

## FACTSHEET:

# Rough Sleeping

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### BACKGROUND

Unfortunately, in London, due to extensive demand on housing some people can find themselves without a place to stay for the night. 'Sleeping rough' is a phrase used to describe people who sleep in public spaces or other areas which are not intended living spaces.

Rough sleeping can be dangerous especially if you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) due to the increased risk of hate crime. If you find yourself rough sleeping you should try to seek help as soon as possible.

### THE LAW

The law recognises rough sleepers by the following definition<sup>i</sup>:

*People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").*

The police have powers of arrest to prevent people from rough sleeping<sup>ii</sup> however they can only use this power if you also fit into one of these categories:

1. There is a shelter nearby, you know about the shelter, and you don't go there.
2. You make a habit of sleeping on the street, even though you have been offered a place in a shelter.
3. You have caused damage, or infected the place with vermin, or it looks like you are going to do so.

(Source: The Pavement<sup>iii</sup>)

In 2011 the government published the paper "Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide<sup>iv</sup>" this plan sets out a commitment to end rough sleeping.

## OUR ADVICE

If you find yourself rough sleeping in London, as well as working with organisations such as Stonewall Housing, you should try to access emergency street outreach projects. In London this can be done through No Second Night by calling the rough sleeping phonenumber on 0870 383 3333 or StreetLink on 0300 500 0914.

You can also self-refer via StreetLink's website:

<http://streetlink.org.uk/i-am-rough-sleeping>

Couch-surfing is where a host allows someone to stay in their home on their couch for free or very low charge. This is mainly aimed at tourists. Obviously couch-surfing comes with risks as you won't know the person who will host you. However, you should weigh up the risk and do what you feel is right for you. Check out [www.couchsurfing.org](http://www.couchsurfing.org) for more information.

If you are rough sleeping, whilst waiting to be picked up by one of the outreach teams, there are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and reduce the risk to your health this includes:

1. Try to find other people who are sleeping rough as you will be safer in a group. However if they make you feel unsafe trust your instincts and move on.
2. You will need a sleeping bag and ideally a yoga mat. If possible also use a layer of cardboard underneath where you are sleeping this will help keep you warm.
3. Never sleep directly on the floor this can be dangerous.
4. Make sure you have warm waterproof clothing. If you don't have these day centres or outreach teams may be able to provide you with some.
5. Day centres are local resources across London that offer services such as a laundry, showers and hot food. Some day centres also have access to doctors. We have a list of London day centres, if you would like this please ask.
6. Store you belonging at a local day centre, especially your identification (ID) such as your passport, bank card and proof of former address. If you find yourself without any ID on the streets it could take a lot longer to get you re-housed.
7. Thermal underwear is a good idea as well as a hat, gloves and scarf.
8. The 24 hour night buses are a good alternative to sleeping on the street as they are warm.
9. Try to find somewhere protected from the elements. Children's playgrounds in local parks may offer some shelter such under the slide.
10. Sleeping rough is rough! If you find it emotional you could call the Samaritans for emotional support (08457 90 90 90) they are open 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

Stonewall Housing's advice service can support you to look at your housing options in more detail. We can do this by:

1. Exploring if the council have a legal duty to house you (see our factsheet Local Authority Housing)
2. Referring you to a some social housing providers
3. Helping you explore the private rented market

Once you are housed we may also be able to offer you support to maintain your tenancy.

If you are rough sleeping you may find out factsheets on Severe Weather and Cold Weather Shelters useful.

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### ***Further information***

- The Runaway Guide has a useful guide on rough sleeping here:<http://www.runawayguide.com/runaway-travel-guides/how-to-sleep-on-the-street/>
- More information on hyperthermia can be found on the NHS website <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hypothermia/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- The Pavement have published this excellent Rights Guide for Rough Sleepers <http://www.thepavement.org.uk/pdfs/rights-guide.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6009/1713784.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6009/1713784.pdf) accessed 16.12.2013

<sup>ii</sup> Vagrancy Act 1824

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.thepavement.org.uk/pdfs/rights-guide.pdf> accessed 16.12.2013

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.nosecondnightout.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/no-second-night-out.pdf> accessed 16.12.2013

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If you have any feedback on this factsheet please email [info@stonewallhousing.org](mailto:info@stonewallhousing.org)