

COUCH SURFER HANDBOOK

for couch surfers

PREPARED BY:





A NOTE FROM RABBI MENDEL KASTEL OAM



Jewish House
People helping people

Welcome to the Couch Surfer Handbook. This is a resource for couch surfers and has been designed to ensure your safety and provide tips on how to deal with the various issues that you may encounter as a couch surfer.

Jewish House acknowledges that couch surfing may not fit the stereotype of a homeless person, but couch surfing is a common form of homelessness. Couch Surfing can lead to a lack of belonging, low self-esteem, and it can be challenging not having long-term accommodation of your own.

We have created this handbook to help your experience as a couch surfer be a positive one.

Should you begin to feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or need further advice while couch surfing, we have developed a dedicated Couch Surfer Support Service which you can access by texting on 0480 049 922 or filling out the web form www.couchsurfer.org.au

Our Textline is available in 109 languages which can be accessed by scanning the QR codes provided in this handbook and the website.

Our service is supported by professional workers who can help you navigate through your time couch surfing and assist you to connect with other services to ensure you have stable, and longer-term accommodation.

Our ultimate goal is to provide early intervention and prevent long-term homelessness. We would like to thank all those who helped make this handbook happen in particular Michelle Lewis and the support from DCJ.

We wish you well and hope you find this handbook helpful during this time.

Yours sincerely,

Rabbi Mendel Kastel
CEO Jewish House

Disclaimer: Any content created by us, whether published on the website or transmitted through any other means: Is not legal advice; is intended to provide a general summary form of legal and other information regarding couch surfing; is not intended to be a substitute for professional legal or financial advice and should not be relied upon as such and is general in nature and does not take into account your circumstances.



CONTENTS

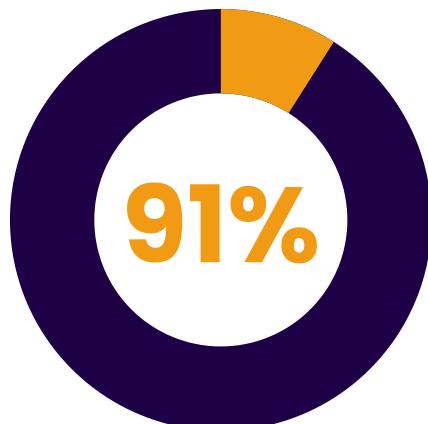
A Couch Surfer is a person who typically moves from household to household, intermittently, who is not regarded as being part of the household and who does not have any form of leased tenure over any accommodation*

- COUCH SURFING STATS IN OUR COMMUNITY
- COUCH SURFING ETIQUETTE
- SAFETY CHECKLIST
- CONVERSATION STARTERS
- IF YOU ARE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- WHY DO PEOPLE COUCH SURF
- RESOURCES
- LEGALS
- SAMPLE COUCH SURFING AGREEMENT
- WHAT IS MEND? HOW IT WORKS
- TESTIMONIALS

*Source Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

DID YOU KNOW?

