How to talk about homelessness: getting started

This guide was created for Homewards following a FrameWorks UK webinar in 2023.
More recommendations, research and resources are available **here**.

Instead of	Try	Why this matters
Talking about homelessness as an insurmountable crisis 'Homelessness is rising in the UK' 'Ending the homelessness crisis should be a priority'	**Talking about the social cost of homelessness – and what's possible when we work together** 'Rising homelessness hurts us all' 'Together, we can end homelessness'	People care about ending homelessness. But most of us don't believe it's possible – or see our part to play in ending it. Language emphasising connections between us (like we and our) can help overcome fatalism and inertia.
Identifying people by their problems 'The homeless and the vulnerable'	**Using language that puts people first** 'People experiencing / at risk of homelessness'	Defining people by problems can dehumanise – and risks further stigmatising those of us experiencing homelessness.
Using rough sleeping as a shorthand for homelessness 'This initiative will tackle rough sleeping'	**Including less visible forms of homelessness** 'This initiative will tackle homelessness in all its forms – like sofa surfing or rough sleeping'	Most people equate homelessness with rough sleeping. This obscures other, less visible forms of homelessness – and makes it harder for us to advocate for comprehensive solutions.
Talking about homelessness without explaining how it happens	**Explaining the constant pressures that can push us into homelessness** 'The constant pressures of rising rents and soaring prices can push people into homelessness'	Most people assume homelessness is an individual (not societal) level problem – one caused by bad luck, bad relationships, bad choices. This makes it harder for us to think about systems-level solutions and prevention efforts.
Telling individual stories 'Sam lost his job in the pandemic. He was left with no choice but to leave home'	**Telling individual stories in context** 'Like a lot of people on zero-hours contracts, Sam lost his job in the pandemic. He was left with no option but to leave home'	Talking about shared experiences stops stories from being dismissed as exceptional or isolated. Talking about options (instead of choices) gets people thinking about what is and isn't available to us.
Starting with problems 'Homelessness is the biggest problem facing the UK'	**Starting with solutions** 'Together, we can end homelessness. Here's how'	People are concerned about homelessness, but struggle to think about how it can be ended and prevented. Solutions-first content can help avoid fatalism.