

# Homeless?

*Get Your Foot in the Door...*



- Are you homeless?
- Are you 16 or 17 years old?

If you can answer **YES** to both questions, then your local Council Housing Department **MUST** provide temporary housing and assess your housing needs. If they don't, they may be breaking the law.

They also **HAVE** to help you if you left care after your 16th birthday, and you are still under 21 years old.

**Get advice – know your rights – take action!**

## What's your problem?

"I've left home, and there's no way I'd go back now. My Dad was always yelling at me, but then he started hitting me and I couldn't take it any more. I know if I go back, sooner or later he'll start hitting me again and it will just get worse. I stayed with friends, sleeping on their floors, but then I ran out of people I could stay with. I spoke to the Council, but they told me they can't do anything because I'm not in priority need."



**Sam, 17**

## "Priority need"

If you are in "priority need" the council must provide housing for you. Nearly all homeless 16 to 17 year olds will automatically be in priority need.

# Know your rights

**1** If you contact the Council Housing Department, they **MUST** assess your need for housing and they **MUST** give you a decision in writing.

**2** It's not just rough sleepers who are homeless. If you are at risk of homelessness within the next 28 days, the Council must still assess your needs, and give you somewhere to stay if you can't stay where you are.

**3** If you are homeless and are 16 or 17 years old, you have 'priority need' for housing in law. So does someone who left care after their 16th birthday, if they are still under 21.

**4** If you are over 21 now and you were in care, you won't get help unless the Council agrees you are 'vulnerable'. Contact the Council anyway. If the Council refuses to help, get advice.

**5** If you were in care and are still under 18, then Social Services may have to house you instead.

**6** Most young homeless people need more than just a roof over their head. You can ask for other help from Social Services if you are under 18 and homeless, or are under 21 if you were in care before. If you contact the Council Housing Department for help, they may want to refer you to Social Services for help. But they cannot refuse to provide temporary housing in an emergency just because you're being sent somewhere else.

**7** If you don't think you need any more help than just finding somewhere to live, the Council should listen to your wishes, but they may disagree with you.

**8** If the Council Housing Department refuses to help, you can appeal against the decision. If you're not happy about the way you are treated, you can also complain. Get advice. Act quickly. You usually only have 21 days to take action if the Council rejects you.

**9** If Social Services refuse to help, get advice. You can complain, and you may be able to get help from a solicitor to get Social Services to assess your needs.

## How did Sam sort it out?



"I went to Connexions and they told me to call *Community Legal Advice Direct*. *Community Legal Advice* helped me find a local housing adviser. When I spoke to the housing adviser, she told me that the Council had no right to refuse to help me. She said I *am* in priority need because I'm under 18 and homeless. She phoned the Council for me, and the Council agreed to see me again the same day. The Council put me into a hostel that night, so at least I had a roof over my head. My housing adviser asked me about how I was coping, and said she could ask Social Services to help me if I wanted it. I didn't want to go into care. My adviser reassured me that this wasn't going to happen if I didn't need it. Social Services assessed me, and helped me get a place in supported housing, and made sure I wouldn't be kicked out of the hostel until I moved in. I'm getting the help I need so that I'll be ready to live on my own when I move out of supported housing."

## Take action

- Get advice. The law on homelessness is not easy to understand.
- When you talk to someone at the Council Housing Department or Social Services, always write down
  - The name of who you spoke to
  - What they agreed to do
  - And when they agreed to do it.Keep your note. It could be useful if you need advice later.
- It shouldn't make any difference to you if you contact Housing or Social Services. Whoever you contact should assess your needs, and if you need more help, refer you to the other department. But they should not send you somewhere else without making sure that you have somewhere to stay first. Remember – if you're unhappy about the way you're treated you can complain, and get independent advice.

**Don't delay, do it today!**

## Getting help

There are services near you that can help with your housing problem.

For details of your nearest advice centre call **Community Legal Advice on 0845 345 4345**

You can make a note of their details here:

## Useful numbers

- **Shelterline – 0808 800 4444**  
**www.shelter.org.uk**  
Free 24 hour service for anyone with housing problems. Their website is also very helpful.
- **Community Legal Advice**  
**0845 345 4345**  
**www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk**  
Community Legal Advice is a free and confidential advice service paid for by legal aid. If you live on benefits or a low income, call 0845 345 4345 for independent advice about debt, education, benefits and tax credits, employment and housing problems. They can also help anybody find their local independent advice services and CABs.
- **ChildLine – 0800 1111**  
ChildLine helpline for children living away from home: 0800 88 4444
- **Message Home Helpline – 0800 700 740**  
Free and confidential service to help you leave a message for your family.
- **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline – 0808 800 5000**  
Confidential advice for young people running away from home.

This information is produced by Advicenow. Other guides include:

- How to avoid identity theft
- 10 steps to sorting out your debts
- LivingTogether
- Family Mediation
- Dealing with bailiffs
- Working parents
- Trouble at school
- Unfair dismissal
- Is that discrimination?
- How to get good asylum advice
- Support for asylum seekers in the UK
- How to handle an interview under caution
- Turned down for DLA/AA? Think you're not getting enough?
- Claiming compensation
- Dealing with discrimination
- Parents apart
- Young workers
- What's a contract?
- Do I need a lawyer?

This guide is written by Enfield Law Centre, with material from Greenwich Housing Rights.

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**The information in this guide applies to England and Wales only. The law in Scotland and Northern Ireland is significantly different.**

**The law is complicated and every case is different. Get advice.**

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**0845 345 4 345**  
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