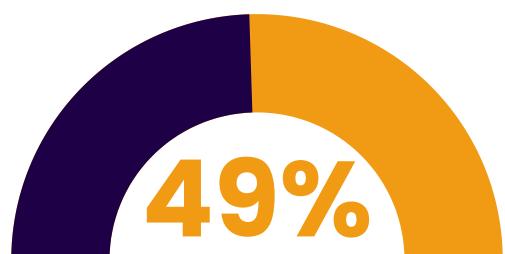
Couch surfing stats in Australia



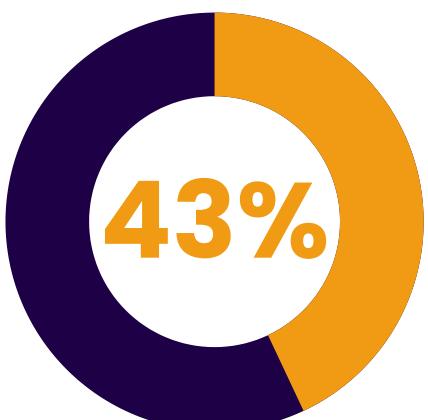
of couch surfers are unemployed*



of couch surfers are female*



of couch surfers are aged
between 15 and 24 years



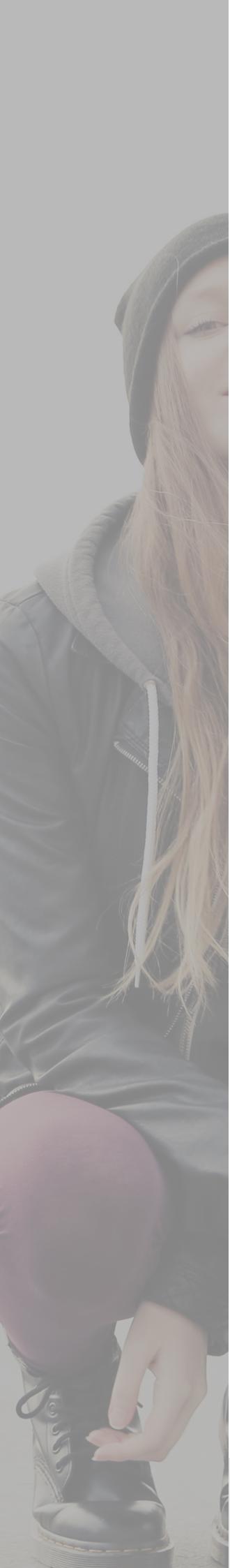
of couch surfers have experienced
family or relationship breakdowns*



1 in 5

couch surfers experience repeat
episodes of homelessness*

*source data from AIHW 2011 - 2015



COUCH SURFING ETIQUETTE

As a couch surfer, what is the etiquette?

As you are being hosted in someone's home, helping around the house where appropriate may be a way to respectfully couch surf. Keeping yourself and belongings to the agreed areas of the host's home is an important part of couch surfing etiquette. It is important to show respect for the house rules and abide by things such as curfews, lights out, noise levels and policies on visitors.

Risks for the Couch Surfer

Given the substantial number of young people and women (and LGBTQIA+ persons) who are couch surfers, there are sometimes expectations of unpaid, forced labour or sexual favours being exchanged for a place to sleep. This should never be agreed to or provided. Any request made, or circumstance which make you feel uncomfortable, threatened or unsafe are all 'red flag' situations and should be addressed properly or reported.

In an emergency call the police 000

Experiences of couch surfers

Couch surfing can be a positive experience when you are provided a much needed sense of relief in knowing that you have a place to stay for a period of time. On the other hand, couch surfing can be a dangerous, unstable and frightening experience for those using it as a last resort to a means of shelter so they don't end up sleeping on the street. Please get in touch with MEND via www.couchsurfer.org.au, we can help you navigate this situation in a safe, secure way.



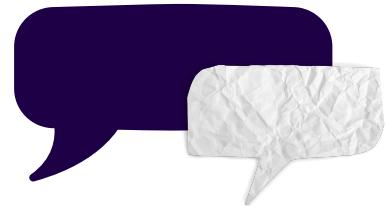
SAFETY CHECKLIST

INSTRUCTIONS: Below are a list of things to consider before settling on a place to stay. Your safety and security are important to the team at MEND and we want to make sure that you feel comfortable about the short-term situation until you find a longer-term solution.

- ✓ This feels like a safe environment.
- ✓ I feel comfortable about staying here.
- ✓ I know how long I can stay.
- ✓ My host and I seem to communicate well.
- ✓ I have a comfortable place to sleep and space to work or study.
- ✓ I have enough privacy and privacy boundaries have been discussed.
- ✓ My mental health and general well-being aren't at risk living in this home.
- ✓ My host and I have discussed boundaries around physical contact.
- ✓ I understand the financial arrangements.
- ✓ My host and I have discussed and agreed on chores I will do.
- ✓ These chores are not excessive or unfair.
- ✓ I understand the arrangement about bringing guests home.
- ✓ This home is free from dangers and triggers for me
- ✓ There is no violence, illicit drug use, or excessive drinking.
- ✓ I agree not to use illicit drugs during my stay.
- ✓ My host is supporting me to connect with services for housing, healthcare (Medicare), education, training and employment (Centrelink).



CONVERSATION STARTERS



For you to feel comfortable, you need to know the rules of the house. For the host to feel comfortable, they'll want to have a full and frank conversation with you so both of you understand the arrangement. The sooner you do this the better. Be open and find ways to make it work for everyone in the house.

