LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION:
A parent’s survival guide

Supported by:
Anna Freud
National Centre for Children and Families

This guide has been developed by parents, for parents.
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A PARENT’S SURVIVAL GUIDE

This guide is for parents living in temporary accommodation. It’s written by parents who’ve experienced temporary accommodation and can understand what you’re going through.

We’ve included some tips to help you settle in, ideas for keeping your children healthy and happy, and ways to look after yourself. We’ve also listed some useful phone numbers, and there’s space for you to write down your local services.

We know living in temporary accommodation can be difficult. We’ve all been through challenges, good times and bad times. Everyone’s experience will be different – and as parents, only you can know what is right for your family. But we hope that by sharing our tips, we can help make your own experience a little easier.

The booklet has been supported by The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. The views in it reflect the real experiences of the families who have experienced temporary accommodation, but do not necessarily reflect the Centre’s policies.
Our top tips for you

The following pages have lots more tips, but these are some of our main ones:

**Before you move in...**

**Be prepared**: If you have them, you may need to bring your own bedding and towels – these are not always provided.

**When you arrive...**

**Ask questions**: you may feel anxious, but it’s important to ask if you’re unsure about things.

**In the first few days...**

**Turn your space into a home**: it’s hard to know how long you’ll be staying, but try and make it as homely as possible.

**Take time for yourself...**

**Look after yourself**: consider things like studying, doing a language course, or volunteering.

**And most importantly...**

**Don’t give up**: we know it’s not an easy time, but remember it’s just one part of your journey. Homelessness can happen to anyone and things will get better.

“Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.”

CS Lewis
The first few days: finding your feet

Your first few days in temporary accommodation can be confusing. You’ll probably get a welcome pack with lots of useful information. It’s a good idea to read it straight away and keep it safe, so you can look things up from time to time.

You’ll probably still have lots of questions about how things work, what services are available, and where to go for advice and support. We’ve created a short list of things you might want to find out.

□ Essential items. For example, you might need to bring your own bedding, towels and kettle, remember to ask.

□ Practical things. Such as the rules and visiting hours, what to do if there’s a fire, what time staff are on site and where to put rubbish and do laundry.

□ Local information. Including your nearest GP surgery, pharmacy, dentist, school, park, community centre, library and food bank.

□ Baby or parenting groups. There may be groups in or near your accommodation.

□ Financial support. It’s important to take control of your finances, so don’t be afraid or embarrassed to ask daytime hostel staff about benefits and grants (evening staff aren’t always there in a supporting role).

“Budgeting and managing your finances can make a huge difference in your daily life. The sooner you address this, the easier it will be to manage other things.” Message from a parent

“Think smart and prioritise your possessions. There isn’t always room for everything.” Message from a parent
“Even though it’s temporary, do what you can to make it a home.”

Message from a parent
Finding things to do with young children

Your accommodation might not be very big, so you’ll probably want to take your children out and about.

This doesn’t have to be expensive. There are lots of free activities and events you can get involved in. The more you get to know your local area, the easier it will be to find fun things to do.

Why not head outdoors and explore? Places to try include:

- local baby and parenting groups
- libraries
- children’s centres
- community centres
- faith groups
- leisure centres and swimming pools
- local parks and other green spaces

“Remember, everyone is in the same situation. Don’t be afraid to go outside your room – I wish I did this earlier.” Message from a parent
Making time for your children

Being a parent is hard work, whatever your situation. Living in temporary accommodation doesn’t mean you aren’t a good parent. Here are some of our ideas for spending quality time together.

- **10-minute play.** Regular play time with mum or dad can help children feel special and valued. It can also help you relax for a while. One idea is to stop what you’re doing and switch off your phone for 10 minutes. Let your child choose what you do, and just have fun together. You don’t need to spend any money – you could play with pots and pans or even a simple cardboard box!

- **Create a play area.** You could set aside a corner where your children can play or do arts and crafts. Or try putting a sheet over some chairs to create a play den.

