



Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied homeless youth are young people experiencing homelessness who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. [4.2 million youth and young adults experience homelessness](#) each year. The prevalence of youth homelessness is [similar in rural, suburban and urban areas](#).

Homelessness is associated with [an 87% likelihood of dropping out of school](#). At the same time, the [highest risk factor for youth homelessness](#) is the lack of a high school diploma or GED. Youth without those basic education credentials are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness.

Homelessness among unaccompanied youth is most commonly caused by severe family dysfunction, and exacerbated by poverty. Family dysfunction includes abuse, conflict, and substance abuse. [Research shows](#) that 20-40% of unaccompanied homeless youth were sexually abused in their homes, while 40-60% were abused physically. Family conflict over sexual orientation and gender identity plays a role in some youth's homelessness, as an estimated [one-third of unaccompanied homeless youth](#) identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Research also has found [a clear link](#) between parental substance abuse and youth running away from home. Family homelessness also contributes to youth homelessness: [a recent study of homeless and formerly homeless youth](#) found that 47% experienced homelessness both with their family, and on their own.

Unaccompanied youth are at a [much higher risk for labor and sex trafficking](#), assault and other forms of victimization than their housed peers. Most unaccompanied youth are unable to access safe housing or shelter, for a combination of reasons, including: being [too young to consent for services](#) without a parent; [fear of child welfare involvement](#); and the lack of services overall: [more than half of those who seek shelter cannot access it](#) because shelters are full. The risks for unaccompanied youth also extend to many infants and toddlers, as research indicates [as many as 20% of homeless youth become pregnant](#). In fact, unmarried [parenting youth have a 200% higher risk of homelessness](#) than youth without children. Providing appropriate services to keep unaccompanied youth safe and secure permanent housing for them requires inter-agency collaboration and strategies that recognize the unique developmental needs and strengths of young people.