LENGTH OF STAY & REVIEW PROCESS

Be sure to agree to a start date and an end date for the stay. Have an agreed review process in place and be sure to schedule regular conversations to check in with each other to see how you're both managing with the arrangement.

RENT, FOOD, CHORES, CLEANLINESS

Are you expected to contribute to rent and food? Is it okay for you to help yourself to anything in the kitchen? Is it okay for you to cook for yourself, do you expect to eat some meals together? What about household chores and keeping the home clean and tidy?

BATHROOM, SHOWER

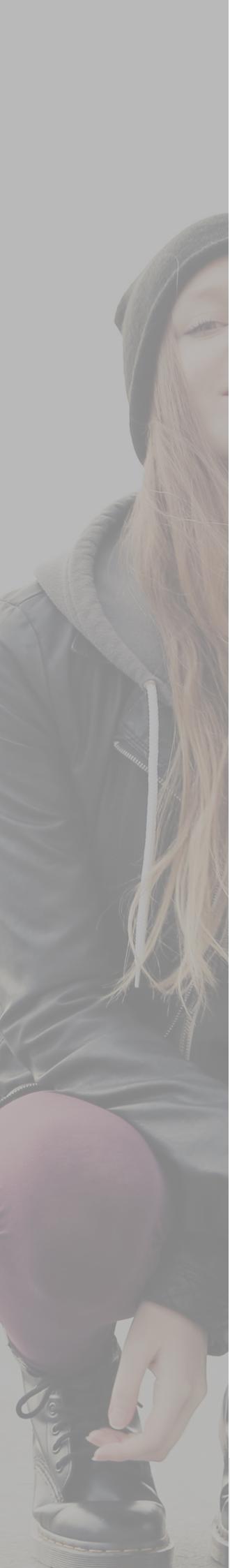
How does the house run? Is there a roster for people showering depending on their routines? It's a good idea to discuss this. What are the expectations about people cleaning the toilet, shower screen after they've used it? Where to hang a wet towel is worth mentioning!

PRIVACY, DRESS CODE, LANGUAGE, CONFIDENTIALITY

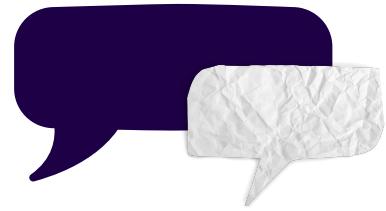
What do you each expect regarding personal privacy? How about dress code in the house so as not to make anyone uncomfortable? What language is offensive and shouldn't be used? The confidentiality of information seen or heard needs to be discussed too.

BRINGING GUESTS OVER, CURFEW, NOISE

Is it okay for you to bring guests home & what about guests for overnight stays? Check with your host! What about a curfew? All households need to consider each other when it comes to noise, music, how loud the TV is, etc. so talk about these things..



CONVERSATION STARTERS



KEYS, SECURITY, PARKING

Will you have a set of keys? Will you be responsible for setting the alarm or turning it off if you are the last one to leave the house or the first one home? If you have a car, are there places you shouldn't park (i.e. blocking the driveway/garage)

INTERNET, TV

What's the arrangement for internet access? Is there an unlimited plan or is there restricted usage? Discuss streaming, usage limits, and heavy traffic times. This applies to using the TV, both live to air and subscriptions.

ALONE TIME / TOGETHER TIME

This is a conversation you should have early on. Are there times of the day/days of the week when it would be good for you to be out of the house? On the flip side, what about some together time, eating meals together, etc.

AIRCONDITIONING, HEATING, LIGHTS

This is as simple and yet as complicated as sharing expectations. We all try to keep the electricity bills down while wanting to be comfortable. Should lights be turned off when leaving the room? Can the aircon/heating be switched on and how about the temperature?

KITCHEN & COOKING

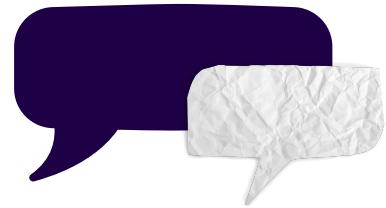
As well as discussing if you'll sit down to meals together, it's a good idea to talk about the use of the kitchen and the appliances. What can be used, when and what are the expectations around cleaning up afterward? Please do be specific

STORAGE AND VALUABLES

Is there anywhere for you to store your valuables, hang your clothes, and unpack some of your personal items? How about a safe place for things you won't unpack but need to keep in a secure location?



