

Chatterbox #207 – Homelessness

Episode description

Homelessness is a big problem throughout the world. In this Chatterbox episode, Andrew and Suzanne discuss the causes and the social implications of this serious issue.

Fun fact

Although homelessness is no laughing matter, Charlie Chaplin had a stellar film career making people laugh with his tramp character.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To get to
- To eavesdrop
- On a scale from 1 to 10
- To price [someone] out
- Root cause
- Heartbreaking



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

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Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hello, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew, how are you?

Andrew: I'm good, how are you?

Suzanne: I'm good. You know, I went away for the weekend to New York City.

Andrew: Oh yeah, that's right. How was that?

Suzanne: That was great. I **got to** see the Mets play baseball, and they won. I **got to** see some home runs, that was pretty cool, yeah.

Andrew: Really cool.

Suzanne: That's always fun. Yeah, that was a really great experience to go back to my hometown.

Andrew: How did you get there? Do you fly, do you drive, do you take the train, the bus? There's many ways to go to New York.

Suzanne: Yes, there are. We drove down and then drove back up. The way down was a little longer 'cause we stopped for dinner and we didn't get in until, like, 2:00 in the morning. So we were a little slow on the drive, but it was fun. Roads trips are always fun.

Andrew: Well, good thing New York is the city that never sleeps, right? Even if you arrive at 2 a.m., it's not really a big deal.

Suzanne: Yeah, the metro, the subway—still going.

Andrew: Beautiful, I love that.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Well, Suzanne. today we are going to do a Chatterbox episode. And for all the listeners out there that don't know, Chatterbox is our series where we have completely 100% unscripted, natural conversations and we let everybody listen in and do some **eavesdropping**. And today, Suzanne, we have a serious topic to talk about. It is homelessness, homelessness.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: But just before we talk about homelessness, and I think this will be an interesting discussion, I wanna let everybody know that the study guide for this episode, which includes tons of good stuff like a transcript, a quiz, detailed vocabulary explanations, examples, even some prompts for journaling or speaking, that study guide is available on our website, Culips.com. So if you'd like to study along with the guide, just head on over and give it a download.

OK, Suzanne, homelessness. Maybe we should start with a very basic definition of homelessness. What is it?

Suzanne: Yeah, well, it's quite self-explanatory as far as the definition goes, that it really is when someone doesn't have a place to live. They are without a home, so they might sleep on the streets or in a shelter. Sometimes it's when people are between homes, maybe they lost their home. But it usually means someone who for economic purposes does not have a place to live.

Andrew: Right, exactly, they just don't have a place to live. Now, Suzanne, if you had to rank homelessness as a problem in Canada **on a scale from 1 to 10**, how big of a problem do you think it is?

Suzanne: So if 1 is low and 10 is high?

Andrew: Yeah, 1 is a perfect paradise where there's no homeless people and 10 is just a really bad situation. It's a really visible, intense problem. What would you say?

Suzanne: Maybe 6?

Andrew: Yeah, I would agree with you. I think homelessness is a pretty big issue in Canada, unfortunately.

Suzanne: Yeah, I definitely notice that in Montreal—it's a bigger city—and I notice when I go downtown, for example, I do see people on the streets, sleeping on the streets or in the metro.

Andrew: Yeah, that is right, you do tend to see people sleeping in the metro on the train sometimes or in the stations on the benches that they have. Especially in the winter, right? Because it gets really, really cold in Montreal during the winter, and homeless people have nowhere to go, often. Of course, there are shelters and special facilities that are built to temporarily house homeless people, but often there's not enough beds, or sometimes these shelters are affiliated with religions and they want you to participate in some ceremonies or something like this, which some people are opposed to, so they won't even stay in these shelters. And because of the extreme cold in the winter, you have to find shelter somewhere, right? So this makes people go into the metro stations, absolutely.

Suzanne: Yeah, I'm wondering if there are more homeless people in the US than Canada, just because of even the temperature, right? Just because of the, or that they're more apparent. Maybe I see more people outside on the street, more in New York than I do in Montreal, just because of the population. There's more people, right? There are more people in New York and it's a bit warmer, as well.

Andrew: Yeah, well, I've never been to San Francisco, unfortunately—I would love to go—but I heard that recently the homeless population in San Francisco is really hitting a problem level because of that, because, well, really because of two main reasons.

