

**WHAT TO DO & WHAT NOT TO DO**  
**When You Encounter People Experiencing Homelessness**

Many passers-by *try to ignore* people who appear to be homeless. When conversations do occur, well-intentioned people may say the wrong thing and exacerbate feelings of isolation. Here are a few tips on what you can do to help increase understanding so that Metro Denver residents experiencing homelessness are viewed by others, and regard themselves, as valuable members of our communities. For more information, visit [www.CloseToHomeCO.org](http://www.CloseToHomeCO.org).

| <b>Do</b>   | <b>Don't</b>   |
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| Make eye contact.   | Avoid eye contact or look away.  |
| Smile, nod, and give a "thumb's up" or a friendly wave.   | Frown and shake your head.   |
| Say hello or stop to talk.  | Shout a derogatory remark.   |
| Ask the person his or her name and introduce yourself. Oftentimes people without homes feel anonymous and live in relative isolation. | Don't ask, "Do you have family?" Leave it to the discretion of the individual to share what they are comfortable with.   |
| Ask, "How are you doing?" or "Where did you stay last night?"   | Don't ask, "Why don't you get a job?" Many people without a safe, stable home do work.   |
| Ask the person to share their story.  | Don't ask, "How did you become homeless?" An individual could be between homes and still not perceive that as grounds for being labeled as homeless. There's a difference between <i>experiencing</i> homelessness and <i>identifying</i> as homeless. |
| Ask if they know where the local shelter is. If not, help them look it up.  |  |
| It's okay to give <a href="#">money</a> , food coupons, new socks, etc. if asked and if you would like.                               | Don't put conditions on your gift ("I'll give you some money, but only if you don't use it to buy drugs or alcohol.") or make patronizing comments. When someone is in crisis they will spend the money on what's needed to manage that crisis.        |
| Be safe, just as you would interacting with anyone you do not know.   |  |