CONVERSATION STARTERS



PHYSICAL / INTIMATE CONTACT

It's important to discuss what's appropriate and have clear boundaries around physical contact such as horsing around with children living in the home. It's vital to have very firm guidelines for intimacy and intimate touching between you and the host/family.

PETS

If there are pets involved (hosts or couch surfers), be sure to talk about their place in the house. Do they have free reign to wander in any room they like or are they restricted to certain areas of the house or do they stay outside? Discuss care and safety issues too, like toxic foods.

POOL AND GARDEN

Are the pool and gardens common property in a strata block or is it a private area? Are there any pool rules, time of day restrictions, noise restrictions, etc? Ask about maintenance such as bringing in cushions from the sunbeds, scooping leaves, etc.

LAUNDRY

Every washing machine and dryer works a little differently. Ask for a run-through of how the laundry equipment works, along with washing detergent, access to the clothesline, and the laundry schedule if there is one.

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

This is an important conversation to have early on. Be honest and open about drug use and alcohol consumption. This affects everyone living in the house and guidelines need to be set and followed.

ENDING THE STAY

If you need more time with the host, don't leave it to the last day of your planned stay. Discuss extending your stay ASAP. Couch surfing with a caring host is an opportunity for you to have time to re-establish yourself and look for permanent housing options.



IF YOU ARE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

IF YOU ARE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PLEASE TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

The time after leaving a domestic violence situation can be very dangerous.

If you are in immediate danger call 000

1. Are you concerned that the perpetrator would be looking for you to harm you? Please call DV Line on 1800737732 to find safer accommodation.

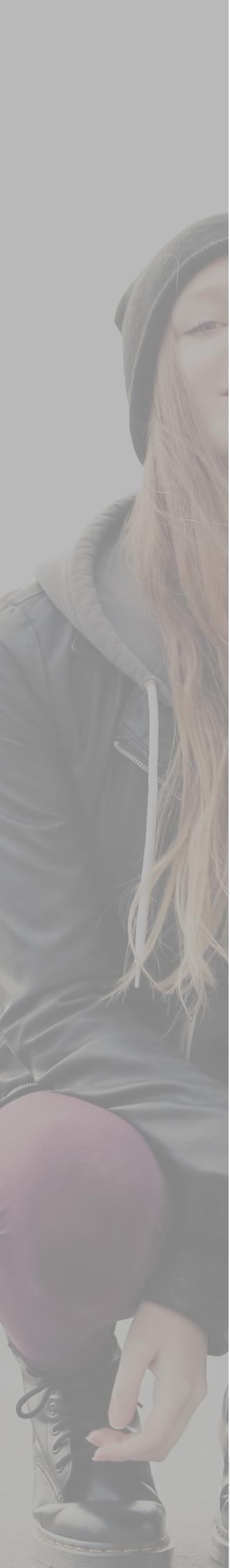
2. Do you feel that he/she might come after you to this home, and does the perpetrator know the Host? If you trust the Host explain the situation to your host and ask them not to tell anyone about your situation. Always call the DV line if you are feeling unsafe.

3. Even if you feel safe where you are, it's still a good idea to make a safety plan. All safety plans are unique to your situation however here are some ideas: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/safety-planning>

4. There are many apps to help you be safe. Each app has different information, so check them all out.....

- Sunny app
- Daisy
- Girls Gotta Know
- Help me
- Positive Pathways
- Penda
- Emergency +

5. There may be more risks to your privacy and safety if someone still has access to your deviceS. Please use the Online Safety checklist <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence/online-safety-planning/online-safety-checklist>



WHY DO PEOPLE COUCH SURF?

Why do people couch surf?

People couch surf for a variety of reasons, one being that they are currently experiencing homelessness and need to find a safe place to avoid sleeping rough. A person may use couch surfing as a form of temporary accommodation due to family violence or other issues until they find a more permanent arrangement.

Although couch surfers are predominantly young people, people of all ages may find themselves couch surfing at times throughout their life, while seeking long-term housing.

