



Homelessness : Definitions and Examples

Being homeless is much more than sleeping rough. The people you see on the streets are just the tip of the iceberg, because the majority of people who are homeless are staying in temporary accommodation until a more permanent place can be found for them to live. Having a home is about having a permanent place to live in which is habitable (windproof, water tight and not damp) warm, safe (and this includes safety within the home) and secure (both in terms of home security and security of tenure. For this reason the legal definition of homelessness covers a wide variety of circumstances.

The legal definition of homelessness includes situations where:

- You have nowhere you can live with your family.
- You can't gain access to your home (e.g. you are locked out and not allowed back in).
- You are not safe at home (e.g. as a victim of or threatened with domestic violence).
- You live somewhere that is overcrowded or puts your health at risk.
- You are being 'kicked out' of where you stay.
- You are being threatened with homelessness (within 2 months).
- You are living in temporary and insecure circumstances e.g. staying on a friend or relative's sofa.

How easy is it to.....?

1. Get a place in temporary accommodation.

A. If you go to your council and are assessed as homeless then they have a duty to provide you with temporary accommodation until a more permanent home can be found. In some cases 'temporary' can mean a year or more. Temporary accommodation can be a hostel, bed & breakfast or rented flats. The hostels and B& B's aren't like the ones you go to on your holidays. You will probably have to share kitchen and bathroom facilities with strangers of different ages.

2. Get a permanent place through the council?

A. If you are aged between 18 and 64 you are not necessarily guaranteed a place to live when you apply as homeless- it depends on your circumstances.

3. Hold a job or get a job when you are homeless?

A. Being homeless is extremely disrupting and unsettling:

Getting a new job requires an address. If you have nowhere to live you don't have one. If you stay in temporary accommodation your address could change quite often

Not having your own space and facing the uncertainty of not knowing where you'll be living are a lot to cope with on top of finding or even holding down a job.

4. Save up money while you are in temporary accommodation?

A. Temporary accommodation is usually a lot more expensive than renting a place (e.g. You could pay £30 a night in a B&B or £75 a night in a hostel) and for some people it's their only option.

- If you are unemployed your housing benefit covers the cost, but if you earn a wage you get less or no housing benefit and have to cover the rest of the cost out of your wages.
- Some people find that once they have paid their rent or housing costs they have little money left and are better off being unemployed. This is called a benefits trap- when you are financially better off being out of work than in work.
- Unless you earn a really good wage you will struggle to get yourself out of temporary accommodation and have to wait until you are offered a place through social housing (renting from the council or housing association).

5. Living a Healthy Lifestyle?

A. Not having your own place, your own things around you and having nowhere to relax can be stressful, unsettling and very lonely. People living in temporary accommodation have little stability in their lives and even less privacy or security. Simple day to day tasks like cooking or eating healthily become more challenging when you are living on a low income or sharing kitchen facilities. You are often required to leave B&Bs during the day time so you have to find ways to feed yourself and keep warm. This is difficult if you have little money and nowhere to go. Surviving on takeaways is expensive and unhealthy. Many people find their mental health and physical health deteriorate when they are homeless.

6. Keep in touch with family and friends?

A. Being homeless is a very isolating experience. It's easy to lose touch with friends, especially if the place you are staying in is far away from your local area. Friends and family sometimes aren't allowed to visit you in temporary accommodation or it may be difficult or awkward. Isolation is extremely common amongst homeless people and a major cause of depression and poor mental and physical health.