The first reason is the weather, it's very temperate, it's warm. So, yeah, I mean, if you have enough money to buy a bus ticket from, I mean, for what, \$150 maybe, you could buy a bus ticket across America, right? So if you were, say, living in Boston or New York, a cold city in the winter, hey, why not go to San Francisco, it's gonna be warmer.

So I think this is the first reason, and the second reason is that's it's a very liberal city. The government isn't actively trying to kick the homeless people out the city. And there's also a lot of money, it's a rich place, so many the services are better. So, yeah, I know, maybe you're on the opposite end of the country from San Francisco, Suzanne, but I think this does play a decision in where large homeless populations are, is the climate.

Suzanne: Yes, I agree. And I also think, too, it has to do with the cost of living. Like in New York, the cost of living is so high and in San Francisco it's maybe even higher, like, just the cost of having, owning, you know, renting an apartment is very, very high. So it's possible that it forces people out of the, you know, living situations because it **prices them out**. It's just too much. And they might be left on the street or in those situations.

Andrew: It's very sad, it's a very sad issue and one that's really difficult to solve. And Suzanne, I'm wondering if we could maybe talk a little bit about some of the causes of homelessness. I think one of the major causes, actually two major causes of homelessness, the first is addiction and the second is mental health. And I'm wondering if we could talk about those for a second. So let's start with addiction, why or how could addiction lead to homelessness?

Suzanne: Wow, well, a lot of times, when someone is addicted to a substance, for example, they might take any money or income that they receive and put it towards maintaining that addiction, right? So their income isn't being used for food or shelter, and that could cause them to lose their status as far as their rent or their payments are concerned. And then that can force them out on the street, you know? Because any money that they receive is going toward feeding that addiction.

Andrew: And this is a huge issue in Vancouver, a city that is close to my hometown, where there's a whole area downtown called the Downtown Eastside that has a huge homeless population. And if any of our listeners have visited Vancouver, they may have seen the Downtown Eastside, which can be pretty intense and maybe even a little bit scary if you're not used to it.

And a huge issue here is addiction, so people getting addicted to drugs that are just controlling, they control your whole life, right? The high from these drugs is so powerful that you don't care about anything except getting high again. So, doesn't matter if you don't have a home, doesn't matter if you don't have a job, you just need to find that next fix. And so one way that the city of Vancouver has tried to address this is by having a safe injection site.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: Where people can actually go and use drugs in a supervised way. It's a government-controlled centre and so actually—I'm not an expert I don't know if this has been effective—but I think definitely in terms of preventing death it's been useful, the safe injection site.

Suzanne: Yeah, and I think like some cities in the US, there's a lot going on as far as opioid addiction, which has caused some people to become homeless, because all of their money and energy has gone to addiction and gaining the substances and maintaining their high.

Suzanne: Like you said, a lot of people are in emotional or physical pain and so in order to alleviate that pain or take away that pain, they medicate it with these substances and then, as a result, become addicted, and as a result can become homeless, lose their job or their family, 'cause, you know, you're not just taking away the resource of your money, your also taking away your mental capacity, right? Your focus, your time, so you're also not available for work, available for your family, and this can, you know, cause you to be alienated and on the street.

One thing that some cities are doing, shelters and such are giving a replacement to opioids, it's still addictive but it's a safer, less strong, more legal sort of way of giving painkillers, in a sense, and it helps regulate that imbalance. So that's, that's one thing, but it's definitely an epidemic that's happening in the US, for sure.

Andrew: Yeah, I agree, especially fentanyl, the drug called fentanyl has really had a huge effect on Canada and the USA. It's one of the consequences of this increased drug use is homelessness, and also many other issues that we won't get into right now. But, another, I think, **root cause** of homelessness is mental health and the failure of the government in North America to address properly mental health. So I think this is really **heartbreaking**, actually, when you see somebody living on the street and they're sick, right?

Suzanne Right.

Andrew: They're broken. They have a problem, a health problem, but we as a society just say, oh, that guy's crazy, you know?

Suzanne: Right, and we sort of dismiss it.

Andrew: And we just leave them to live on the street and it's super sad, I think. Many surveys have been done and they find, like, a huge percentage of homeless people actually have mental health issues and so, instead of living on the streets, we should be providing medical services, medical care for these people. But it's a hard sell, a lot of people don't, maybe, accept that this is a real, legitimate health issue or they don't want to support with their tax dollars this type of care. I'm not exactly sure why. But in the end it's very **heartbreaking**, in my opinion.

