

A close-up photograph of a young man with dark hair, smiling warmly and hugging a woman from behind. The woman has long dark hair and is wearing a maroon knitted sweater. The man's face is in profile, looking down towards the woman. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

How to Help Homeless People



If you are worried about a rough sleeper who may be in immediate danger, call 999 or 101 to speak to the police. Alternatively, ensure that the person is helped quickly by alerting StreetLink – [thestreetlink.org.uk](https://www.thestreetlink.org.uk)



Firstly, thank you for taking the time to learn about this important subject. This guide is your toolkit for positive action. It provides practical advice, resources, and inspiration to help you make a meaningful impact.



The job ahead of us is huge. At present, there are over 300,000 homeless people in England. The numbers are growing, and the scale of the issue seems unsurmountable. However, there are countless ways to contribute and make a difference.

By understanding the challenges faced by homeless people, learning about effective strategies, and taking concrete steps, you can play a vital role in addressing this pressing social issue.

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What causes homelessness?

Every person is an individual with their own unique circumstances which led to them becoming homeless. It is important to show an interest and listen to them.

Immediate causes of homelessness can include:

- ▶ Fleeing domestic abuse
- ▶ Leaving care
- ▶ Mental health problems
- ▶ Substance abuse and alcohol problems
- ▶ Leaving prison
- ▶ Eviction
- ▶ Debt
- ▶ Job loss
- ▶ Leaving the Armed Forces

This is exacerbated by social issues such as:

- ▶ Lack of social housing
- ▶ Inadequate housing benefit
- ▶ Unaffordable and insecure private rental sector
- ▶ Discrimination and inequality
- ▶ Low pay and insecure work



Rough sleeping rose by 27% in England between 2022 and 2023.

Source: shelter.org.uk

What are the types of homelessness?

Homelessness takes many forms. In the UK, they are generally categorised as below, however the lines between categories can become blurred.

▶ **Statutory homelessness**

Local authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for certain groups of people. However, the eligibility criteria are strict, and few individuals receive permanent housing. Households, particularly those with children, may be offered temporary accommodation as a first step.

▶ **Rough sleeping**

This is the visible and often most dangerous type of homelessness. It includes parks, train stations, shop doorways etc. People who sleep rough may fall outside of the definitions of statutory homelessness and move in and out of temporary accommodation.

Migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) are at high risk of homelessness. The status means that they cannot access benefits, council housing or homeless help.



▶ **Hidden homelessness**

Those who are not entitled to help with accommodation, or those who don't seek help from their local council can fall into this category. Many stay in hostels or B&Bs, squats or 'concealed' housing such as floors and sofas of family and friends. These people usually make up the majority of single homeless people in England.

It is important to remember that the best way to help someone is to put them in touch with local services. These services have specialist support and funding in place.

Helping a rough sleeper in your area

Rough sleeping is dangerous and isolating. Within days it affects a person's mental and physical health and exposes them to abuse, violence, crime, and addiction. It is essential to prevent a person from rough sleeping if at all possible.

Awareness and being prepared are vital in helping those who are homeless. If you choose to engage with a person sleeping rough, here are some considerations:

- ▶ **Safety first:** Assess the situation to ensure your own safety. Avoid approaching individuals who appear agitated or aggressive. If someone poses an imminent threat, call the police on 999. Do not allow a homeless person who is unknown to you into your home or place of work. Speak to them in a public place or in sight of other people.
- ▶ **Engage in conversation:** Approach the person with kindness and respect. Start by asking their name and how they are doing.
- ▶ **Listen actively:** Give the person your undivided attention and listen to their story. Avoid making assumptions or judgments.
- ▶ **Be realistic:** Showing kindness to a homeless person can encourage them to make positive changes in their lives. However, you should be honest about the limits of your capacity to help. Above all, try not to be naive about the effects of addiction or mental illness, and keep firm boundaries about what is acceptable.
- ▶ **Offer resources:** If the person is in need of shelter provide them with information about local support services or notify those services yourself (see page 7).

Entrenched rough sleepers

People who have been on the streets for a long time and find it difficult to break the cycle of homelessness, are sometimes referred to as 'entrenched' rough sleepers.

They will probably be known to local services. For those who are unable or unwilling to get off the street, all we can do is keep them as safe and healthy as possible.

Resources for rough sleepers



Go to the **website of your local council** and search for 'helping rough sleepers' – each council will have their own numbers and links for help in the area.



There are many **day centres and night shelters** run by local voluntary organisations and churches. Some are drop-in, while some require referrals from the council or other local services. Please note that many night shelters only operate in the winter months.



