

Frequently Asked Questions

When talking about homelessness people often have questions about the lives of those affected by homelessness, our services, and how the structural causes of homelessness can be changed. Below are examples of some of the most common questions and information to help you answer them.

If you are asked a question you do not know the answer to or are uncomfortable answering, it is OK to let the person know you do not know the answer and will find out. You can contact community.advocate@crisis.org.uk who will help respond to uncommon or challenging questions or you can bring them to the quarterly advocate sessions.

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Popular questions

What can you do if you see someone rough sleeping and want to help?

- Report them to [Street link](#) which is a charity that can help put homeless people into temporary accommodation.
- Or in Scotland [StreetWork](#) which is 0808 178 2323
- Buy them a hot drink or meal.
- Have a chat to them, a lot of people experiencing homelessness feel invisible when they are on the streets.
- Call 999 if someone is in a life-threatening situation.

How does Crisis spend its money?

Crisis offers housing, health, education, and employment services. We work with thousands of people experiencing homelessness across the UK every year. We are also determined campaigners working to prevent people from becoming homeless through changing the way society and governments think and act towards people experiencing homelessness. We spend our income primarily on delivering these services.

Why are service users called members?

Our members are the people who use our services and get help from Crisis. They are called members because they are part of Crisis and at the centre of everything we do. They are the people we work with every single day and who inform, inspire, and motivate us in our mission.

Does Crisis provide housing for people experiencing homelessness?

Crisis is not able to provide housing for people experiencing homelessness, as we don't own property, however we are here to help more people to navigate the path towards a new home. We have Housing Lead Workers in all of Crisis services across the UK. Supported by Crisis's Renting Ready training our Lead Workers help members prepare themselves for the day-to-day responsibilities of renting and support them to find and sustain a tenancy.

In London, with the support of Lloyds Banking Group funding, we have recently set up a new social enterprise [Good Place Lettings](#) – It is a joint venture from Crisis and [Homes for Good](#) (based on their social lettings agency model in Glasgow).

Good Place Lettings provide a comprehensive private rented sector property management service to landlords. Leading by example to provide good quality, affordable and sustainable long term housing options for tenants, and particularly those in housing need. We will take an ethical approach to lettings and management and provide ongoing advice and support services to both tenants and landlords.

Is someone who lives in a hostel or temporary accommodation really homeless?

Yes, both are temporary and insecure, even if someone ends up living there for quite a long time. It is impossible to settle and make a life for yourself, as you could be moved on at short notice, and this could also be to a different area.

A 'home' is so much more than a roof over your head, it has a legal and social dimension and is somewhere people can feel safe and secure. Being in temporary accommodation often provides a roof over people's heads but it is not the same as having a home.

Why are people homeless?

People can be homeless for a variety of reasons. Crisis research looking at people's turning points into homelessness in the UK, found that reasons most often cited by male participants were relationship breakdown, substance misuse, and leaving an institution (prison, care, hospital etc). For women who are homeless, the most common causes were physical or mental health problems and escaping a violent relationship. There are also problems in wider society that can contribute towards homelessness. These structural causes might include a lack of affordable housing; high levels of poverty, unemployment or worklessness; the way in which the benefits system operates; or the way social housing is rationed.

Why have so many people who are homeless got dogs? Should they be keeping them?

Many people experiencing homelessness are lonely and isolated and enjoy the companionship of dogs. Research suggests that from the dog's perspective, this is quite a good way of life. They spend all day with their owner, a lot of time outdoors, most owners would feed their dog before themselves, and there are charities to help people experiencing homelessness care for their dogs (such as All4paws). In addition, for some people they have the dog when they lose their home, and they are already a valued part of their family.

Do people choose to be homeless?

Rarely does anybody choose to be homeless. Often people who are homeless are pushed into making difficult choices and have few options available to them. They might choose to sleep on the streets rather than make use of the available services and this can be for a whole variety of reasons, from feeling safer on the streets, to being unable to access shelters due to having pets, or the shelter only being available during the night-time. But it is not the same as choosing to be homeless. Homelessness is not an individual choice, but caused by societal and political factors that push them into homelessness.

Should I give money to people who are homeless?

This is up to you to decide what you think is best in the individual circumstances. There are often other things you can do, such as offer a coffee, hot chocolate or sandwich, or a bottle of water during warmer weather.

How many people are homeless?

There is no national figure for how many people are homeless across the UK. This is because homelessness is recorded differently in each nation, and because many people experiencing homelessness do not show up in official statistics at all.

Crisis carries out an annual study in response to concerns that many people experiencing homelessness are not being accurately recorded in official statistics. Known as core homelessness, it includes rough sleeping, people living in sheds, garages and other unconventional buildings, sofa surfing, hostels, and unsuitable temporary accommodation such as B&Bs.

On any given night, tens of thousands of families and individuals are experiencing the worst forms of homelessness across Great Britain, this includes over 242,000 households in England alone (2024). For the last five years' core homelessness has been rising year on year in England.

How does Crisis support people at Christmas?

We support people experiencing homelessness at services across London, Edinburgh, South Wales, Newcastle, Oxford, Merseyside, and Birmingham. Our Skylight Centres provide warmth, comfort, safety, and hope for the future through activities, health services, food and advice and support.

