



Reminder: Please break down this sheet by **MONTH** & by **WEEK**. You will be asked to for this sheet and or information on it.

Month:

of Sacks Distributed

Student name:

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4

Week 5

Total Visits:

	Month:	# of Sacks Distributed					
	Student name:	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Total Visits:
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	Total Number of Students Served:	Total Number of Sacks Distributed:					



Identifying Hunger

Chronic Hunger

One of the most important roles of a Backpack Program Coordinator is identifying chronically hungry children and helping fellow staff members to do the same. In the following section, we'll take a look at the definition of chronic hunger, and how to distinguish these children from their peers. We'll also look at identifying children who are not chronically hungry, and where to refer families for more help.

Chronic hunger defined

Chronically hungry children have little or nothing to eat outside of school.

We define chronically hungry children as children who have little or nothing to eat outside of school. These children are often completely reliant on the free or reduced meal programs offered at their school as their only source of food, and are not getting sufficient, nutritious food on a regular basis outside of school. Without the Backpack Program, these children might possibly go the entire weekend without eating.

The Backpack Program is not intended to serve as a "snack program" - it is meant to provide a source of food for children who would have little to none without it.

Why is this program only for chronically hungry kids? We have made a commitment to provide food to those who are in the greatest need first. There are many kids across the state who come to school desperately hungry on Monday morning, having eaten only a few bites of food since Friday – or perhaps nothing at all. You can help ensure that all chronically hungry children in central and western Oklahoma receive food on the weekends by making sure that children who are not chronically hungry do not take home sacks of food. We must respect our donors, volunteers and community by adhering to our commitment of using our resources to serve chronically hungry children.

Signs of a chronically hungry child

While many growing kids will complain about being hungry, there are a variety of indicators that

set chronically hungry children apart.

Behaviors

Chronic hunger can often be identified by observing a child's interaction with food. The chronically hungry child:

- may stash or hoard food, especially on Fridays
- comes to school Monday morning with extreme hunger
- will eat anything placed before him or her
- continually asks for food
- asks for peers' leftover food
- spends a lot of energy thinking about food
- may rush to the cafeteria line or show up early for breakfast

In addition to the behaviors above, you may see an impact on the child's ability to function at school. Such behaviors include:

- excessive absences (unexcused or due to sickness)
- difficulty in forming friendships
- hyperactive, aggressive, and irritable behavior OR withdrawn, distressed and passive behavior
- excessive sickness—sore throat, common cold, stomach ache, ear infection, fatigue
- short attention span, inability to concentrate.

Physical Traits

Certain physical features may be indicators of a vitamin and/or food deficiency:

- puffy and swollen skin (protein deficiency)
- very thin, bones protruding (calorie deficiency)
- redness around the lips, cracked lips, dry and itchy eyes (vitamin A deficiency)

Please note that the weight of a child isn't always an indicator of chronic hunger. Obesity can be caused by extreme poor nutrition in a child's diet.

Ask Questions

It's very important to talk to children who are candidates for the program. By asking a few questions, you can better assess whether or not the child is chronically hungry. Good questions to ask include:

- "What did you eat for breakfast?"
 - If they say they skipped breakfast, find out why. Did they wake up late and not have time for breakfast or was there not enough food in the house?
 - If they did eat breakfast, was it enough to fill them up?

- “What did you have for dinner last night?” ○ Was it enough to fill them up?
- “What did you eat over the weekend?”
 - Did they have the correct number of meals?
 - Was it enough to fill them up?
- “Who prepares your meals at home?” ○ Is a parent cooking for them, or is it a sibling or someone else?
 - Do they cook their own meals?
 - Do they typically count on one particular person to make their meals?

Be a Good Listener

Listen for cues regarding the child's home environment. Some traits may indicate that chronic hunger could be an issue, such as:

- the child often cooks their own meals, or has a sibling who does
- the family moves frequently
- several family members live in the same household
- the child mentions the loss of household income (loss of job)
- the child mentions a family crisis (illness, death) or disaster (fire)

It is important that the entire staff understands these cues to hunger. Insight into a child's home situation may come from a teacher, counselor, coach, cafeteria worker, bus driver, teacher's assistant or custodian. Each interacts with children in a different way. Cafeteria staff often have great feedback on a child's relationship with food and their eating habits. PE teachers can detect physical problems as they perform athletically. Bus drivers may have a first-hand look at their living conditions.

Children should not be automatically enrolled in the Backpack Program because they receive free or reduced meals. A majority of families receiving free or reduced meals have food in their homes and the children are not at risk of going hungry over the weekend. Our experience has shown that approximately 10% of these children are chronically hungry. Conversely, children who do not qualify for the free or reduced meals at school may still have need for food over the weekends because of neglect or because they stay at a different family member's home when on a school break. Some parents may also refuse to enroll in the lunch program but still have need for the Backpack Program.

Signs that a child may not be chronically hungry

Kids who are chronically hungry are typically very careful to follow the rules of the program- they want to make sure they receive their food each week. With that in mind, children who may not be chronically hungry are more likely to:

- forget multiple times to pick up the sack of food Friday afternoon
- leave food at school on several occasions
- complain about the flavor or variety of food

- discuss what food they have eaten over the weekend

If a child does something on this list it does not necessarily mean you should remove them from the program immediately. Some students may show these signs because they are:

- very young
- special needs children
- children who switch between multiple homes on weekends
- children who are embarrassed about receiving the food, or may be teased

Use your best judgment

The best way to determine continued need is to speak face-to-face with the child. Ask some of the questions about their home situation again. Do they forget because the Backpack Program food is not important anymore or is something else going on? The most important thing is to assess the reason behind the behavior.

If you decide that the child's situation has changed or they have misused the program, you may use your discretion and withdraw the student from your list of participants.

In addition to helping us reach all chronically hungry children across our service area, effective targeting will help the program run more smoothly at your school. The number of kids on the program will become unmanageable for you if children are not screened appropriately.

You can find referral forms and parent letters [here](#).

Additional help for families

If a family is in need of more help, you can use our website to locate partner agencies in your community. Go to www.rfbo.org and click on 'Get Help.' This is also a great tool for any family who may not fit the criteria of chronically hungry, but still needs assistance.

Whenever possible, the Regional Food Bank staff will communicate information to you that may be beneficial to your families: for example, pantries with extended hours for holidays or programs providing food to students over school breaks.

For your students with older siblings: We offer the School Pantry Program for middle and high school students. Please email Jhonhenri or call 405-600-3127 for more details.

