

Resource Article

Street Children

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There are between 100 and 200 million street children in our world today. More of them are boys than girls. Most are between 5 and 16 years old. They are often perceived as being violent and of little value. In order to survive, they steal, take drugs, beg, and work as prostitutes. But street children are also often loyal to their friends, resilient, and self-sufficient.

What Is a Street Child?

A street child is anyone under 18 years old who lives in streets, parks, shopping centers, and other public spaces. This young person sleeps, eats, socializes, has sex, raises babies, and works illegally on the streets. Why Are They on the Streets?

There are many reasons young people live on the streets. Some ran away from abusive families. Others grew up on the streets and know nothing else. Some left rural areas to find adventure or employment in the city. Some simply wanted to live without responsibilities and rules.

Some were abandoned by their families because of poverty or natural disasters. Others were forced to leave their homes when their parents began new relationships. Still others were bribed to come to the cities and were then sold into prostitution. If they were able to escape, they escaped to the streets.

Their Common Problems

Family: Without families, young people lack love and care. Street children see gangs as their new families. Older children often parent the younger ones. They provide protection, identity, and a sense of belonging.

Health: Street children may use drugs to help them face the harsh realities of the street. Using drugs is a means of escape from the neglect, pain, loneliness, and hopelessness.

They often abuse alcohol and marijuana. They may sniff paint thinner, glue, or nail polish. These are cheap and easy to get. Selling drugs gives them status among their friends and money for food.

Street children suffer from poor nutrition, poor hygiene, and lack of health care. Many have no knowledge of diseases such as AIDS, including how these diseases are contracted.

Education: Living on the streets is very stressful, and children's mental development suffers. Also, once they live on the streets, few continue to pursue an education. Many are illiterate or have only a basic education. Most street children grow up and lack the abilities needed to get a job.

What Can You Do?

Building trust is the key to the long process of bringing change to the lives of street children. You can build trust by showing empathy, not pity. Show respect, acceptance, patience, and genuine concern for them. Listen to their stories.

Throughout the relationship, model positive behaviors for them. You must be reliable. You must respect what they tell you and keep it in confidence. Continue to build the relationship, especially by asking questions and listening when they talk. Many street children do not have strong communication skills, so this may be more difficult than it sounds.

Set limits on their behaviors. For example, if they want to be respected, they must also treat you with respect.

Whenever possible, provide health care and basic education. Ideally, you should get them into a care facility, usually a halfway house.

Street children are often exploited and abused by adults. They are usually shunned by society. Because of their vulnerability, they remain 1 of the most disadvantaged groups of at-risk youth. When you reach out with love and support, you can bring change and hope to those who are hurting.