In London, we have day centres and hotels where guests can access health appointments, temporary accommodation, activities, advice, befriending, and practical items such as toiletries etc. It is a holistic offering of emotional and wellbeing support, offering everything from Christmas games and advice to volunteer befrienders.

At Crisis we make sure people in our society are not homeless and alone at Christmas and for those in London accessing our services at Christmas can be the first step to ending their homelessness and accessing year-round services. We extend our hotel accommodation offer into January to give us more time to work with individuals to address their situation and stop them returning to the streets.

Questions about Government and Local Authority support

Why are charities providing this support? Why isn't the government helping?

A lot of charities do it on behalf of government and are funded by government, charities may also offer additional services on top of the support provided by the government. Charities like Crisis are often founded because people are moved by a problem and see a need and want to get involved in finding the solutions and changing things for the better.

Questions about funding

How much of my donation will go to help people experiencing homelessness?

61% of our expenditure was spent on [charitable activities](#) last year. Crisis receives the majority of its funding from individuals, companies and trusts and has little reliance on statutory income. Our shops are also a valuable part of our income portfolio.

This enables us to have some financial resilience and to speak for people experiencing homelessness from a position of independence, but it also requires us to invest significant resources in fundraising. In addition, the planned growth of Crisis's services means that we have had to invest more in fundraising.

Where does your money come from?

Crisis relies on the generosity of the general public, companies and charitable trusts to fund its work. Without the kindness of these people, the support that we provide the hundreds of people experiencing homelessness would not be possible.

For every £1 we spend on fundraising, we raise another £3.14 to fund our charitable services.

Why doesn't Crisis hold 'sleep-outs' to raise money?

Whilst 'sleep-outs' can be a good way of raising money, Crisis does not encourage using 'sleep-outs' as a way of fundraising. Sleeping on the street is incredibly dangerous and potentially fatal. Research shows individuals sleeping rough are 13 times more likely to be a victim of violence, and bad weather can have a serious effect on health and wellbeing. The average age of death for someone experiencing homelessness is just 47.

In addition, Crisis does not feel that it is appropriate for individuals or groups to fundraise or raise awareness by undertaking an activity which mimics the real experiences of people who are homeless. Whilst we appreciate all support, there are many [other ways to fundraise to end homelessness](#).

Dealing with challenging questions

Aren't they all druggies/alcoholics?

People can become homeless for all sorts of reasons, sometimes drugs and alcohol can be both a cause and a symptom of homelessness (for example people turn to drugs and alcohol because of their homelessness) but not all people who are homeless have drug or alcohol problems. This is a stereotype that we need to challenge and use of the term druggie itself is stigmatising and inappropriate and should be challenged – an appropriate alternative phrase is a person first approach such as "person with a problem with drugs".

How do I know if the homeless person I see on the street is really homeless?

Not all people who are begging on the streets may be homeless, and equally not all people who are homeless will beg on the streets. However often when people are begging on the streets, even if they are not homeless, they may be vulnerable and facing difficult circumstances.

How are you regulated?

Crisis is regulated by the Charity Commission, the Scottish Charity Regulator, the Fundraising Standards Board, and where appropriate our services may be externally validated, for example the qualifications we offer are all validated by an external agency in Scotland it is the SQA.

How is Crisis different to Shelter?

Crisis and Shelter are both homeless charities offering services for people experiencing homelessness and campaigning for change. Crisis focus solely on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, whereas Shelter Scotland have a broader remit and also offer support to people who are in housing difficulty or staying in poor quality accommodation. Shelter offer help and advice to people in housing difficulty, they have a

national helpline, as well as offering a number of services where people can go for advice. Crisis works with people experiencing homelessness to support them with education, health and well-being, employment and housing supporting them on their journey out of homelessness.

Questions from children and young people

Children ask all sorts of difficult questions all the time and while we don't want to upset them it's important to answer their questions directly while still using age-appropriate language. Children often ask very big/broad questions based on people or things they have seen; sometimes it helps to break down a big question to figure out where the question has come from. However, we don't know everyone's story so it's best to talk in broad terms.

Here are some examples:

'Why do homeless people take drugs?'

First, it's important to tell them that not all people experiencing homelessness take drugs or drink a lot of alcohol. We actually did some research that said only 1 in 4 people experiencing homelessness use drugs a lot. (source: [Crisis Skylight Final Report of the University of York evaluation](#)) But being homeless is really really hard so some people do to help them cope. This is why we want to get people into homes as quick as possible.

'Why do homeless people have dogs if they can't afford a home?'

You can talk about how dogs offer company and friendship. Dogs love being outside, going on walks. Maybe ask if they have a dog, the best bits about having a dog and when the dog is most happy (with their family and when they get to go outside and on walks). Mention that there are other charities that help people who are experiencing homelessness dogs with food, grooming etc such as All4Paws in Edinburgh and Street Paws and Street Vets.

'Why can't the government just give everyone a home?'

This is a really big question, it's important not to get too political when answering it. Simply put, the government could give everyone a home, but it's really complicated because anyone can become homeless and so it's hard to keep track of everyone that is entering homelessness. However, we are trying to help the government make it less complicated and put the systems in place so that everyone is looked after, and no one gets missed out.