Suzanne: Absolutely. You know, it's almost as though we are choosing what, you know, which person is more beneficial to our society, and we don't realize that everyone is beneficial, you know. Everyone has something that they could be offering the world and by, sort of, just leaving them to be without offering aid, you know, we're only as strong as our weakest link.

Suzanne: And I think if someone is in pain or hurting, it's important that there's programs, counselling, you know, resources that can help them and can bring them to a point that they could function and be, you know, living to their best potential instead of their worst potential. I think people see it as separate from them, but in fact it's not, right? We're all really a society that's connected and if someone is hurting, we are actually hurting, too, and we don't really make that connection enough, I think, in our government, so yeah, it is **heartbreaking**.

Andrew: Yup, something that we need to work harder on. Suzanne, I know we could talk about this issue for hours, probably, it's a very big and complicated issue, but actually it's hard to squeeze it all into 15 minutes. But I'm really curious about our listeners. We have listeners from all over the world and I'm sure the issue of homelessness is different in each country. So I would be very interested to hear what homelessness is like in your country. How big of an issue is it? And feel free to get in contact with us. Probably the best way to do this is on our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast), just leave a comment under the posting for this episode and let's start a discussion. Let's see what homelessness is like around the world. I'm hoping that the situation is better than it is in Canada in other countries.

Suzanne: Yeah, I agree.

All right, Andrew, so that about wraps up today's episode. So, thank you guys for spending your time listening to us, and remember to visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And if you want to learn more about how you can study with us and improve your English, visit us at Culips.com and check out our study guides, as well.

Andrew: Yes, that is a very good idea. All right, guys, that's it for us, we'll catch you next time. Bye.

Suzanne: Bye.

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Detailed Explanations

To get to

Phrasal verb

In this episode, Suzanne tells Andrew about the things she **got to** see in New York. **To get to** do something is to have the opportunity to do something. Suzanne could say, “I saw the Mets play,” but instead says, “I **got to** see the Mets play.” In this sense, she is happy for the opportunity for something that might not have happened.

Here are a couple more examples with **to get to**:

Bryan:	How was the weekend?
Vern:	Really good. I went to my high school reunion—it was the 10-year anniversary of our graduation.
Bryan:	No kidding? I went to mine last year and hated it.
Vern:	Oh. Mine was quite interesting. I got to talk with old girlfriends, catch up with the soccer team, and see some former teachers.
Bryan:	Yeah, me too. That’s why I didn’t like it!

Simon:	Have you started your new job at Canadian Tire yet?
Esther:	I have. So far so good.
Simon:	Really? Which department?
Esther:	The outdoor and gardening department. It’s really rewarding. I get to be around plants all day, and then I get to sell them to lovely people.
Simon:	That sounds like a win-win situation for you.

To eavesdrop

Verb

To eavesdrop is to listen in on a conversation without being a part of it. You are actively trying to listen to other people talking and did not just happen to overhear them.

Eavesdropping is considered bad etiquette.

Here are a couple more examples with **to eavesdrop**:

Jack:	I gotta quit my job. The commute is way too far. It's killing me.
Mario:	That's too bad. I love long commutes. I get to do my favourite hobby.
Jack:	Listening to music?
Mario:	No, eavesdropping .
Jack:	What?
Mario:	People on the bus, on the subway, they always have such colourful conversations.

Gina:	Did you know Vera started dating Miguel?
Lindsey:	Really? How do you know that?
Gina:	I overheard her.
Lindsey:	Did you overhear her or did you eavesdrop ?
Gina:	I may or may not have eavesdropped . Don't tell her!

On a scale from 1 to 10

Idiom

Asking someone to give you their opinion or interest level **on a scale from 1 to 10** is a very common way for English speakers to interact. Usually, if it's something negative, 10 is the worst and 1 is the best. If it's something positive, 10 is best and 1 the worst. It's a good idea to make sure the other person knows ahead of time if 10 is good or bad. You can also change the numbers, such as **on a scale from 1 to 4**.

Here are a couple more examples with **on a scale from 1 to 10**:

George:	Oh, you just cut your hair. Do you like it?
Trish:	Kind of.
George:	Oh no. That doesn't sound good.
Trish:	How about you tell me? On a scale from 1 to 10 , what do you think?
George:	I'd rather not answer that.
Trish:	That bad?

Phoebe:	We're thinking of hitting the beach on the weekend. How interested are you in joining, on a scale from 1 to 10 ?
Fanny:	If Peter's going to be there, that number goes down to zero.
Phoebe:	No, he's not coming.
Fanny:	Oh. OK, then. Let's go!