It is important to understand the link between couch surfing in your hometown and homelessness. Couch surfing comes under the umbrella of 'secondary homelessness'. The definition of this describes an individual who is moving from temporary 'shelter to shelter'.

'Slipping through the cracks' is a common theme among couch surfers who have been failed by the social structures in which they exist. Although couch surfing is considered a secondary form of homelessness, many couch surfers do not consider themselves homeless which excludes them from a system that is intended to support those in their circumstance. This want to remain out of a system, often reflects a lack of trust in how their unique situation would be handled by service providers.

What are youth services, domestic violence, and homelessness services, and how do they work?

Homelessness services are a variety of programs that support people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. They are usually run by not-for-profit agencies, which are of different sizes and offer different types of assistance. These agencies receive government funding to deliver accommodation and interpersonal services, including crisis/emergency accommodation, accommodation placement and/or support, housing information, public rental housing, advice, and case management.

Resources NSW

We are here to help you navigate the available resources and advocate for you to achieve the best outcomes.

Register with us and we'll be there for you every step of the way.

In an emergency call **000**

If you need a bed tonight ring **link-2-home 1800 152 152**

If you are a couch surfer and need assistance text **0480 049 922**

 CALL

CHILD PROTECTION | 13 21 11
BEYOND BLUE | 1300 224 636
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NSW | 1800 737 732
KIDS HELPLINE | 1800 551 800
LIFELINE | 13 11 14
LINK2HOME HOMELESSNESS | 1800 152 152
MENTAL HEALTH LINE | 1800 011 511

 VISIT

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS
www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/services

 REGISTER

WWW.COUCHSURFER.ORG.AU



www.couchsurfer.org.au

Page 11



National Resources

Australia Wide:

Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636
Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
Lifeline – 131114
Headspace – 1800 650 890

Australian Capital Territory

Homeless line – Social Housing and Homelessness Services – 1800 176 468
DV Line – Domestic Violence Crisis Services (DVCS) – (02) 62 800 900
Child Protection- Child and Youth Protection Service - 1300 556 729
-ACT Policing-131444 (to report)
Homeless Legal Service- Street Law- 1800 787 529 or (02) 62 187 900

Northern Territory

Homeless line – NT Shelter – (08) 89 854 389
DV Line – Dawn House – (08) 89 451 388
Child Protection- Child Protection Reporting line - 1800 700 250(Hotline)
Homeless Legal Service- DCLS (Darwin Community Legal Services) - 1800 312 953

Queensland

Homeless line – Homeless Hotline - 1800 474 753
DV Line – Domestic Violence Action Centre (07) 38 163 000
Child Protection- Child Safety (After Hours Service - 1800 177 135)
During hours
Brisbane - 1300 682 254
For North Queensland - 1300 684 062
North Queensland- 1300 706 147
South East - 1300 679 844
South West- 1800 316 855
Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland - 1300 703 362
Homeless Legal Service - Homeless Person Legal Clinic- (07) 38 466 317



www.couchsurfer.org.au

Page 12



National Resources

South Australia

Homeless Line – Homeless Connect – 1800 003 308
DV Line – Domestic Violence Crisis Services – 1300 782 200
After-Hours Crisis Care - 131 611
Child Protection - Child Abuse Report Line- 131 478
Homeless Legal Service - Justice Net SA - (08) 82 322 282
SA Helpline - 1800 025 539 (Homeless Person Legal Aid)

Tasmania

Homeless Line – Housing and Homeless Services (03) 6 278 2817
DV Line – The Family Violence Counselling and Support Services – 1800 608122
Child Protection - Advice and Referral Line - 1800 000 123 / Child Safety Services
Homeless Legal Service - Legal Aid Advice - 1300 366 611

Victoria

Homeless Line – Contact Housing Victoria – 1800 825 955
DV Line – Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre - (03) 99 289 600/ 1800 015 188
Child Protection- Child Protection Intake - 1300 884 706
After Hours Emergency Child Protection- 131 278 (5pm-9am)
Homeless Legal Service- VIC Legal Aid- 1800 825 955

Western Australia

Homeless Line – Entry Point – 1800 124 684 or (08) 64 960 001
DV Line – Women's Domestic Violence Helpline – (08) 92 231 188
Child Protection - Department of Communities - 1800 273 889 (Central intake team)
Homeless Legal Service - Street Law Centre -1800 752 992
Mandatory Report Service- 1800 708 704



www.couchsurfer.org.au

Page 13





LEGALITIES

Legalities for couch surfers

As a couch surfer, you are considered a 'guest' under The Residential Tenancies Act, and therefore you have little to no rights to protect yourself or your belongings. In this situation, you might feel especially vulnerable. If you would like to speak with someone about your legal rights please see the list of resources below.

