



TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

As adults we often have a hard time processing Australia's confounding homelessness problem. So how in the world do we explain it to our kids?

When talking about the issue of homelessness we recommend keeping explanations straightforward and compassionate. Admit if you don't know the answer, then try to find it. The Vinnies website is a great resource.

ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS:



When someone doesn't have a home, they have no place to sleep, eat or to permanently keep their belongings



Not everyone has friends or family who can help them right now, so they have to find different places to sleep each night.



Not everyone has enough money to own or rent a home, because these things are very expensive. They might not be able to work right now, or maybe their job doesn't pay them enough money for them to afford a house.

MODEL COMPASSION NOT FEAR

Simple interactions with people on the street can set a good example for children. Show kindness by always smiling and saying hello.

Giving money is a personal decision, but you might want to carry supermarket gift cards or warm socks to hand out instead. Have kids donate presents to shelters at Christmas, collect money in lieu of birthday gifts, and if they're old enough, volunteer.



PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

Help your kids to interact with people experiencing homelessness in a safe and positive way – whether it's buying the *Big Issue* and stopping to chat with the vendor, or fundraising for Vinnies at school. It all helps teach children about the people behind the 'scary' images that they are seeing both on the streets and in the media.

PROMOTE EMPATHY

Help children understand that everyone has a story to how they've ended up without a home.

"I tell children the reality; maybe they don't have a mum and dad that looked after them. Maybe mum and dad weren't well. Maybe they lost a job," explains Danusia Kaska, Vinnies Soup Van Operations Manager.

Emphasise the importance of feeling for people doing it tough and showing respect, while also teaching your child the value of helping someone in need.

FOLLOW IT UP WITH PROBLEM SOLVING

Empathy can be followed up by problem solving. Brainstorm with them on how to support someone else by sharing or giving what we have.

OFFER REASSURANCE

Reassure your children their family and home are secure — if that's the truth. Explain there are organisations, like Vinnies, who help people find places to live.

TALKING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

If you pass a person who has an obvious mental illness, offer your child a chance to ask you questions. Liken it to another physical injury or illness by saying the person's brain isn't working the way it's supposed to.

