



How to Address Panhandling

This document was created to respond to questions we receive about why homeless people panhandle and what to do when a panhandler approaches them. Many panhandlers are not homeless and of those who are, they represent only a small percentage of the population. We all need help at some point in our lives. It is how we help that makes the difference.

- People panhandle because they have learned it works! Some can make a lot of money in just a few hours. People's generosity encourages the begging.
- Generally, there are two types of panhandling: passive and aggressive. Passive is playing to your caring side. These individuals want you to feel sorry for them. They often have a sad story to complement their request for cash. They also might try to make small talk first before asking for money. Aggressive panhandling is often playing to your fear of just trying to get out of the situation. They send the message "the sooner you give me money, the sooner I will leave you alone."
- General Rule of Thumb – Never give cash!
 - Usually the response to cash requests is about us and not what would be best for the homeless person. We have been taught to help people – parents, church, civic groups, etc. Our emotional need is to help and we may feel guilty if we don't. Some people just want to get the panhandler to go away as quickly as possible. But in the end – it is not a response that helps the homeless person in the long run.
 - Studies have shown that a majority of those who panhandle can get their needs met by service providers for free food, shelter, clothing etc. Oftentimes, these individuals are panhandling for money for drugs or alcohol which in turn, can enable them and keep them homeless longer. We encourage to give your money to the agencies that help the homeless so that you know your money is going towards helping them out of homelessness not maintaining it.
- Say no in a polite but firm way.
 - If you would like, give them a resource brochure or tell them to call 2-1-1 for resources
 - Sometimes when you say no, they will show anger
 - This can also be a panhandling technique – it has gotten results. Most people don't like conflict and especially not in this uncomfortable setting. Many people will then give money just to get out of the situation and make the panhandler go away.
 - Respond with calmness and politeness. Keep your voice at a lower level. Say something like, "I hear your frustration but I can't give you cash.... We are not allowed... I already support..."
 - Remain with firm and consistent boundaries. Once you say "no" don't change your mind. When you change your answer from a "no" to "yes", you are just confirming the notion that if the panhandler hassles someone long enough they will give something.
 - If you are able, one of the best techniques is to keep moving. Get to your car and leave. Acknowledge the person by saying "sorry I can't do that" but by stopping you are giving them more time to try to talk you out of something.
- Once homeless persons learn that panhandling in a certain area will not get them cash, then it will be greatly reduced, if not stopping completely.