

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Everyone in San Francisco encounters homelessness on a daily basis: on streets, in parks, on public transportation, near workplaces and in businesses. It's because we care that it is painful and frustrating to see our neighbors living on the streets, but as an individual, it's hard to know how to make a difference.

As our community works hard to implement lasting solutions to homelessness, help people recover from the trauma of living on the streets, and advocate for better policies to break cycles of poverty and homelessness in San Francisco, there are also ways you can help the next time you encounter someone on the street.

11 Ways You Can Help When You See Someone Experiencing Homelessness in San Francisco

- 1 Smile. Make eye contact. Introduce yourself.** Remember the individual you are encountering is a person who needs human interaction and connection just like you do, and they are going through trauma by simply living on the street.
- 2 Offer to help in whatever ways you can.** If you have the means, offer cash, a sandwich or water, or a new pair of socks if it seems like these are useful and appreciated.
- 3 Call the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) at 415.355.7445 if the person asks for or responds to an offer of help finding shelter or housing.** Be sure to save this number in your phone!
- 4 If the person appears to be in immediate psychiatric crisis, check in with them, and call the Mobile Crisis Team if necessary: 415.970.4000.**
- 5 If the person requests medical help or is unconscious, call 911 immediately.** Make it clear that this is a medical and *not* a police emergency.
- 6 If the person needs medical attention but is not in need of an ambulance, call the Homeless Outreach Team at 415.355.7445.**
- 7 If your neighborhood is short on public restrooms (and it is), call the Department of Public Works at 415.554.6920** and pressure them to put in "Pit Stops" for individuals living in those areas.
- 8 Contact your Supervisor and the Mayor's Office and pressure them to double the number of homeless units in their affordable housing pipeline.** Take action now at bit.ly/homes4sf.
- 9 Familiarize yourself with homeless services and providers in your area.** Check out resources such as link-sf.org and askdarcel.org for comprehensive listings of local services in San Francisco.
- 10 Organize your neighbors and invite a speaker to talk about real solutions to homelessness,** and how *everyone* can play an important role in building a better future for San Francisco.
- 11 Educate yourself!** Read resources like the *Street Sheet*. Stay connected with local nonprofits leading the charge to address homelessness. Make sure you know the basic facts: there are not enough shelter beds; most people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco lived here before becoming unhoused; and supportive housing (giving people homes paired with support services) is one of the most effective ways to keep people safely housed and off the streets – for good.

DO NOT

Do not call the police. NEVER call the police on people who are not threats. Police contact can actually prolong a person's homelessness and cause trauma.

Do not call 311. Criminalization of homelessness primarily occurs through a complaint-driven system. San Franciscans often use the city's 311 complaint system to report people and encampments. The City frequently responds to those complaints by sending police, who then use the threat of arrest or citations to force those people to move, often times with nowhere to go. This wastes resources that could be better spent on solving homelessness. In 2017, San Francisco police were dispatched nearly 100,000 times to respond to caller complaints and homelessness only increased.

NOTE: Not everyone who is panhandling, showing signs of mental illness on the street, or appearing disheveled are without homes or services. This is why it is important, when possible, to check in with people through a human conversation to ask what they want or need, before making assumptions.

