

# What Does “Homeless” Mean?

In the Lifetime Original Movie, *Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story*, Liz Murray narrates the story of how she grew up homeless, yet managed as a teenager to get into Harvard.

You may have wondered about homeless people—how they became homeless, what it must be like to be homeless, what happens to those who have no home. There is a lot of misinformation surrounding the issue of homelessness. Read the questions below and answer as thoughtfully as possible. Then discuss your answers in class to see how your ideas stack up to reality.

1. What does “home” mean to me?

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2. What is homelessness?

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3. What are some of the reasons people become homeless?

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4. Why don't homeless people just live with family members?

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5. About how many people in the United States are homeless?

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6. Why don't homeless people just get jobs and earn money to pay for a place to live?

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7. How can I help the homeless?

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# Understanding Youth Homelessness

Do you think you know anyone your age who is homeless? Chances are you may know homeless teens, but you may not be aware of it because they keep their living arrangements a secret. Then, too, some teens go in and out of homelessness, depending upon family struggles.

Read each statement below and circle whether you think each one is true or false. Use the space following each statement to explain your choice. Be prepared to discuss your feelings with fellow students.

1. An estimated 1.3 million young people are in the street each night. TRUE FALSE

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2. Teens become homeless because the adults who care for them are too lazy to work. TRUE FALSE

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3. Teens who choose to be homeless rather than live with their parents are just being rebellious. TRUE FALSE

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4. Teens in foster care are at an increased risk of becoming homeless. TRUE FALSE

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5. All homeless people abuse drugs and alcohol. TRUE FALSE

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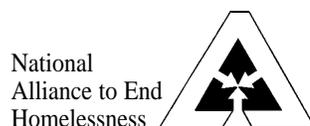
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6. There is help available to homeless teens. TRUE FALSE

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*If you or someone you know is at risk of becoming homeless, or is already homeless, there is help. Call the National Runaway Switchboard at 800-621-4000 for anonymous and confidential crisis counseling. Visit <http://www.nrs Crisisline.org> for more information.*



# The Power to Accept and Change

Despite desperate circumstances and enormous obstacles, Liz Murray was not a teen who was easily dissuaded from her goal of getting a good education. One of the obstacles Liz encountered was peers who made fun of her and put down the way she looked. But she did not let any hurt stop her. She accepted the parts of her life she could not change and changed the rest to best support her drive and dream. For example, she loved and accepted her parents as they struggled with drug addiction; she accepted that her school wasn't meeting her needs, so she switched to a school where she could thrive.

Read the following scenarios about typical teens and their goals. The path to each goal includes both positive and negative components. For each one, use a separate piece of paper to describe which circumstances you believe the teens in each scenario must accept and which they have the power to change to reach their goals.

1. Chris is a solid student, but math is a challenge for her. Last report card, she missed the honor roll by one point because her math grade brought her overall average down. Chris wants to do well in math, but she finds it hard to follow the teacher's instruction. Plus the teacher gives quizzes almost every day. Chris's older sister is a math whiz. She volunteered to tutor Chris, but Chris is worried because her sister always acts like such a know-it-all. Chris's best friend has math first period. She offered to slip Chris a copy of the daily math quiz so she can easily raise her grade by seeing the quizzes ahead of time.
2. Ali wants to buy a car. Her parents say that when she can afford the insurance and maintenance on a car, they will pay for half the cost of a car they agree on. Ali also wants to run track. The track coach says Ali is talented—that she has a real shot at a college scholarship. But, between track meets and practices, there will not be any time left to work to earn money for a car.
3. Tawny is in the school marching band. She is a good trumpet player, but she's losing interest in band. She is growing bored with all the practices and marching at the football games every Friday night. She secretly wants to quit and take it easy in her senior year. But Tawny's band director and her parents have other ideas. They want her to practice even more, so she can qualify for a music scholarship, or at least get a place in the university band. Tawny knows if she quits now, she will disappoint the adults in her life, but if she stays in the band, she will disappoint herself.



# Reality Check

As a homeless student, Liz was the victim of taunting from her classmates in school. Part of the teasing may stem from the fact that her classmates were uncomfortable with her.

It's true that many myths and misconceptions surround the issue of homelessness. This exercise will help you better understand your own feelings about the homeless and encourage you to separate the reality from the falsehoods.