- **Make your space your own.** Children don’t need expensive gifts to feel special. Why not celebrate birthdays and other special occasions by decorating your room? You could surprise your children, or even have fun making the decorations together.

- **Quiet time.** Sometimes it’s enough just to spend time together. You could lie down together in the evening and talk about what you did that day, or just enjoy some quiet time. If you have more than one child this can be a great way of making sure each child gets their own ‘special’ time with you.
Questions, questions, questions!

Children are curious and love to ask questions, some of which can be hard to answer. Here are some questions our children have asked:

- Why can’t I have a sleepover for my birthday?
- Why do other people have bigger houses than us?
- Can I bring my friends round?

It’s normal not to tell children everything. But trying to hide things rarely works, as they can usually tell when something is wrong. You could try dealing with their questions by being patient, acknowledging how they’re feeling and being honest. You may want to say things like:

- I can hear how you’re feeling...
- It’s okay to feel sad about that...
- We may not have that, but perhaps you have something that your friend wishes they had...

You might feel embarrassed or ashamed when your children ask questions. But try to remember that homelessness can happen to anyone and it’s just one part of your journey.

“Take people’s advice, but tailor it to you. You know your family best.” Message from a parent
“Even though you might not feel like it all the time, you are the most wonderful person in the world for your child. This doesn’t mean you have all the answers – and that’s okay. Just letting your child know that you’re listening, and that you can hear that they’re wondering what’s going to happen, is enough.”

Dr Eva Crasnow, a Child Psychotherapist working in temporary accommodation.
Making time for yourself

Living in temporary accommodation can be stressful. You may feel worried about providing for your family, keeping them safe, and what the future might hold. This could have a real impact on your wellbeing.

Make sure you find the time to look after yourself. Most parents find this hard, and it can be even harder in temporary accommodation. The following ideas may help.

- **Unwind in the evening.** Once the children are in bed, enjoy some time on your own. You could read or listen to music.

- **Take time for yourself throughout the day.** Even taking a few deep breaths while you boil the kettle can help you de-stress.

- **Spend time with family and friends.** Talking about things can help to clear your mind.

- **Try parent-and-baby yoga.** If you really can’t get time alone, include them in your ‘me’ time!

If you feel very down, anxious, stressed or angry, these could be signs that you’re finding it hard to cope. Speak to your GP, they are there to help. You could also call the SANE helpline on 0300 304 7000 for emotional support and information.
“Remember that you are strong - your situation doesn’t define you.”

Message from a parent
Useful organisations

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families
020 7794 2313 (available 9am - 5pm)
A mental health charity providing services and support for children and families.

Sane
0300 304 7000 (4:30pm - 10:30pm)
A telephone helpline providing emotional support and information.

Citizens Advice
03444 111 444 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5pm)
Free, independent and confidential advice on anything from housing to money problems, either in person, or by phone, email or webchat.

Home-Start UK
0116 464 5490 (Mon - Fri, 9am - 5:30pm)
Support for families with young children for a range of issues, including loneliness, parenting, money problems, and accessing local services.

Relate
0300 100 1234 (Mon - Sat, various hours daytime and late hours)
A Counselling service booking line, for adults, children and young people, and advice on relationships and parenting.

Gingerbread
0808 802 0925 (Mon - Fri, various daytime hours)
A charity helpline for single parent families, providing advice and practical support for single mums and dads in England and Wales.

Shelter
0808 800 4444 (Mon - Fri, 8am - 8pm, Sat - Sun, 9am - 5pm)
A charity helpline that provides expert advice and support to individuals facing housing issues or homelessness.
Services in your area

Use this space to write down contact details for services in your area.

GP Surgery

Pharmacy

Hospital

Library

Children’s Centre

Local Food Shop

Community Centre
Notes

You may get lots of other useful ideas from people you speak to. Use this space to write these down.
“Living in temporary accommodation can be a difficult & uncertain time. Do ask for help, information and advice if you need it”

Message from a parent
Thank you to all the parents who contributed to and supported the development of this guide.