Go to **[Homeless.org.uk](https://www.homeless.org.uk)** and click the 'find a service' button.



Alternatively, send an alert to StreetLink, a 24-hour UK wide service that enables local services to engage quickly with people who are sleeping rough. **[thestreetlink.org.uk](https://www.thestreetlink.org.uk)**

If the rough sleeper is in immediate danger, needs medical assistance or is under 18 you should phone 999.



FAQs

Should I give cash to a homeless person?

Many rough sleepers have addictions and giving them money will feed this addiction. In particular, synthetic psychoactive drugs are cheap and readily available. They destroy thousands of lives, as users become violent, often towards themselves, and may suffer permanent brain damage.

You may want to keep a stock of small, helpful items to give instead of cash.

Examples: chocolate bars, non-perishable food, bottles of water, lighters, notebook and pens, tissues, sunblock, small shower gel/shampoo, books etc.

Rough sleeping is not illegal per se; however, it is illegal to beg in a public place. If someone becomes aggressive when asking for money, report them to the police by calling 101.

What about donating items to homeless charities or services?

Small items such as those mentioned above are useful for rough sleepers. However, many support services recommend that cash donations are the most effective way to assist. They can better allocate these funds to address the specific needs of homeless people and ensure that donations are distributed fairly and safely.

What if someone asks for money for a place to stay?

We recommend directing someone to the established support services in the area or alerting them yourself via Streetlink. See page 9 for contact information.

What else can I do to help?

There is only so much that we can do as individuals – but when we work together, we can achieve a lot more.

- 1. Educate yourself and others:** Learn more about homelessness and share your knowledge (or this guide!) with others to raise awareness and reduce stigma.
- 2. Make your voice heard:** Try writing to your local MP regarding homelessness in your local area. Advocate for policies and programs that address the root causes of homelessness, such as affordable housing initiatives and increased funding for social services. Shelter have all the information you could need to find and contact the right people.
https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/writing_to_your_mp
- 3. Supporting homeless charities and support services:** you can do this through regular donating, fundraising, or leaving money in a will or trust.
- 4. Volunteer your time:** Offer your time to volunteer at shelters, soup kitchens, or other organisations serving the homeless.
- 5. Donate food:** Homeless people rely on foodbanks, sometimes solely, for their food and essential items. To find your nearest food bank go to trussell.org.uk

More guidance on how you can help homeless people is available from the Homeless Link website – homeless.org.uk

Whatever you do, do something! Homelessness is not inevitable and should not be a fact of life. We can all do our part to end homelessness.

Helplines



General advice

- ▶ Shelter Helpline **0808 800 4444** (Monday - Friday 8am - 6pm)
- ▶ The Citizen's Advice Bureau (England) **0800 144 8848**

Organisations that help particular groups of people:

16-25 year olds

- ▶ Nightstop UK helps young people into emergency accommodation. Runaway Helpline **116 000** (24-hour)
- ▶ CentrepoinTE give advice to young people on their housing situation and rights **0808 800 0661**

People escaping domestic violence

- ▶ National Domestic Violence Helpline **0808 200 0247** (24-hour)

Veterans

- ▶ The Ministry of Defence's Veterans UK helpline provides assistance on many issues, including housing **0808 191 4218**
- ▶ Veterans Aid will assess a person's needs and find appropriate support, including housing **0800 012 6867**

People with mental health problems

- ▶ Mind Infoline **0300 123 3393**
- ▶ The Samaritans (UK) **116 123** (24-hour)

Refugees

- ▶ Visit Refugeecouncil.org.uk and search their support directory for your nearest service or call **020 7346 6700**





About Church Homeless Charity

Every homeless person has their own needs, stories and struggles. We give personalised grants, tailored to their individual circumstances. There is no one size fits all, and we give the help that fits *them*.

Each year, around 3,000 people receive help from Church Homeless Charity. We receive no funding – all our grants are made possible through our donors.

We work with support services to identify those most in need of our help.

Examples of our support for homeless individuals:

- ▶ Training to help people into work
- ▶ Warm, clean clothes and shoes
- ▶ I.D. in order to apply for benefits, training, housing and work
- ▶ Items to improve temporary living accommodation, eg. curtains and carpets
- ▶ One-to-one counselling
- ▶ Digital inclusion

We're helping homeless people take the next step in their journey towards a home of their own. Help is available to everyone, regardless of their gender, sexuality, race or religion.

Strengthening people's confidence and building resilience are key to helping homeless people rebuild a life free from homelessness.

**Find more information at
www.churchhomelesscharity.org.uk**





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