Below are some actual quotes that have appeared in newspaper articles and editorials around the country. Read each one and decide if you agree or disagree with it and why. Record your responses on a piece of paper. Then, use the Resource Guide to do some research to discover what you can about the facts of homelessness. Record the information you discover. Compare the information you found during your research with your original responses. Share your research with classmates and see if your opinions about the homeless change or stay the same.

Here are some questions to guide your thought process:

- Do you agree with the quote? Why or why not?
- What do you think the writer or speaker would propose to do to address the problem of homelessness?
- Would you approach the problem the same way or differently? Explain your ideas.

"Some of [the homeless] are clearly just down on their luck—out of a job and out on the street as a result. How many there are of these is anyone's guess, but the percentage is probably small...if a person wants a job, the chances are he or she can find one."

"The vast majority of homeless are, by anyone's definition, mentally ill...and most are drug addicts, alcoholics, or both."

"Most homeless people have no interest in living under a roof, in following some specified regimen, or in earning a wage."

"The problem isn't lack of housing, but a lack of interest in it. Whether their judgement is impaired by mental illness, substance abuse, or a pathological rejection of convention, evidently many of the homeless are in their situation because they choose to be."

**girls  
inc.**<sup>®</sup>

National  
Alliance to End  
Homelessness



*Lifetime*<sup>®</sup>  
Television for Women<sup>™</sup>

# Timeline Goals



Liz is a girl who will not be dissuaded from her goal of getting an education. Although she does not attend school regularly, Liz reads the encyclopedia to educate herself. When she is late for the interview for the school she wishes to attend, she presses the adults in charge to give her a try. Liz is determined not to fail because she sees succeeding as the only way out.

Chances are, you have already reached important goals in your life. There may also be other goals you have not yet attained. Goals help you celebrate both where you have been and where you are going. Read the following list of questions. They will guide you to list your past and present goals.

### Guiding Questions

1. What goals have you attained in school, at home, with friends, in sports and hobbies?
2. What were some of the earliest goals you reached?
3. What were some of the later goals you reached?
4. What was the most important goal you reached?
5. Were any of your goals celebrated or commemorated with parties or awards?
6. What goals do you hope to reach in the near future?
7. What goals do you hope to reach in the distant future?



National Alliance to End Homelessness

Use this space to list goals you have already achieved:

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Use this space to list goals you still want to achieve:

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Use the back of this paper to draw a timeline for recording the goals you achieved and those you hope to achieve in the future. Here is a sample. Jot in today's date on the blank line in the center of the timeline with space before and after for recording past and present goals.

|                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| October 1999     | Was on the honor roll               |
| December 1999    | Sang solo in holiday program        |
| Summer 2000      | Learned to rollerblade              |
| November 2000    | Entered project in science fair     |
| June 12, 2001    | Got my first job                    |
| August 2001      | Saved enough money to buy a camera  |
| February 2002    | Got my conditional driver's license |
| May 31, 2002     | Had perfect attendance              |
| October 19, 2002 | Took PSAT                           |
| April 7, 2003    | Score above 1100 on SAT             |
| May 3, 2003      | Start jogging 4 times per week      |
| Summer 2003      | Get accepted to UCLA                |
| December 2003    | Get regular driver's licence        |
| February 2004    | Graduate high school with honors    |
| June 2004        | Get a seat in university government |
| 2006             | Buy my own car                      |
| 2007             | Land a job in my field of study     |
| 2008             | Own my own home                     |
| 2013             |                                     |

PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

FUTURE GOALS

# Letter to Educators

Dear Educator:

Lifetime Television is proud to present the enclosed educational materials based on the Lifetime Original Movie, *Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story*. These materials have been developed in partnership with two organizations: Girls Inc. and The National Alliance to End Homelessness. Girls Inc. is a national nonprofit youth organization dedicated to inspiring all girls to be strong, smart, and bold. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) is a nonprofit organization that implements strategies to end homelessness by partnering with local communities including nonprofit organizations, government officials, the faith community, corporations, and advocates.

