



# HOW TO TALK ABOUT POVERTY

A practical guide on how to talk about poverty with friends, family and colleagues.

**NO PLACE FOR  
POVERTY**

A Guide by No Place for Poverty

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country and their ongoing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to the Elders past and present.



# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

## Welcome

**How to Talk About Poverty** is a guide for anyone who's worried about rising poverty and inequality in Western Australia and wants simple, respectful ways to talk about it with friends, family, or colleagues.

You don't need to be an expert.  
You don't need to have all the answers.

It just starts with one conversation. That one chat today could ripple into someone's tomorrow.

**No Place for Poverty** is a movement of everyday Western Australians who believe no one should have to live in poverty.

We created this guide to make it easier to start conversations that matter because understanding, empathy, and action all begin with a single, honest conversation.





## TIP 1

### Begin with simple, clear messages

Keep these ideas in mind when talking about poverty. You don't need to share them all. One is often enough to start the conversation.

- Poverty is happening now in WA. More people are struggling than ever.
- Poverty isn't a personal failing. It's shaped by social, economic, and political systems.
- Poverty is not inevitable. Systems were designed by people and can be redesigned to work for everyone.

**Your voice is bigger than you think. It speaks for your kids, your neighbours, and our collective future.**



## TIP 2

### Open the conversation with curiosity

Starting is often the hardest part. These simple approaches can help:

- Link it to everyday life. "Have you noticed how much more expensive groceries and rent have become? It's pushing a lot of people into poverty."
- Share something you've learned. "I was surprised to learn that over 420,000 people in WA are living in poverty right now."
- Use moments that already exist. News stories, cost-of-living conversations, housing discussions, or school costs are natural entry points.

**You're not trying to convince someone in one conversation. You're just trying to open the door.**



## TIP 3

### Connect around shared values

People are more open when conversations are grounded in shared values. You might try saying:

- "It's not right that so many people in WA are struggling to meet basic needs."
- "I think we all want to live in a society where everyone has a fair chance at a good life."
- "Anyone can fall into hardship. Most of us are closer to it than we realise."

#### Helpful points:

- **Over 420,000 people in WA are living in poverty.**
- **Children born into poverty are more than three times as likely to experience it as adults.**
- **A fair and thriving WA is one where no one is left behind.**



## TIP 4

### Make poverty easier to understand

Not everyone connects with stats. Real life examples help.

- Poverty limits choices, such as choosing between paying rent or buying food.
- Lack of money creates barriers to work, health, housing and education.
- Low pay, rising costs and housing shortages pull people into poverty and keep them there.
- Support systems like income benefits help people to survive but not thrive - they often aren't enough to keep people out of poverty long-term.

#### Simple framing:

**“Poverty isn’t just about income. It’s about what people can and can’t do because of money.”**



## TIP 5

### Know how to respond to common pushback

You may hear things like:

- “People just need to work harder.”  
*You could respond with:* “Most people experiencing poverty are already doing their best. Many are working, caring for others, or managing health issues.”
- “There will always be poverty.”  
*You could respond with:* “Poverty isn’t inevitable. Other places have reduced it by changing policies and systems.”
- “We can’t afford to fix it.”  
*You could respond with:* “Poverty costs all of us through health, housing and social systems. Prevention is cheaper and fairer.”

**The goal isn’t to win an argument. It’s to keep the conversation human.**



## TIP 6

### Highlight how income support helps

When we talk about benefits, it's easy for people to see income support as a problem rather than a vital tool.

Remind people that we all rely on social supports every day, and these systems help our community thrive.

#### Keep these ideas in mind:

- We all rely on public services, from schools and roads to health care.
- Income support is another essential part of this system, helping people who are struggling.
- Stronger support means everyone has a better chance to live a good life, free from poverty.



## TIP 7

### Focus on shared humanity not politics

Many people switch off when conversations feel too political. Try to steer clear of divisive language and focus instead on what we share — fairness, compassion, and the chance for everyone to get ahead.

#### You could say:

- It doesn't feel right that in a place as well-off as Western Australia, so many people are still living in poverty.
- I think most of us want everyone to have a fair chance. We can work together to make that happen.



## TIP 8

### Use metaphors

Metaphors can make poverty easier to understand. They help explain how poverty limits people's choices and affects the whole community.

Poverty can put people in impossible situations, like having to choose between paying rent, feeding their children, or buying essential medication.

#### You could try a metaphor like this:

Poverty isn't just about people making bad choices. It's more like trying to stay afloat in rough water. When wages are low and costs keep rising, people are using all their energy just to keep their heads above water. For many people, the system isn't helping them stay afloat, it's making the current even stronger.

## What to embrace and what to replace

The research shows that certain words, ideas and ways of engaging people work better than others. Use this summary as a reminder when you next engage someone in a conversation about poverty.



### EMBRACE

**Lead with shared values such as fairness, compassion and opportunity.**

**Use language that reflects compassion, fairness and shared responsibility.**

**Explain how systems can limit people's choices and keep them in poverty**

**Show how we all rely on strong public services and social supports (including income support).**

**When sharing lived experience, explain the wider causes and the solutions.**

**Emphasise that poverty is not inevitable and change is possible.**

**Use metaphors and shared values to help explain facts and statistics.**



### REPLACE

Leading with economic arguments alone and losing the human story.

Using language that feels divisive or triggers "politics as usual" reactions.

Talking only about how widespread poverty is, without explaining why.

Replace 'us vs them' talk about income support with language that includes everyone.

Sharing stories without context about why this is happening or how it can change.

Leaving people with the sense that nothing can be done.

Using numbers without explaining what they mean or why they matter.



**FOR  
SUPPORT**

## Remember

Talking about poverty is about showing what's possible, not just what's wrong.

- **Lead with compassion.**
- **Keep it relatable.**
- **Focus on shared values and practical solutions.**

Together, we can create a WA where poverty has no place. Add your voice to ours, and thousands of others, as we push for solutions to poverty in WA.

## Reach Out

Have suggestions for how this guide could support you better? Or want to share a conversation about poverty that you've had?

**Email us at:**

[connect@noplacforpoverty.org.au](mailto:connect@noplacforpoverty.org.au)

**Visit our website:**

[noplacforpoverty.org.au](http://noplacforpoverty.org.au)

We'd love to hear from you.