Because of these legal vulnerabilities, it is a good idea to negotiate and agree on a length of stay and discuss the arrangement and the boundaries before you move in and agree on a secure place for you to keep your belongings and your valuables.

Jewish House and other services are here to help navigate and mediate where required, to make the couch surfing experience as positive as possible for you and your host.

Helpful contacts

Justice Connect
www.justiceconnect.org.au

Homeless Persons Legal Service (HPLS)
Phone (+61 2) 8898 6500
Web: <http://www.piac.asn.au>



COUCH SURFING AGREEMENTS

How important is having a host-surfer agreement?

It's very important that both you and your host have discussed the terms of your stay. Agree on the length of time that you will be in the house and the house rules. Understanding the way the house works and all the things mentioned in the conversation starters will help make your stay more comfortable and make you feel more a part of the household. This way, there can be fewer misunderstandings, assumptions, and key factors left to chance.

What are standard time frames for staying, and how do you implement exit strategies?

Stay times can vary, from a single overnight stay to stays of multiple days or weeks. The length of your stay in a host's home must be negotiated at the start of the stay.

It's also a good idea for longer stays to have regular reviews to check in with each other.

Regular reviews are a great idea. They give you the chance to discuss extending the stay if you need more time to find suitable long-term accommodation or end the stay earlier if there are unresolved issues that can't be sorted out.

Disputes can be managed and resolved through third parties – who can either translate if you and your host don't speak the same language or can mediate any issues if you are finding it difficult to come to an understanding. For further assistance reach out to our couch surfer support services www.couchsurfer.org.au

SAMPLE COUCH SURFING AGREEMENT

This COUCH SURFER AGREEMENT is made on _____/_____/_____

Between:

HOST/S _____
("the host/s")

And

COUCH SURFER: _____
("the couch surfer")

Together referred to as "the parties"

FOR THE HOME AT: _____
("the home")

1.____ The host hereby invites the Couch surfer licence to stay for a period of _____ days/weeks/months ("the Term"), beginning on _____ ("the Commencement Date") and ending on _____.

2.____ The couch surfer agrees to leave on the date agreed unless the agreement is extended through mutual discussion and arrangement

3.____ The parties agree that no person other than the couch surfer is permitted to live in or stay at the home during the specified term or any part thereof unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the host.

4.____ The Host agrees to allow the couch surfer to stay rent-free for the term of this agreement, in return for the carrying out of such duties as are noted in the Schedule attached.

5.____ 'The host' and 'the couch surfer' agree not to make any claim against the other for personal injury/loss/damage/breakages that may arise during the stay. Both host and couch surfer agrees to investigate necessary insurance cover should they deem it necessary.

6.____ The couch surfer agrees to take all reasonable steps in relation to the security, care, and upkeep of the home during their stay.

7.____ This agreement may be extended by mutual agreement of the Parties, communicated either in writing or by email.

8.____ Nothing in this agreement absolves the parties from their statutory and common law duties and responsibilities, nor abrogates their legal privileges, rights, and remedies in respect of the subject matter of this agreement.



SAMPLE COUCH SURFING AGREEMENT CONTINUED

PAGE 2

9.____ In the unlikely event that any dispute should arise in relation to this couch surfing arrangement, the parties agree to use their best endeavours to settle the matter in a fair and amicable manner.

10.____ However, should any dispute arise which they are unable to resolve between themselves, the Parties agree in the first instance to have the dispute mediated by a mediator accredited to the Australian Mediation Associations.

(signed by host/s)

(print name of host/s)

(signed by couch surfer)

(print name of couch surfer)

(signed by witness)

(print name of witness)

*In signing this agreement the parties acknowledge that couchsurfer.org.au is not a party to this agreement, nor will it become involved in any disputes which may arise between the parties, or participate in any other way in relation to this couch surfer arrangement.