To price [someone] out

Phrasal verb

To price [someone] out is to raise the price of something to the point that the product or service is no longer accessible. For example, landlords often raise the rent in their buildings. If the rent hike is too much for the tenants and those tenants need to move as a result, the landlord **priced the tenants out**. It can also mean lowering the price of something to a point where the competition can't compete.

Here are a couple more examples with **to price [someone] out**:

Fitz:	Are you moving? I thought you liked this place.
Shelley:	I do. But the landlady is pricing me out .
Fitz:	Really? By how much is she raising the rent?
Shelley:	\$100 per month! I can't afford that.
Fitz:	That might be illegal. You should check with the city's rental board.

Pat:	Business doesn't look good. How are the figures?
Vick:	Like you said, not good. The store across the street keeps lowering its prices.
Pat:	We can't compete with that. We can't lower our prices any more.
Vick:	Looks like they're trying to price us out .
Pat:	Then we'll have to lay off some staff and cut some corners. We have no choice.

Root cause

Noun

If you are looking for the **root cause** of a problem, you are looking for the origin of the problem, and not just its contributing factors. **Root cause** is often used in relation to illness, where people say that it's important to not just treat the symptoms of the illness, but to also treat the **root cause**.

Here are a couple more examples with **root cause**:

Reporter:	How are you planning to address the recent wave of migrants to the country?
Politician:	This is a very concerning issue. We must first provide enough shelters and clean water before going any further.
Reporter:	What steps will your administration take to tackle the root cause ?
Politician:	Unfortunately, the root cause is in another country. Through careful diplomacy, we will have to help that country and its citizens.

Psychologist:	Are you still angry with Heather?
Patient:	Yes. She's so annoying. She keeps on leaving her clothes everywhere.
Psychologist:	Are you sure that's what's annoying you? What do you think is the root cause of your anger?
Patient:	Well ... I suppose I'm a little upset at her success. She's a professional dancer now, and I wanted to be one.
Psychologist:	Then that's something we need to address.

Heartbreaking

Adjective

When something is **heartbreaking**, it makes you very sad. It's when something figuratively breaks your heart.

Here are a couple more examples with **heartbreaking**:

Olaf:	Hey, are you OK? You look down.
Dean:	I'm not OK. My aunt, you know the one who lives in Saskatchewan?
Olaf:	Yeah, I met her once, right?
Dean:	Yes. It's so heartbreaking . Two of her dogs got run over by a car the other day.
Olaf:	Oh no.
Dean:	She's been inconsolable.

Wilma:	Have you been watching the news lately?
Sara:	Yeah, about the homelessness problem?
Wilma:	Yeah. It's getting worse. They were showing the living conditions of some of the homeless people. It's inhumane that they're allowed to live like that.
Sara:	I know. It's truly heartbreaking . What do you think we should do?
Wilma:	I've already written a few letters to politicians and newspapers to increase the funding for mental health in the city.
Sara:	That's a start.

Quiz

1. **Select all that apply: What are some of the major causes of homelessness mentioned in this episode?**
 - a) drugs
 - b) migrants
 - c) bad politicians
 - d) the weather
 - e) losing a job
 - f) rent increases
 - g) mental health

2. **True or false: The numbers in the expression “on a scale from 1 to 10” are fixed and not changeable?**
 - a) true
 - b) false

3. **In this episode, the hosts mentioned San Francisco is temperate. What does that mean?**
 - a) it is liberal
 - b) it is too cold
 - c) it has moderate weather
 - d) it has a homelessness problem

4. **Which of the following expressions is an example of bad grammar?**
 - a) I got to go outside.
 - b) I get to go outside.
 - c) I slowly got to enjoy the bath.
 - d) I got food to enjoy to.

5. **Which of the following is NOT an example of pricing someone out?**
 - a) selling someone an apple for a dollar
 - b) raising the rent for residents
 - c) always trying to have lower prices than the competition
 - d) selling a painting for a price you know nobody will want to pay

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. How bad do you think the homelessness situation is in your city?
2. What do you think are the best ways to tackle the issue of homelessness?
3. What would you do if, overnight, you found yourself without a home?
4. How big a factor do you think weather is in making it easier or harder to be homeless?
5. Opioids are a big problem in North America. Do you think doctors and pharmaceutical companies bear some of the blame for overprescribing drugs? How can you prevent further problems?

Quiz Answers

1.a, e, f, g 2.b 3.c 4.d 5.a

Episode credits

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