency family is being referred to:	
Consent obtained?	Yes No
Contact information	Date: Name:
Actions/Comments	

My Plan

Referral Checklist

	I understand the family's situation and perceived needs.
	The family and I have talked about how to prioritize these needs and what options exist to help address them.
	The family is willing and ready to be referred.
	We have discussed what issues might make it difficult for the family to follow through with the referral.
	I am familiar with the agency to which I am referring the family, including its eligibility requirements and services.
	I have made a plan to follow up with the family to see how things went and to determine next steps.



Notes:



Helping Families Stay Housed: A Toolkit