SAMPLE COUCH SURFING AGREEMENT | SCHEDULE

TERMS: (Any terms agreed by the host and the couch surfer, (e.g., food, privacy, house rules/routine, inviting visitors to the house, etc.)

HELPING AROUND THE HOUSE: The host and couch surfer may agree that the couch surfer will help out with some chores around the house, both cleaning up after themselves and contributing to the smooth running and care of the home. (e.g. washing up dishes after eating, helping in the preparation of meals if the host and couch surfer are planning to eat together, cleaning the bathroom after use)

Signature HOST/S_____

This _____ day of _____, 202____

Signature COUCH SURFER_____

This _____ day of _____, 202____

WHAT IS MEND?

Mend is a Jewish House strategy to bring innovation to homelessness and homelessness prevention. We want to be game-changers when it comes to homelessness and couch surfing, through our couch surfing platform, textline and rough sleeper App.

- You can register to be connected with a service provider who can help.
- This may be you or someone staying with you. We are here to help you connect with resources that empower you.

Our aim is to help connect the couch surfer with services that will assist in finding longer-term accommodation and for us to mediate so the host can host for a bit longer while the couch surfer finds longer-term options for housing and support.

How it works



1. A couch surfer or a host who needs assistance simply fills in a web form or send an SMS.



2. You'll answer key questions to be stored in our system, which we'll use to identify how we can help you.



3. Your information is given to a live operator to assist their mediating between couch surfer and hosts, to remove any anxiety and enable everyone to work together.



4. Couch Surfers and Hosts are subsequently connected to the appropriate service to achieve a long-term outcome, re-housing the Couch Surfer if necessary.

Couch Surfer Textline

The couch surfer text line is a facility to support individuals who needed to couch surf and can communicate in 109 languages.

The couch surfer text line supports couch surfers and those hosting a couch surfer. We will connect you with services that can assist.

In an emergency call **000**

If you need a bed tonight ring **link-2-home 1800 152 152**
If you are a couch surfer and need assistance text **0480 049 922**
or
Scan this Bar Code



SCAN ME FOR HELP

 **Jeeves.plus**
www.jeeves.plus

Powered by
Jeeves.plus



扫描寻求帮助
Chinese



Σάρωση για βοήθεια
Greek



بحث عن المساعدة
Arabic



Quét để được trợ giúp
Vietnamese



Escanear en busca de ayuda
Spanish



Cerca aiuto
Italian



मदद के लिए स्कैन करें
Hindi



הירק לעזרה
Hebrew



Couch Surfer Support

Mend-ing our community by connecting couch surfers and their hosts with support services to reduce the risk of homelessness.



This handbook is supported by:



Testimonials

"Couch surfing affects many Australians at some stage of their life and is often hidden. Rabbi Mendel and Jewish House are committed to bringing this problem out of the shadows and trying to improve the safety and outcomes of those who have no choice but to rely on the support of family and friends to find temporary accommodation. Homelessness can be ended. While we work on this goal we must bring the problem into the light and provide people with good information and better options." - The Hon Graham West - CEO of ESSC

"Couch surfing is a very important issue. We at Jewish House are very proud to spearhead a campaign to create awareness and provide support services to couch surfers and their hosts through these online resources and handbooks"

- Rabbi Mendel Kastel OAM - CEO of Jewish House

"One of the main barriers to leaving domestic and family abuse is having nowhere safe to go. In an ideal world, these women would move straight into their own, safe home, but sadly we don't live in an ideal world! The creation of the couch surfer handbooks helps guide both those looking for somewhere to stay in the short-term, and those that want to offer that support, providing useful information and boundaries to help create a positive experience for all."

- Rachael Natoli - CEO and Founder of LOKAHI Foundation

"I really love the idea of this handbook. It would have been really helpful when I was couch surfing, after finishing high school. It would have helped my hosts and I set clear boundaries while I was staying with them" - Vanessa*, 20 - Couch Surfer

"It was a privilege to be able to host a friend of a friend recently. We encountered some challenges - this handbook would have made the experience a lot more pleasant. We're so happy to see him settled in permanent accommodation now" - Jenny and Rick, Couch Surfer Hosts



www.couchsurfer.org.au

Page 22





PREPARED BY:

