

Discussing Safety Concerns with Doubled-Up Families & Individuals

Tips for Coordinated Access Networks

Developed by the Families with Children Workgroup, "Safely Doubled-Up" Committee

CT Shelter Diversion efforts prioritize diverting families and individuals 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. Not all Doubled-up arrangements are safe for individuals or especially children.

When helping people to reside in a doubled up situation it is important to help them assess the home's safety for their child(ren) and/or offer suggestions that could help improve the safety of a Doubled-up household. It is ultimately the family's decision to decide if their living situation is unsafe and not your perception of safety. The family or individual 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 for the whole family and individual family members.

"We want you (and your children) to be safe. Please think about the home where you could stay tonight"

When there is a child under age five:

- Discuss realistic safe sleeping arrangements, e.g., placing a blanket-lined box or large drawer on the floor, ways to access a "Pack and Play"
- Distribute information on safe sleeping arrangements
- Determine if additional beds, a crib or cot would help sustain the doubled-up arrangement

Families with Children

- Under 5 years old - distribute *Child Development Infoline* brochure
- School-age child or adolescent – discuss why and how to connect with school district McKinney-Vento Liaison

Resources

[Office of Early Childhood Safe Sleep](#)

[National Institutes of Health safe sleep](#)

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

Physical Space

- Are the heat, lights, running water, and plumbing all working reliably?
 - Would payment of utilities in arrears support the family to double up?
 - Are there minor repairs needed? (toilet not working, pipes leaking)
 - Are there environmental hazards present? (lead pipes, poor air quality)
- Are there any problems with rodents, bugs, animal(s) or any other pests?
 - Has an animal(s) in the home recently bitten anyone who required medical treatment?
 - Can the animal(s) be safely contained? (cage, outside on a line)
 - Could extermination services be offered to resolve a chronic rodent or bug infestation?
- Do you have any concerns about getting in or out of this home? (reference to having safe access and unrestricted exit)
 - Would the person or family be given a key to the home?
 - Are there set times the family or person must enter or leave the home? (If so, could this be negotiated?)
 - Is there anything (furniture, boxes, other hazards) blocking any of the doors that prevent entering and exiting the home?

Resources

[Utility Assistance](#)

[Environmental Hazards Evaluation](#)

[Lead Poisoning Prevention](#)

Behavioral Health

- Is there drug or alcohol use or sales in the home that could hurt you or your child(ren)?
 - Offer assistance to connect the person or family to an appropriate therapeutic provider to discuss strategies for safely navigating the situation, possible alternative arrangements
- Can the parent decide who has access to their child(ren)?
- 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?
- Does anyone in this household physically hurt or threaten you, your child(ren), or anyone in the home?
- Does anyone in this household verbally or emotionally hurt you or your child? (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 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:

- What expectations do you have of me or my family while we live here?
 - Offer assistance with household chores, meal preparation, yard work, babysitting, etc.
- How can I or my family 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.

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Reaching Home Families with Children Workgroup Stakeholders

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| Access Agency | CT Housing Finance Authority |
| Always Home | CT Office of Early Childhood |
| Center for Children’s Advocacy | Journey Home |
| Child First Inc. | Melville Charitable Trust |
| Christian Community Action Inc. | New Reach |
| CSH | Partnership for Strong Communities |
| CT Birth to Three System | State Department of Education |
| CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence | Supportive Housing Works |
| CT Coalition to End Homelessness | Thames River Community Service, Inc. |
| CT Commission on Women, Children & Seniors | The Connection Inc. |
| CT Department of Children and Family | U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| CT Department of Housing | United Way of Connecticut |
| CT Department of Labor | |
| CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | |

References

Early Childhood Practice Guide for Children Aged Zero to Five, April 1, 2016
CT Dept. of Children and Families

Billioux, A., K. Verlander, S. Anthony, and D. Alley. 2017. *Standardized Screening for Health-Related Social Needs in Clinical Settings: The accountable health communities screening tool*. Discussion paper, National Academy of Medicine, Washington, DC.

Box 1: Accountable Health Communities Core Health-Related Social Needs Screening Questions
<https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Standardized-Screening-for-Health-Related-Social-Needs-In-Clinical-Settings.pdf>