

# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LANDLORD

## During your rental search

- 1) **Know what your expectations are before searching for a property.** If your requirements aren't offered at a particular property, then move on. Don't expect a landlord to add an unreasonable amount of amenities or upgrades to an existing rental. There are often other units available that will meet all of your needs.
- 2) **Submit completely accurate rental applications regardless of your shortcomings.** Do not overstate your income or lie about credit problems. Landlords are increasingly open to working with challenged credit. Providing a clear explanation as to why your credit has suffered and expressing your desire to improve the situation will go a long way to sway a decision. We always recommend a pre-written letter with this information be sent with the rental application as it shows some planning and thought went into your process. Lying on an application is almost always grounds for denial or later termination of a lease.
- 3) **Ask the right questions.** Those questions are the ones most important to you. In most cases landlords/agents are not required to disclose some information that may be important to you. Do not be shy when searching for a home. Ask as many questions as necessary to make sure that you are comfortable with the decision you are making.
- 4) **Get it in writing.** If a landlord has promised a repair, new carpet, new appliances, or anything else will be done as a condition of your lease then be absolutely sure to get it in writing, preferably on the lease document. Anything less opens up the chance for miscommunication and leaves an opening for problems.
- 5) **Read your lease completely.** This is an important process. You are making legally binding guarantees regarding payments, upkeep, repairs, etc. Read it thoroughly before you sign it. If possible ask for a copy the day before signing the lease so that you have enough time to read and think about any potential questions.

## Move-in time

- 6) **Complete or request a walk-through to assess any existing wear or damage.** This will alleviate many disputes at the time of move out. Make sure this is done thoroughly and ask for a copy for your records.
- 7) **Make sure that you know all of the pertinent property information** (utility info, garbage day, mailbox #, instructions for alarms, entry systems, sprinkler systems, HOA rules, etc.). By collecting all of this information up front you can eliminate several calls to your landlord over the first weeks of tenancy. When landlords receive a flood of calls from a new tenant they instantly start to think of that tenant as high maintenance. This puts an instant strain on the relationship and can set up future problems. An effective landlord should provide this information for the same reason but many do not. By collecting all of this at the time of move-in you can avoid that unnecessary contact.

**8) Make sure that you know the exact process for contacting your landlord in case of any questions or repair issues.** Every landlord is different and each has their own process for dealing with tenant inquiries. You are best served to ask exactly how the landlord would like to be contacted. Don't assume that texting them or calling them on their cell phone is the preferred or most effective option. By following the landlord's preferred process you instantly become "easier to work with" than the tenant who contacts them by some other means. Landlords are also likely to respond more quickly to those who operate the way that they prefer to.

## **During your tenancy**

**9) Pay your rent on time.** Easy enough when everything is going well but what about when things are not? Your best option is to contact the landlord as soon as you see a problem arise and work out an agreement to get on track. Very few landlords will want to evict a tenant who they believe honestly wants to pay but is having a short-term problem. The worst option is silence. A non-paying, non-communicating tenant will and should be dealt with harshly.

**10) Be reasonable with your requests.** There are many cases where the tenants are absolutely in the right regarding maintenance and repairs and landlords have neglected their duty to provide clean, safe housing. However, in many other instances the requests made by tenants are completely unreasonable and by utilizing a bit of patience and thought these issues can be resolved reasonably. Handle very minor issues on your own. Almost any tenant can replace a light bulb, furnace filter, or smoke detector battery. They can tighten a door knob or put a closet door back on its track. However, these types of tiny issues constitute a huge number of service calls and maintenance costs for landlords.

If you have small issues and can't handle them on your own then wait until a larger problem arises that truly requires service and ask if those smaller items can be addressed as well saving multiple service trips. If you have a non-emergency issue, don't require that it be handled on an emergency time frame. There are many factors out of the landlord's control that go into how quickly an issue can be resolved including vendor schedules, time of day/week, weather, travel time, etc. Tenants need to take these factors into account and try to understand that your landlord wants to resolve your issues and wants you to be a happy tenant as it is in their best interest.

## **Conclusion**

Above all else, it's important to remember that you are ultimately dealing with another human being. If you are speaking with a property manager or maintenance tech you are dealing with someone who can choose to help you or ultimately push your concerns aside. Your goal should be to get your questions answered and problems resolved, not to make as much noise as possible. By portraying yourself as an honest tenant, preparing yourself for your tenancy up front, educating yourself on your lease terms and rules, and making reasonable requests using the proper channels it is very likely that you will have a happier and more successful relationship with your landlord and a more pleasant stay in your rental property.