



DETERMINING HOMELESS STATUS OF YOUTH

This guide is intended to assist intake workers help determine and document homeless status for youth using the definition of homelessness found in the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and Continuum of Care (CoC) Programs so that youth are not turned away from the housing and services that they need in error. Although the [HUD definition of homelessness](#), except for Category 3 (families and youth defined as homeless under other federal statutes), is not specific to youth or any age group, many communities have had difficulty determining how youth meet HUD’s definition of homelessness and what is required in terms of documenting homeless status. The examples in this guide are hypothetical scenarios intended to help providers understand HUD’s homeless definition and what documentation is needed. While the scenarios specifically reference youth, the information may be used to determine homeless status for people of all ages seeking assistance. HUD’s homeless assistance programs do not prohibit providers from providing assistance to youth who meet the criteria in HUD’s definition of homelessness, whether they are unaccompanied children under 18 or youth age 18-24. However, organizations serving unaccompanied children under the age of 18 should be aware that there may be state and local laws or regulations that can affect program design or eligibility for these youth.

HUD and its federal partners recognize that, as communities build more [coordinated and comprehensive responses](#) to ending youth homelessness, they will likely need to construct a menu of appropriate services and housing options for youth that are funded through a variety of public and private, and federal, state and local agencies. HUD’s homeless assistance resources should be a part of that menu but likely will not be the only resources or definitions that a community needs to consider. Nevertheless, for HUD’s CoC and ESG Program funded projects, intake workers will need to verify homeless status according to HUD’s definition.

Verifying homeless status is only the first step, though. A provider must also verify that a youth meets specific project eligibility criteria. Different types of ESG and CoC Program funded projects have different eligibility criteria that are defined in regulations and annual funding announcements made by HUD. Although a youth may be determined to be homeless under a particular Category of HUD’s homeless definition, it does not mean that the youth is eligible for all CoC or ESG Program funded projects or that HUD funded homeless assistance projects are the most appropriate type of assistance for these homeless youth. HUD is developing additional technical assistance materials to assist providers in determining eligibility for HUD’s homeless assistance projects. This guide is intended to assist providers in understanding how to determine and document homeless status according to HUD. However, in order to effectively match homeless youth to the appropriate resources, each local homeless housing and service project must provide the CoC with their detailed eligibility criteria.

YOUTH HOUSING CRISIS SCENARIOS

ALEXIS

Alexis, 23, had been living with her boyfriend but they broke-up and she could not afford her own place and had no other friends or family willing to let her stay with them. A friend’s father offered her a room in his house in exchange for sex and Alexis moved in since she had nowhere else to stay and could not afford her own apartment. Alexis doesn’t want to stay there anymore but she has nowhere else to stay, little money, and is afraid she will have to sleep under a bridge if she moves out.

Is Alexis homeless according to HUD’s definition? Yes, under [Category 4](#). She has been trading sex for a place to stay and she will lose the place if she refuses to have sex with her friend’s father. She has no other housing options or resources to secure her own housing. On the other hand, she wasn’t homeless when she was with her boyfriend because he wasn’t requiring her to have sex with him to stay at his place and she felt safe.



David, 19, came out to his parents a couple of months ago. His mother was supportive but his father was angry and has been trying to get David to change his mind about his sexual orientation and is drinking more. His father has never hit him but David worried that things could get worse and his father could get violent. A few times, when his father was really upset, David drove around all night to get out of the house. Two weeks ago it was so bad at home he went to his friend's house, but now his friend says David has to leave this week because he will get in trouble with his landlord. David only works sporadically and has nowhere else to stay. He wants help but is embarrassed about going to a homeless service provider and doesn't want to ask his friend for a letter saying he can't stay there anymore because it could get his friend in trouble.

Is David homeless according to HUD's definition? Yes, under [Category 2](#) and under [Category 4](#). He is homeless under Category 2 because he has been staying with friends and has to leave in less than 14 days with no safe alternative housing or resources to secure housing. His parent's house would not be considered other available housing since David states that it is not safe for him to live there due to the possibility of violence by his father. He is also homeless under Category 4 since he was fleeing his home because of his concern that his father would be violent and because his home wasn't a safe or supportive environment.

Does David have to ask his friend for a letter? If the intake worker is qualifying David under Category 2, then no, David only needs to state that his friend will no longer let him stay there. It is the intake worker's responsibility to attempt to obtain written or oral verification from the friend, but David may have to help the intake worker contact his friend (e.g., provide a telephone number or address). If the intake worker is not able to obtain written or oral verification from his friend, then David may provide written self-certification that his statement is true and the intake worker must document their attempts to obtain the higher level of documentation. The intake worker should not attempt to contact David's family if David believes this would jeopardize his safety.

Jordan, 18, had an argument with his mother a month ago because she wouldn't let him drink or smoke in the house. He left and has stayed with different friends a week at a time since then. Now school has started and his friends' parents will no longer allow Jordan to stay with them. His mother is willing to allow him to come back home.

Is Jordan homeless according to HUD's definition? No. He is currently staying with friends and has a safe place to return to with his mother. They may need family counseling or mediation to help them have a better relationship so Jordan will return home and won't leave again until he is ready.