*Homeless to Harvard* is based on the life of Liz Murray, a young woman raised in New York City in poverty by loving, yet drug-addicted parents. With incredible spirit and drive, Liz turned her life around by getting off the streets, going back to high school, and ultimately getting accepted to Harvard University. This true-life movie will premiere on Lifetime Television on **April 7 at 9:00 PM ET/PT** with encore presentations throughout the month of April (please visit [www.lifetimetv.com](http://www.lifetimetv.com) for specific dates and times). It is a truly inspiring story and we hope that these materials will spark sensitive and stimulating classroom discussions about self-esteem and homelessness.

Included in this kit are six reproducible activity panels for you to copy and distribute to your class, a teacher's guide explaining how to use the materials, a four-color poster for classroom display, and additional resources for you and your students to learn more about self-esteem and homelessness. These materials are specifically designed to fit high school curricula in health, psychology, and sociology and have been distributed to teachers of these subjects as well as guidance counselors and school psychologists. They are meant to facilitate discussions surrounding issues related to prejudice, empowerment, determination, compassion, self-esteem, homelessness, and survival with young people ages 16-19.

The *Homeless to Harvard* education materials are part of Lifetime's public awareness campaign, *Our Lifetime Commitment: Be Your Own Hero*. This campaign aims to build self-esteem among women and girls by celebrating their strengths, talents, achievements, and determination. In addition to *Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story*, a centerpiece of the campaign is *Lifetime's Achievement Awards: Women Changing the World* premiering on **May 22 at 10:00 PM ET/PT**. This inaugural television special salutes women from around the nation—nominated by Lifetime Television viewers—who have beaten all odds and made a positive difference for their families and communities.

The story of *Homeless to Harvard* brings into sharp focus the painful reality of homelessness in America, but it is also the story of how one teen's courage and compassion allowed her dream to become reality. It is our hope that you will share these materials with your students. For more information on *Homeless to Harvard*, go to [www.lifetimetv.com](http://www.lifetimetv.com), or contact us at 212.424.0944.

Sincerely,

Mary Dixon  
Vice President  
Public Affairs

*Lifetime*  
Television for Women

# Teaching Guide

## Activity #1: What Does "Homeless" Mean?

*Activity Aim:* This introductory activity determines students' knowledge of homelessness. Based on information from the National Alliance to End Homelessness located in Washington, DC, the activity presents students with a series of questions designed to assess their background knowledge about homelessness, and to help them understand what it is like to be homeless, as well as what a big problem homelessness is for so many families across the country.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the activity for each student.
2. Read and discuss the introductory paragraph together.
3. Tell students they will be examining their own knowledge and beliefs about homelessness.
4. Ask students to complete the page by recording their answers to the questions on the lines provided.

*Follow-up:* Encourage open dialogue using the completed activity sheets as an entry point to a discussion on homelessness. Ask volunteers to share answers to each item to prompt immediate discussion. Accept a variety of responses to each statement. Refer to the Resource Guide as a reliable discussion reference for presenting factual information.

## Activity #2: Understanding Youth Homelessness

*Activity Aim:* Students read statements and decide if each is true or false, and then explain their responses in writing. This activity alerts students to the devastatingly deep and far-reaching effects of homelessness and makes real the notion that homelessness can happen to anyone or to any family.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the activity for each student.
2. Read and discuss the introductory paragraph together. Emphasize that knowledge is the first step to solution.
3. Ask students to complete the page by reading each statement and telling if they think it is true or false. Students may use the blank spaces to explain their answers.
4. Have students break into small groups of 4-5 each and discuss how they feel about the homeless. ("When I see someone who is homeless I feel...")

*Follow-up:* Ask students to research ways to help the homeless population in their own community and have them plan a community service project that addresses the homeless. Refer to the Resource Guide as a reliable discussion reference for presenting factual information and for fostering community involvement. *Variation:* Designate the four corners of the room as Strongly Agree; Agree; Strongly Disagree and Disagree. Refer to the Resource Guide to generate a list of common misconceptions about the homeless. Read each one aloud. Have students go to the corner of the

room that matches their opinions about each statement. Have each student take turns explaining his or her reasoning. Read aloud the fact that corresponds with each misconception.

## Activity #3: The Power to Accept and Change

*Activity Aim:* In this activity, students are presented with a few different scenarios citing typical teens and their goals, plus the positive and negative factors in place for each teen as he or she attempts to reach those goals. Through discussion and writings, students will decide and describe which circumstances they believe the teens in each scenario must accept and which they have the power to change to reach their goals.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the activity for each student.
2. Read and discuss each scenario together.
3. Have students identify the supports and the hurdles in each scenario.
4. Ask students for written responses to the parts of the situation the teen needs to accept, the parts that could be changed, and some suggestions for what sort of change the teen could put into motion.

