

10 Dos and Don'ts in Loving Homeless People

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By Jeremy Myers

As there are different things you should or should not do for homeless people versus those who have a home but are poor, some of the items on the list begin with the words "Homeless" or "Poor" for things that are specific to those groups of people.

10 Things to Do for the Poor and Homeless

1. Get to know the poor and homeless. Spend time with them. Ask them their names, and remember them. Tell them yours. Shake their hands. Be open and friendly. Touch them. Hug those who want hugged. Allow them to tell their stories. Listen. Remember.
2. The poor and homeless are our equals. Honor them, respect them and treat them as our brothers and sisters. Feel honored that they are willing to share their lives with you and that you have the opportunity to spend time with them.
3. Find out from them what they most need. Your presence, your touch, your love, may be at the top of the list. If you're giving them "stuff", personally hand it out. Remember – You're "sharing", be it your time or your stuff.
4. Homeless: Check with your town or city to make sure they do not have an ordinance against distributing food on the street.
5. Homeless: If you distribute food, small items that can be held in the hand and that don't need plates, silverware, ovens or refrigerators work best. If you plan to give out cooked food, make sure hot food (soup, burritos, pizza, etc.) is kept hot until you hand it out, and that cold food (meat sandwiches, etc.) is kept cold until you hand it out.
6. Homeless: Give them new socks and underwear. Bag them individually in Ziplock bags, marked with the size. The highest quality socks and underwear are usually not necessary. When socks and underwear get really dirty they may be thrown out by those who don't have access to a laundromat.
7. Homeless: Give hotel size, single use toiletries – soap, lotion, shampoo, razors (bag one or two disposable razors in Ziploc snack size bags) and so on. Find toothbrushes that have covers. 16 oz. bottles of shampoo or lotion often end up in the garbage (They're too heavy to carry.) You can buy single use items in bulk from hotel supply companies for a few pennies each.
8. Homeless: Many of them have significant dental problems and cannot eat items that require a mouth filled with good teeth, such as apples. They can usually handle bananas, tangerines and oranges.
9. Poor and homeless: Give them clean clothes, blankets, and similar items that are in good condition. Launder and fold them and label them with sizes. Dirty clothes and blankets usually end up in a dumpster.
10. Homeless: Always take bottles of water, regardless of the time of year. Dehydration is a common problem among the homeless.

10 Things Not To Do for the Poor and Homeless

1. Homeless: Never give them money. If they tell you they need it to buy a specific item, buy the item for them.
2. Homeless: Never tell them your address or take them to your home. If you doubt the wisdom of this, let's communicate privately.
3. Homeless: Don't go alone. Don't go in large groups. Groups of three to five work best. Don't go after dark. Mid morning to mid afternoon works best.
4. Homeless: Don't take your wallet or purse or wear expensive jewelry or clothing.

5. Homeless: Don't give them new clothing, with a few exceptions – socks, underwear, and possibly shoes. Why? – Three reasons:
 - a. Expensive new jackets, hoodies, shoes and similar items may endanger them in areas with high populations of street people, where it is likely they'll be mugged (and possibly beaten) and lose that new coat you gave them.
 - b. They frequently sell those items to raise cash to fund their habits. We go the day after Christmas, and they try to sell us brand new coats, shoes, blankets and similar items. Swap meet dealers in vans also patrol the homeless during the holidays, offering to pay cash for new items.
 - c. Many do not have access to laundromats. When the sweatshirt you gave them gets filthy, if they can lay their hands on another one, they'll throw the filthy one in the trash, whether it's the \$1 one you bought at a garage sale or the \$30 one you purchased at the department store.
6. Poor and homeless, but especially the homeless: Do not clean out your attic or closets, bag up the stuff and drop it off on a street corner in the homeless area. Most or all of it will end up in a dumpster. They do not need gold four-inch heels, bell-bottom pants from the 70's and broken blenders. If it's usable, donate it to the thrift shop. Otherwise, throw it in the trash!
7. Homeless: Do not drop off cases of bakery products, such as loaves of bread, packages of rolls, whole cakes and pies, packages of frozen dough, unbaked pizzas, and so on. Most of this will end up in the garbage.
8. Try to avoid giving out "packets" of items, such as a toothbrush, lotion, apple, socks and soap, unless you tell them what is in the packet and ask them which of those items they need. Otherwise, they sort through the packet after you've left and throw away the items they don't want.
9. Avoid giving out major items at Christmas, especially to the homeless. Visit them at Christmas, take along water, tangerines, little bags of crackers, hotel size shampoos and that type of thing. In most urban areas, many of the people who are on the street on the weekend before Christmas and on Christmas day are not homeless. They only pretend to be homeless and are on the street to get free blankets, sleeping bags, coats and similar items which they plan to sell at the swap meet. Hand out the sleeping bags and similar items at least a week on either side of Christmas, when the real homeless people will get them.
10. Avoid giving out large quantities of candy. Many poor and homeless cannot afford dentists and have bad teeth. Also, people who work with drug addicts have advised us against giving out candy. Apparently some addicts will live on drugs and candy if possible.

These are not exhaustive lists. Of course, some of these things may not apply where you live. If you have one homeless guy in your small town who sleeps on the city square, you would probably notice if several other people sat with him on Christmas day, pretending to be homeless so they can receive new blankets and sleeping bags.