



How to Help in a Way That Will Make a Difference

Do's and Don'ts for Helping Unsheltered Homeless

- ✚ You see someone at a corner asking for money or holding up a sign and you want to help.
- ✚ Someone that visits your church and asks staff or a member for money to pay rent, to provide someone with a hotel, gas or other need.
- ✚ Good hearted people become convicted and want to do something when they see people living in tents or sleeping on the side of the road.

What should one do? What is the compassionate, moral, safe, and loving thing to do?

Do's:

- If in the moment your heart is led to give someone money on the street, that's ok. Only do this if it will be a one-time situation and you will not be interacting with the individual regularly. (This is normally a don't because doing this may cause more harm or prevent someone from taking advantage of a program.)
- Be prepared: carry bus tickets, socks, and/or water bottles with you. Offer these items when you happen upon someone. Be prepared and ok if they don't want these items. Accept no graciously.
- Find out who is helping this population in your community and get educated. Visit their website, find out how they are helping, visit one of them in person, and volunteer.
- If you have an idea of how to help, call one of the organizations doing the work and share your idea. Possibly your idea is already occurring, or they may know how or if it will work. Be willing to hear that it's not what is needed and then **ask, "What is needed?"**
- Listen and understand that this is a complicated issue: people may be suffering from mental illness, substance abuse, and many other problems that keep them on the streets. Be understanding.
- If someone approaches you for help, it is important to connect them to the experts (i.e. shelters, housing support, 311 homeless hotline). Organizations such as CAM, United Way 211, and Haven for Hope have experience helping unsheltered folks.
- Donate money or donate requested items to a place that you see is helping. Limit your in-kind donations to **needed items** that will make a difference.

Don'ts:

- Don't take someone home or give them a ride in your car. Even if you have developed a little relationship with them; this is not appropriate.
- Don't offer regular meals or money; you are creating a dependency that you may not be willing to fulfill. We often see this when a restaurant offers a meal and then the homeless person comes by every day (this can happen at work or a church too). Things may quickly get out of hand.
- Don't pay for a hotel or rent. If you want to do so, reach out to an expert (at an agency) on how to do this with some very defined boundaries and maybe partner with them for this help.
- Don't go to an encampment or the tents under a bridge with a bunch of food. Likely that region is very well served and it's a duplication of services. If you feel passionate to do this, join an organization that is already doing it daily and weekly; help them serve a meal.
- Don't donate items that you wouldn't want or can't overtly help someone living on the streets; listen to the providers on what is needed. For instance, they don't need business suits, or high heels.
- Don't judge those suffering from homelessness or become angry because they won't take the help or do the steps you think that are so easy.