

Discussing Safety Concerns with Doubled-Up and Couch-Surfing Youth

Tips for Coordinated Access Networks

Developed by the Coordinated Access for Youth and Young Adults with contributions from the Families with Children Workgroup, "Safely Doubled-Up" Committee

CT Shelter Diversion efforts prioritize diverting youth and young adults to other housing solutions at their first contact with the homelessness response system. Often, this involves helping them to preserve their current housing situation or assisting them to make alternative housing arrangements. Doubling-up is often economical, culturally appropriate and realistic. However, not all doubled-up arrangements are safe for individuals or especially youth.

When helping people to reside in a doubled up situation it is important to help them assess the home's safety and/or offer suggestions that could help improve the safety or stability of a doubled-up household. It is ultimately the youth's decision to decide if their living situation is unsafe and not your perception of safety. The youth must make their own decision, but these "pointers" can guide your conversation to help them evaluate the safety of their doubled-up situation. Questions should be open-ended; **this is not intended to be a script.**

Sleeping Arrangements

Ask about the sleeping arrangements and if young person is parenting, see "Safely Doubled Up Tips for Families" to assure safety for young children.

"We want you to be safe. Please think about the home where you could stay tonight"

- Do you have enough room to sleep so that you do not have to wake up with physical complaints due to sleeping position (i.e., sleeping in a chair, small couch as opposed to a bed)?

Resources

[School District McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons](#)

[Youth-Help.org](#)

[Department of Children and Families](#)

[Safely Double Up Tips for Families](#)

[211 Protocol for Minors \(need to add link\)](#)

Physical Space

- Are the heat, lights, running water, and plumbing all working reliably?
 - Would payment of utilities in arrears support the youth to remain safely doubled up?
 - Are there environmental hazards present? (lead pipes, poor air quality)
- Do you have any concerns about getting in or out of this home? (reference to having safe access and unrestricted exit into the home)
 - Would the young person be given a key to the home?

- If no, what's your plan should you not be able to get in during the day/at night? Have them identify 1-2 safe places they can go (library, other friends, etc)
- Are there set times the young person must enter or leave the home? (If so, could this be negotiated?)

Resources

[Utility Assistance](#)

[Environmental Hazards Evaluation](#)

[Lead Poisoning Prevention](#)

Behavioral Health

- Is there anything you need to do in order to stay in this home that makes you uncomfortable? Are there any “strings” attached to living there?
- Is there drug or alcohol use or sales in the home that could hurt you?
 - What times does this seem to happen the most and where can you go during those times to avoid this?
- Does anyone in this household physically hurt or threaten you or anyone in the home?
- Does anyone in this household verbally or emotionally hurt you? (belittling you, extreme sarcasm or put downs, negative comments that hurt your self-image)
- Is domestic violence or trafficking a reason that they are seeking housing assistance today?

Resources:

[Mobile Crisis](#)

[Love 146](#)

[CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#)

[CT Domestic Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

[Mandated Reporter Training](#)

Subsidized households (HCV/Section 8, RAP, Public Housing)

When a household receiving any type of housing subsidy agrees to allow a person or family to move in and double-up with them, these are action steps can help maintain the household without jeopardizing their subsidy.

- If there is fear of eviction, talk through any concerns. Explore asking the head of household to inform the landlord or property manager that there will be one or more new household members.
- If the stay is expected to exceed local housing authority limits, ask the landlord or property manager if a larger unit is available to accommodate the expanded household, and to add new household members to the lease
- Contact the local Dept. of Housing CAN Manager for assistance in negotiating a doubled-up situation if the steps above are not productive.

Resources

[Local Housing Authorities](#)

[Rental Assistance Program \(RAP\)](#)

[Section 8 resources](#)

Other Reminders

Always ask:

“Do you have any other safety concerns?”

This may identify other concerns that were missed earlier in the interview, or that the respondent was not ready to reveal earlier.

When the youth is under 18:

- Contact the local Runaway and Homeless Youth provider or DCF. See 211 protocol for minors.

School-age adolescent – discuss why and how to connect with school district McKinney-Vento Liaison

When a person or family must double-up, open communication about practical issues can help prevent problems. Suggest to the housing support applicant that they talk with the current head of household about:

- How long can you stay where you are?
- If you have to leave this place, where do you go next?
- What expectations do you have of me while I live here?
 - Offer assistance with household chores, meal preparation, yard work, babysitting, etc.
- How can I best fit within your household routines and activities?
 - Use of specific household items (e.g., washer/dryer) and placement of personal belongings (clothes, toiletries, dirty diapers), music or TV volume, bedtimes, quiet hours, etc.
- What monetary support could you offer the head of household?
 - Can you contribute \$20 weekly, \$50 a month, assistance with groceries or utilities, etc.

Has there been a recent conflict or on-going communications issues with family members or others in the household? Would there be an opportunity for short-term family mediation? (See information on the STRIVE model)