DOCUMENTING THE YOUTH'S PRIOR LIVING SITUATION

- Youth are not responsible for obtaining their own documentation. Instead, intake workers are responsible for documenting the youth's homeless status by verifying the information provided by the youth starting at the initial interview. Using contact information or documents provided by the youth, the intake worker should obtain the information indicated in the chart below.
- If at any point the youth does not want someone to be contacted because he or she fears for their safety – the intake worker SHOULD NOT contact the person and should document the youth's feelings and statements in the case file.
- If the intake worker cannot obtain a higher level of documentation (e.g., a letter from a third-party) the youth can self-certify and the intake worker should document their effort to obtain a higher level of documentation, including notes about why they were not able to.
- If the intake worker is able to obtain documentation at any point during the youth's participation in the project, then the information should be added to the case file to back up intake documentation.
- When documenting category 4, the intake worker needs to ask only enough questions to know what is going on – they should rely on the youth's own statement about his or her feelings and concerns. If the youth indicates there is a safety risk then no further documentation of the safety risk is needed – the intake worker should simply document what the youth stated.



DETERMINING HOMELESS STATUS OF YOUTH QUICK GUIDE

Category	 Living situation	Types of Documentation <i>(responsibility of intake worker to obtain the highest level of documentation possible in each situation)</i>
Category 1 Literal Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter including emergency shelter, transitional housing, or hotel or motel paid by government or charity Street or other place not meant for human habitation (ex. car, garage, park, abandoned building) An institution (ex. jail, hospital, juvenile detention) that the youth is exiting and where youth was resident for 90 days or less AND the youth resided in emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third party documentation, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMIS or victim services provider database printed record Written statement by housing or services provider such as homeless liaison, street outreach worker, or shelter provider, or Intake worker direct observation recorded in the file, or Certification of homelessness by youth AND documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information, or (If exiting institution) Discharge paperwork or a written or oral statement from staff of the institution with beginning and end dates of the time the youth spent in the institution OR certification by youth that they exited institution AND documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information. Also documentation of shelter or place not meant for human habitation prior to entering institution. <p>NOTE: A youth asking for emergency shelter or street outreach can self-certify their homelessness. This could be a sign-in sheet for shelter with a certification on top that the people signing in are homeless. No further documentation or attempts to verify are required to access emergency shelter.</p>
Category 2 Imminent Risk of Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In own housing, but being evicted within 14 days A hotel or motel paid for by the youth, family or friends where the youth cannot stay for more than 14 days (often due to lack of ability to continue paying) With family or friends and being asked to leave within 14 days <p>Additionally, the youth must have no safe alternative housing, resources or support networks to maintain or obtain permanent housing.</p>	<p>Documentation that youth will lose their housing within 14 days:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice of eviction or equivalent legal document, or Proof of inability to continue to pay for hotel or motel, or Statement by youth that they cannot continue to stay at the place they have been AND written or oral verification from owner or renter of housing obtained by intake worker OR documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information; and <p>Documentation that the youth has no safe alternative housing, no financial or other resources, and no family or other support networks. Youth can self-certify this.</p>
Category 3 Homeless Under other Federal Statutes	<p>Youth who do not qualify as homeless under the other 3 Categories but who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are homeless under other federal statutes including the Runaway & Homeless Youth Act Have not had their own place with a lease, ownership interest or occupancy agreement in the last 60 days Have moved two or more times in the last 60 days Can be expected to have continued housing instability because of a disability, substance use addiction, history of domestic violence or child abuse, or two or more barriers to employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certification of homeless status by the non-profit, or state or local government entity, responsible for administering homeless assistance under other federal statutes, and Certification by the youth that they have not had a lease or other agreement for housing in the last 60 days with written documentation (e.g., from an outreach worker or homeless liaison) OR documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information, and Certification by the youth that they have had two or more moves in the last 60 days with written documentation OR documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information, and Documentation of special needs (e.g., copy of SSI check, third party verification, direct observation) or at least two barriers to employment <p>NOTE: HUD must approve CoC Program funded projects to serve youth under Category 3. ESG funded projects do not require HUD approval.</p>
Category 4 Fleeing Domestic Violence	<p>Youth fleeing or attempting to flee their housing or the place they are staying because of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions related to violence that has taken place in the house or has made them afraid to return to the house, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trading sex for housing Trafficking Physical abuse Violence (or perceived threat of violence) because of the youth's sexual orientation <p>Additionally, the youth must have no safe, alternative housing, resources or support networks to maintain or obtain permanent housing.</p>	<p>For providers that are not victim service providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement by youth that they are fleeing because of domestic or other violence AND <u>If the safety of the youth is not jeopardized</u>, verification of the statement through written observation by the intake worker or staff at other organizations including law enforcement, housing or service provider, social worker, homeless liaison or legal assistance provider youth has sought assistance from OR <u>documentation of intake worker's attempts to verify information and certification of the statement by the youth or intake worker</u> <p>For victim service providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement by youth that they are fleeing domestic or other violence AND Certification of the statement by the youth or intake worker <p>All providers must obtain a youth's self-certification that the youth has no safe alternative housing, no financial or other resources, and no family or other support networks. The intake worker should obtain any available documentation or statements supporting the youth's certification.</p>

NOTE: Additional guidance on documenting homeless status can be found at [Criteria and Recordkeeping Requirements for Definition of Homeless – HUD Exchange](#). Youth who are not determined to be homeless under one of the Categories above may be considered [at-risk of homelessness](#) and eligible for homelessness prevention services funded through ESG.