## Activity #4: Reality Check

*Activity Aim:* This reproducible activity is designed to help students explore myths and realities surrounding homelessness and the homeless. Students are provided with print quotes reflecting widely held attitudes about the issue. They will reflect on the information presented, research the information to find supporting or conflicting evidence, and then compare their findings to their original reactions to see if and how their ideas about homelessness have changed.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the activity for each student.
2. Read and discuss the introductory paragraph and the quotes together.
3. Invite students to react in writing to the quotes by telling if they agree or disagree with the quotes and why.
4. Invite each student to choose a quote to research (or assign each student a quote). Have students conduct research to discover and record factual evidence to support or discredit each quote. You can copy and distribute the Resource Guide on the back of the Answer Key to get them started.

*Follow-up:* Have students who have researched the same quote meet together to share their findings. Have them combine their findings into a chart presentation to share with the rest of the class.

## Activity #5: Timeline Goals

*Activity Aim:* This reproducible activity is designed to help students understand that one of the reasons Liz was successful was that she managed to hold clear goals backed by determination. Students will be asked to list goals they have achieved in their lives, plus goals they

still wish to attain. They will then place these past and present goals on personal timelines. In this way, students will be able to evaluate how far they have come and see where they are headed. The activity offers a list of questions to guide such goal setting.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the activity for each student.
2. Read and discuss the introductory paragraph together.
3. Talk with students about how reflection on past achievement coupled with goal setting for the future can be important steps in shaping their lives. Discuss the idea that students can create one generic timeline or a series of specific timelines, each reflecting different areas of achievement (academic, physical, creative, personal, etc.).
4. Use chart paper or the board to list some past and present goals of your own and then show how the listed items may be transferred to a timeline. After helping students decide if they each want to create a generic or specific timeline, have them use the page to list past and present goals, and then transfer these goals to a timeline. (To guide their efforts, students may refer to the list of goal-setting questions provided.)

*Follow-up:* Have students share their timelines together. Talk about how reflecting on past accomplishments helps to fuel the determination needed to tackle new goals.

## Activity #6: Self-Esteem Matters

*Activity Aim:* This activity is designed to help students understand how self-esteem and belief in self can help determine success. Students will be offered different scenarios and then told to act them out, both from a position of a person with low self-esteem and from the position of a person with a strong belief in self. As an alternative to role-playing, educators may have students offer responses in writing.

*To Use:*

1. Make a copy of the page for each student.
2. Read and discuss the information presented.
3. Help each student choose a role-playing partner; suggest the partners choose a scenario to act out (from high and low self-esteem vantage points) and then work together to craft the dialogue and actions they will present in each mini-play.

*Follow-up:* Allow time for students to act out their mini-plays before an audience of their peers. Talk about how each vignette makes students feel. Encourage students to identify feelings with specific labels (e.g., hopeless, depressed, energized, confident, etc.). Guide students to understand that the frame of mind and spirit from which we each operate and present ourselves can be positive or negative in nature. Suggest that it is up to each of us whether we act from a place of high or low self-esteem.

# Self-Esteem Matters

In the Lifetime Original Movie, *Homeless to Harvard: The Liz Murray Story*, Liz's strong self-esteem and her belief in herself helped determine her success. Below are different challenging scenarios for you to read. Think about the various ways they might play out, both from the perspective of a person with low self-esteem and from the perspective of a person with strong belief in self.

1. You go shopping with a bunch of kids from school. You try on the types of clothes you like, but one kid laughs out loud at you and makes a big joke about your choices.
2. You are teamed up with two other students to do a science project. But on the Saturday you agree to meet to do the project, only one of the two students shows up to help.
3. You are at a restaurant with friends. The waiter brings you your food, but it is cold and greasy.
4. Your friend asks to borrow your favorite CD. You reluctantly lend it but tell your friend you want it back in one week. Two weeks go by, and your friend has not mentioned the CD.
5. You work very hard on an essay for school, but you do not score well at all. You think the teacher graded unfairly. You want the teacher to look at the paper again and change your grade.