

Advice for specific groups

Young people

If you, or someone you support, are 24 years old or younger, you can get more help depending on your exact age. If you're having trouble at home or do not have a place to live, you're not alone and it's not your fault.

Whether it's us at Housing Rights, or another organisation, we'll make sure you get help.

Urgent help for young people

The health and social care trust, (also called 'social services' or the 'trust') is in charge of taking care of you. They'll help you find a place to stay and get support, including:

- checking your needs and situation – they must do this within ten days. They'll look at why you can't live in your home and what housing or other support you need.
- talking about where you'd like to live, if you're working or studying, and who you know that can also support you
- finding a place for you to stay – this can include staying with someone you know, foster care, children's homes or residential schools

Health and social care trust and other organisations

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[Contact the trust in your area](#) to get help or the 16+ team at social services to speak to a social worker.

If you're not getting the help you need, or your social worker is not listening to you, you can contact:

- [Childline, 0800 1111](#)
- [MACS, 028 9031 3163](#) – for any support needs
- [VOYPIC, 028 9024 4888](#) – if you're in or have been in care

If you need a place to stay now, you can also call a hostel:

- Malone Foyer (South Belfast), [0800 171 2222](#)
- Flax Foyer (North Belfast), [028 9059 3301](#)
- Strand Foyer (Derry/Londonderry), [028 7128 1155](#)
- Jefferson Court (Derry/Londonderry), [028 7136 1306](#)
- Slate (Omagh), [028 8225 9000](#)

Under 16

If you're 16 or younger and have nowhere to live or do not feel safe in your home, you're legally entitled to help. Social services will find you a place to stay. You can also talk to VOYPIC to see what you should get. It can depend on whether you spent time in care.

Age 16-18

Either social services or the Housing Executive is responsible for helping you. They will work with whoever needs to take the lead in supporting you.

Over 18

Usually, the Housing Executive is in charge of support if you are 18 or older. Social services may still help you if you spent time in care and you're:

- 21 or younger
- 24 or younger, and still in full-time education
- destitute and vulnerable, and the Housing Executive does not have a duty to help
- vulnerable and your benefits do not cover your housing payments

Leaving care

When it's time to leave care, start getting ready to live on your own. Taking care of yourself can feel scary. Getting ready can make it easier once you're not in care anymore. You should:

- talk to your social worker to sort out what housing support you need and make a plan
- contact [Make the Call](#) to see what benefits you can get
- [speak to our advisers](#) to make sure you're getting all the support you need

Students

Many students live in college or university residences or housing, or a private rental. As a student, you may be a tenant or a licensee. It's important to [know your tenancy type](#) so that you understand your rights. Usually, students cannot get benefits to pay for housing costs.

Options for students include:

Residence halls

Speak to the welfare officer of your student union to find out your options. You're usually a 'licensee' which means the school can easily evict you. But you should check the terms in your agreement which explains your rights and responsibilities. Depending on the terms, you may be a tenant even if your agreement is titled as a 'licence to occupy.'

Private rentals

Such as a shared house, room in a shared house, or flat. Check Studentpad to find private rentals. [Work out a budget](#) and make sure you can afford it.

University housing

These are private rentals owned by the college or university. Priority goes to students with children, mature students or students with specific needs.

Purpose-built student housing

Another private rental option managed by private companies. Apply directly to the company for a place.

Wherever you live as a student, make sure you understand agreements before you sign and stay on top of your bills. It can be very expensive if you don't. Our advisers can talk you through the process.

Your contract explains when and how to pay. Make sure to keep receipts when you pay, including the deposit. If you're having a hard time paying or might fall behind on payments:

- reach out to your landlord right away, you can work together to come up with a solution that works for you both
- contact your student union and ask about student hardship funds
- [speak to our advisors](#) to look at repayment plans you can afford

People in prison

Each prison has a Housing Rights adviser who can help you with housing issues.

Going into custody is stressful. You may be thinking about what happens to your belongings and your home. There is support in the prison to talk about these things and sort things out. There are also many organisations to help you when you enter and leave prison.

If you want to keep your home while you're in prison, it helps if you can make a plan. You may be able to get help with paying for your home. If you do not pay your rent or mortgage while in prison, you may lose your home. Sometimes, giving up your home can be a better option but it is important to [get advice](#) before you give it up.

Paying for your home while in custody

To decide what to do with your home, you can:

Check your benefits – you might not be able to keep getting some benefits while you are in custody, so [check what benefits you can still get](#). You must tell any agencies you get benefits from that you are going to prison.

Decide if you should keep your home – some things are up to your landlord but if you decide to keep the home you own, there are a few ways you can get support:

- you can get a loan for your mortgage while you're in prison if you're single, got Universal Credit, and are in custody for six months or fewer
- if you have someone else living in your property, they might be able to get a loan to help pay for your share
- friends or family can pay while you're in custody and may qualify for benefits

Help with your rent while in custody

You may be able to keep getting Universal Credit or Housing Benefit to help pay your rent.

