Housing Problem Solving (HPS) – Cheat Sheet

HPS is a strengths-based conversation that helps people find housing quickly and keeps them out of the homeless response system. By resolving crises early and reducing the length of time people experience homelessness, we can minimize trauma, preserve limited shelter and housing resources for those with the greatest needs, and strengthen our community's overall response to homelessness.

Steps in HPS

1. **Introduce yourself.** Honor their time, identify your role, and ask permission.
2. **Hear their story.** Listen without judgment and avoid turning the conversation into an assessment.
3. **Explore strengths, networks, and skills.** Ask about friends, family, past housing, income, skills, and what has worked before. Ask permission before asking about income.
4. **Explore short- and long-term housing options.** Consider safe couch surfing, family reunification, shared housing, returning to a rental, or a new unit.
5. **Agree on next steps and follow up.** Be clear about what the client will do, what you will do, and when follow-up will happen. Before ending, confirm the plan, needed resources, transportation or referrals, and follow-up. Only promise what you can deliver.

Housing Problem Solving can be used *at any point* during someone's struggle, but it is best used to prevent or divert a participant from experiencing homelessness.

Components of Empathy

1. Emotion Naming
2. Perspective Taking
3. Staying out of Judgment
4. Validation and Normalization

Housing Options in HPS

1. Doubled Up, Couch Surfing
2. Out-of-Town Family Reunification
3. Return to Rental, Shared Housing, or Other Permanent Housing
4. New Unit / First Month's Rent and Deposit

Common Mistakes in HPS

1. **Rushing to a solution.** Slow down, listen, and give the person space to explore options
2. **Taking over the conversation.** The participant/client should lead decisions on what feels safe and realistic for them.
3. **Making assumptions or leading with stigma.** Approach every conversation with curiosity, dignity, and respect.
4. **Taking notes without explaining why.** Ask permission to take notes, explain how the information will be used, and only record what's necessary.
5. **Turning problem-solving into an eligibility screening.** HPS is not about program criteria or who qualifies for assistance. Keep the conversation focused on understanding the person's housing crisis and supporting them in generating solutions.

Remember

Open-ended questions: "Tell me more about your last place." "Who could you stay with?" "What worked before?" "What would it take for this option to work?" "What do you do (or used to do) for fun?"

When there is a barrier, listen and empathize before offering solutions. Ask what would need to change for the option to work.

Do not enroll a participant/client in a program, make a referral, or do a RISE assessment before HPS.

Generate options, not solutions. The participant/client makes the decision.