

Know your rights

16 or 17 and homeless?

Am I homeless?

You don't have to be sleeping on the streets to be homeless. If you are staying somewhere you have **no legal right to stay** (like a friend's house) or somewhere that is **not safe for you** (where people are violent), then you are homeless.

Who can help?

Children's Social Care must help most homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. It is part of the council and used to be called Social Services. In an emergency they can help find somewhere safe for you to stay the night.

Housing Options help people who are homeless. It is part of the council too. If it is an emergency, they can also help you find somewhere safe to stay that night.

Advice services like Shelter and Citizens Advice Bureau can help you understand your rights and challenge decisions you think are wrong. You can also call Shelter's free helpline **0808 800 4444**.

Some areas have special **young people's projects** that deal with homelessness. See overleaf for contact details to find one in your area or ask a teacher, Connexions or Youth Worker, or check the internet.

What help can I get from Children's Social Care?

Children's Social Care will do an assessment to see if you are a 'child in need' (this legal term covers young people too). If they agree you are, they can help you to:

- find a place to live (and they pay for it)
- get into training and education
- tackle personal issues, like drug or alcohol problems.

What if Children's Social Care won't help me?

Get independent advice as soon as you can. Meanwhile, go to the council and speak to someone from Housing Options. Tell them you are homeless.

What if I don't want help from Children's Social Care?

Some young people don't like the idea of being involved with Children's Social Care. You don't have to agree to it, but they can help with all your issues – not just housing. If you don't want this help, you need to go to Housing Options.

Will they tell me to go back home?

Whoever you go to will want to check if you can go back home, because it isn't easy living on your own at 16 and 17. Housing Options and Children's Social Care have people who can talk to you and your parent(s) to see if you can sort things out, but you cannot be forced to go back home, especially if it isn't safe for you because of violence or abuse. That is why it's very important for you to tell the worker about these things. Even if you and your parent(s) agree to talk, the council should still give you a place to stay while this is being sorted out.

Shelter

shelter.org.uk

RH3300. Registered charity in England and Wales (263710) and in Scotland (SC002327)

What to do

Top tip 1

Some areas have special projects to help homeless young people. Ask your Connexions or Youth Worker. If not, use this guide.

Top tip 2

If you are confused or unhappy with what is happening, get advice from Shelter, a Citizens Advice Bureau or other agency, or contact Shelter's helpline **0808 800 4444** (open daily from 8am, free to call from main UK mobile networks).

Top tip 3

Why have an assessment? If you are a 'child in need' under section 20 of The Children Act, Children's Social Care has a duty to help you find a place to live, pay for it, and help with education and training. In some cases, you have a right to this help until 21 or 24. These are important rights. Don't refuse an assessment without getting advice on what it really means for you.

Local council contacts:

16 or 17, and nowhere safe to stay tonight?
You have two choices:

Go to **Children's Social Care** at your local council.

Go to **Housing Options** (also called the Homeless Persons Unit or Team) at your local council.

They will talk to your family to see if you can go back home, but cannot make you go if it is not safe. If you can't go back:

Children's Social Care will carry out a 'child in need' assessment ('child in need' is a legal term) and should offer you somewhere to stay in the meantime. If not, go to Housing Options for a place to stay and make sure you get urgent advice (see Top tip 2).

Housing Options will arrange a place for you to stay and tell Children's Social Care that you need a 'child in need' assessment, unless you say you don't want one (see Top tip 3). In some places, they do this assessment together.

After the assessment, you will be told if they think you are a 'child in need' or not. If:

If you don't want an assessment:

Yes

No

Children's Social Care are now responsible for finding you somewhere to live, paying for it and giving you other support with your education and training (see Top tip 3).

Housing Options will decide if they are responsible for finding you somewhere to live. If they make a decision you disagree with, get advice (see Top tip 2).

Whichever route you take, you should end up with somewhere safe to live. If this isn't the case, get advice (see Top tip 2).