

Advice On Engaging with People who are Homeless

Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35)

Meeting a homeless person on the streets, especially if they have nowhere to go that night, can be quite shocking and worrying. To think that an individual will be cold, wet and vulnerable can invoke a host of emotions. Decision-making around how we act for that person, however, needs to remain clear, needs to keep the homeless person at the heart of any decision, but also needs to keep you safe from harm. People experiencing homelessness are also amongst the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Any support needs to minimise the risk of infection.

As a member of the public on the spot, late at night, there is a limit to what you can do. It is very unlikely that you will be able to get someone who is a professional in homelessness to attend immediately. It is also likely that many housing options will already have been explored. You would not generally be expected to engage in "Resettlement" work (trying to find housing). Instead concentrate on any immediate needs for that person.



The reasons for people being forced to sleep rough are many and varied, and often very complex. It can take professional agencies many hours to find out risks associated with a rough sleeper, and they have training and experience to help them to minimise those risks. It is important to follow the do's and don'ts listed below.

Do's and don'ts

- Do offer the person bedding or a coat to help them to keep warm.
- Do ensure you keep proper social distance when talking to the person
- Do report the person sleeping rough to "StreetLink" on 0300 500 0914. StreetLink will engage local services, but not on the night.
- Do listen to the person. They often just need a listening ear.
- Do dial 999 and ask for the police or ambulance if the person looks to be in immediate danger (due to the severe weather, their behaviour, the behaviour of others etc.)
- Do assist with travel costs if your budget allows for short journeys as the person may be able to sleep at a friend or relation's house if they can get there.
- Do be approachable and friendly.
- Do respect people's privacy and don't push them for information they may not wish to give.
- Do treat people with dignity, respect and in a non-judgemental way at all times.
- Do inform local homelessness services the following day.



- Don't offer anyone a room or accommodation in your home or invite anyone into your home.
- Don't put the person at risk of COVID offering them food or drink unless purchased from a café or other managed premises.
- Don't offer a person a lift in your car.
- Don't offer your own money or get involved in any "transaction".
- Don't "lone work", and work with another person when engaging a homeless person.
- Don't keep information to yourself about the person, especially if it indicates a risk.
- Don't enter in to gossip and remain professional.
- Don't enter into personal communication with the person by giving them your phone number, address or through social media.
- Don't offer alcohol or drugs, or money for such items.

Sources of Advice and Support

StreetLink	0300 500 0914																
Cornwall Housing	www.cornwallhousing.org.uk 0300 1234 161. If you are facing an emergency and need advice and assistance out of hours, contact 0300 1234 100.																
Torbay Council	Main office number 01803 208723 In an emergency you can call 0300 456 4876																
Devon – Contact the District Councils	<table> <tr> <td>North Devon</td> <td>01271 327711</td> </tr> <tr> <td>East Devon</td> <td>01404 515616</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mid Devon</td> <td>01884 255255</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Devon</td> <td>01822 813600</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Teignbridge</td> <td>01626 361101</td> </tr> <tr> <td>South Hams</td> <td>01803 861234</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exeter</td> <td>01392 277888</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Torridge</td> <td>01237 428700</td> </tr> </table>	North Devon	01271 327711	East Devon	01404 515616	Mid Devon	01884 255255	West Devon	01822 813600	Teignbridge	01626 361101	South Hams	01803 861234	Exeter	01392 277888	Torridge	01237 428700
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Plymouth	housingoptions@plymouth.gov.uk or call 01752 305496 (select option 1) for more information.																
Dorset	<table> <tr> <td>East Dorset</td> <td>01202 228947</td> </tr> <tr> <td>North Dorset</td> <td>01305 251010</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Dorset</td> <td>01305 251010</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Purbeck</td> <td>01929 557370</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Weymouth and Portland</td> <td>01305 251010</td> </tr> </table>	East Dorset	01202 228947	North Dorset	01305 251010	West Dorset	01305 251010	Purbeck	01929 557370	Weymouth and Portland	01305 251010						
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Bournemouth	01202 451467 (This number is diverted out of hours to the on-call team) bournemouthhousing.calls@bcpcouncil.gov.uk																
Poole	For a housing needs assessment people can fill in an online form for an appointment https://www.poole.gov.uk/housing/homeless-or-at-risk-of-homelessness/ If someone is homeless now you can call 01202 633804, or 0800 506050 outside of normal office hours																

Thanks to [St Petrocs, Cornwall](#), for their help in putting this advice together.

Caritas Plymouth, Diocese of Plymouth 01364 645421 caritas@prcdtr.org.uk