



Understanding homelessness

Activity 1-c

The following activities all relate to teaching children of all ages about what having a home means. In order for them to begin to understand what it means to be without a home, they must first define what a home is.

If you are doing this activity as a group, you will need to take the following into consideration.

- It is important to be sensitive to the varying definitions of home within the group.
- It is important to know the home situations of each of the participating children prior to beginning of this activity.
- Do you have a child who is or has been homeless? Do you have a child in the group who has lost a home to a fire?
- Don't assume that having a child with this reality is a reason not to teach this activity. Instead, a child who has been through the experience of not having a home can be a wonderful asset to teaching other children about what this experience is like.

Desired Outcomes:

- Children will learn the difference between items that are necessary and items that make life easier.
- Children will evaluate important items in their homes..

Preparation Time:

30 minutes

Class Time:

one hour

Materials needed:

(for demonstration)

- a real backpack
- several items that would be appropriate and inappropriate to pack
- a scale
- a large piece of paper or chart to record the weights of objects

Basic Objective:

Students will prioritize items that they would carry with them if they lost their homes

Background:

This is the lesson where the idea of homelessness can be introduced. Children should have developed a better understanding for the important role that their homes play in their lives, both as a structure and as a place for them to feel secure and participate in things they like and need to do.

Plus, children begin to prioritize items in their homes based on importance and portability.

Discussion:

1. Ask the children to think about the contents of their boxes. Have them consider what items are the most important to them.
2. Ask them to take out the things that they could carry in a backpack and would want if they were going to be away from their home for a long time. This will take lots of discussion as some children will think that they can carry a TV with them. Make sure they think about what they could really carry in a backpack.
3. Without repeating items, make a group list of the things that they would be able to carry with them if students could not return later.
4. Find items in the room or house that roughly resemble the size and weight of the items on the list. Use the backpack to show what would fit and what would not fit. Allow each child to carry the backpack, noting which things are heavier than others. Weigh and record the items on a chart. Have students consider which things would be too difficult to carry with them.
5. Have students pull the items they have chosen out of their boxes and lay them on their desks. Next, they should consider if these items would meet their needs if students only had these items.
6. This is a good point to talk about the fact that there are people who do not have homes, some of whom live in shelters, on the streets, or in parks.