You can keep getting Universal Credit to pay rent while you're in prison if you:

- got Universal Credit before you went into custody, and
- will be in custody for six months or less

You can keep getting Housing Benefit to pay rent while you're in prison if you got Housing Benefit before you went into custody and you're:

- sentenced and will spend 13 weeks or less in custody, or
- on remand and will spend 52 weeks or less in custody

If you're on recall, your benefits can continue up until your first commissioner date – even if you go straight to panel.

Giving up your home

You can give up your home before you go to prison or while you're there. You may want to think about if you can still afford to keep your home or if it's safe for you to go back. Giving up your home is a good option if you are going to prison for a long time or if you cannot afford to keep up with payments.

[Speak to our advisers](#) before you give up your home. It can impact your housing options in the future.

Private landlords can give you notice to quit while you are in prison. They can start the legal process to evict you much faster than social landlords and do not have the same duty to store your belongings. If you are a private tenant in prison, speak to one of the Housing Rights advisers based in the prison or ask someone to contact our helpline.

Social landlords can't evict you because you're going to prison. If you want to give up the tenancy, [contact the Housing Executive](#) and ask to fill out a non-abandonment form. This lets the landlord know that you aren't abandoning the property and you intend to come back and pay for the tenancy while you are away.

Leaving custody

If you do not have a place to stay when you leave custody, [speak to our advisers](#) about your options - they can make a report for the Housing Executive to start the homelessness assessment.

There are four parts to the homelessness assessment and a few things to keep in mind. As someone leaving custody, you:

- cannot pass the first test (homelessness test) until your release is in 28 days or fewer
- might not be eligible for support if you were convicted of certain offences
- pass the priority need test if you were in custody for four years or more (you can still pass this test for other reasons such as a disability or health condition)
- may be limited to certain areas of choice if you were convicted of certain offences

You may not hear the decision until just before you are due to leave.

Other people and organisations who can help on release from prison are:

- [NIACRO](#) staff
- your probation officer
- your sentence manager

People experiencing domestic abuse

You should always feel safe in your home. If you feel unsafe or threatened, call the police.

You should be safe from any kind of abusive behaviour. This includes physical violence, controlling behaviour, financial and sexual abuse. You can get support for any kind of situation, including staying safe in or [leaving your home](#).

The Housing Executive will never talk to your abuser about your situation. They may want to speak to people or groups that you've reached out to such as a solicitor, friend or family member.

Leaving your home

You can get help finding a new home or making your current home safe. You can:

- ask the Housing Executive for help getting a place to stay, including temporary housing
- get court orders to keep the abuser away from you and out of your home

The Housing Executive must give you temporary housing if they have reason to believe that you:

- are homeless or cannot go back to your current home, and
- experienced or are at risk of violence in your home (also called, 'priority need')

You can get free bus or rail tickets from the Housing Executive or Women's Aid to travel to a refuge or emergency accommodation.

You can [get help paying for two homes](#) if you left because you were threatened with violence and you plan to go back, and you're entitled to benefits. If you left because abuse and your rent is not covered, [speak to our advisors](#) for help.

Staying in your home

If you want to stay in your home, speak to:

- [a solicitor](#) to get a court order that keeps the abuser out of your home
- the Housing Executive to see if they can get help make your home safer

Keep an abuser away from you and your home

An occupation order keeps the abuser away from your home even if you're not the main tenant, owner, or if they're the legal owner or tenant. Call the police if you have a court order keeping them out of your home and they break this.

A non-molestation order prevents the abuser from bothering you or coming to your home or anywhere near you. It helps give you time to stay in your current home and work out long-term decisions. Speak to a solicitor about getting a non-molestation order.

Get help keeping your home safe

The Housing Executive runs a sanctuary scheme to help keep families safe from domestic violence by professionally installing proper security (such as alarms, CCTV) for social tenants. After the police check your home and make a recommendation, you can decide if you want this additional security.

Other support if you're affected by domestic abuse

Other organisations that can support people affected by domestic abuse are:

- [24-hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline](#)
- [LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)
- [The Men's Advisory Project](#)
- [Women's Aid NI](#)

If you're not entitled to benefits because of your immigration status, it can be harder to think about leaving an abusive situation. Speak to one of the organisations above to check if you can get help.

People seeking asylum

If you're trying to get asylum, the Home Office is in charge of your case. Organisations that can support you include:

- [Bryson Intercultural](#) – agency appointed by the Home Office to support people seeking asylum with accommodation
- [The Law Centre](#) – an organisation that can give immigration law advice
- [Starling Collective](#) – volunteer organisation supporting people seeking asylum

More advice

- [Homelessness assessment](#)
- [Emergency help](#)