

HOME Tenant Based Rental Assistance

HOW TO BECOME A GOOD RENTER

Establishing a good rental history is extremely important when a client is considering moving into another rental situation or thinking about purchasing a home. It is becoming increasingly difficult to secure decent, safe and sanitary housing without a good rental history.

Generally, the first item a property owner or manager reviews, is the prospective applicants credit history. If the applicant is consistently late in paying their rent, chances are they will experience difficulty finding a suitable place to live. Often times, previous landlords will be contacted to discuss the prospective applicant's rental history. Some property owners or managers, will stop by the applicants current address to check housekeeping skills before their application is approved.

Use the following as a guide when discussing, "How to Become a Good Renter," with your client.

1. When shopping for a rental unit, the client should make a list of their wants and needs, for example, the number of bedrooms, bus service, proximity to grocery, work and childcare facilities or schools. Clients should explore the surrounding area as well. Being satisfied with the rental unit and the neighborhood creates a positive climate for becoming a good renter.
2. Prior to signing a lease, the client should read EVERY WORD and be sure they clearly understand what they are signing. This must be done BEFORE the lease is signed. If a written document is not required, the client must be sure they understand what the owner expects of them as renters. Encourage the client to write each item down during the discussion with the property owner. They can even ask the property owner to sign the list.
3. Clients should be encouraged to ask the landlord to walk through the unit with them before moving in. Taking pictures of the vacant unit and performing a pre-occupancy inspection will provide the client with the necessary proof of pre-existing conditions to recover their security deposit when they move.
4. Paying rent on or before it is due is the most important element of becoming "a good renter." Know where (the address) the rent is to be paid and if the rent is paid by mail, take great caution to allow for any delays. Clients who consistently pay their rent during the grace period, are not considered "good renters." This could also have a negative impact on the client's credit. If the client pays their rent with cash, it is very important to be sure to obtain receipts with all of the information recorded. Date of payment, amount paid and period of time covered by the payment. If the rent is paid by check or money order, clients can use the canceled check as their receipt or the carbonized copy of the money order. Clients should be encouraged to set up a filing system just for rental payments.
5. If the client is experiencing difficulty in paying their rent on time, they should immediately communicate this to their landlord. Notifying the landlord in advance, demonstrates how important timely rent payments are to the client. If there is a need to establish special payment arrangements with the landlord, the client should NEVER agree to any arrangement they cannot keep. This will destroy the landlord's trust in the client. Honesty is the best policy.

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6. If the client is responsible for paying a portion or all of their utilities, it is important that this commitment be paid on or before the due date. Utility companies report payment histories to credit bureaus, which could negatively impact the client in the future if these payments are not made on time. The responsibility of utility payments must be clearly spelled out in the lease agreement.
7. Property owners from time to time may conduct inspections of the rental unit. This activity should be clearly spelled out in the lease with a written notice provided to the client, at least 24 hours in advance. The purpose of the inspection is to determine the condition of the unit. If the condition is found to be unacceptable, normally, the landlord will site the client and give them a limited amount of time to cure the identified problems. If the client has not satisfactorily resolved the identified problems, eviction proceedings can begin. However, the practice may vary from locality to locality.
8. If the client decides to terminate the rental agreement, they must take care to follow the terms of their lease. If the terms of the lease agreement have not expired, the client may be held responsible for paying a lump sum amount to satisfy the remaining amount of time left on the lease. Generally, a 30-day written notice to the landlord is required before moving out.

The client should request a move-out inspection with the landlord. This should be conducted as quickly as possible, after the client has removed all of their belongings. The move-out inspection can be compared to the move-in inspection, making it easy to determine if there are any damages caused by the client while occupying the unit. If any damages were caused after move in, the landlord generally keeps a portion of the security deposit to cover the cost of repairs. If the client did not pay a security deposit, they may be charged for the identified damages. These two inspection reports provide the client with the necessary documentation in the event of a disagreement. Once again, this practice may vary from locality to locality.

Terminating your relationship with a landlord on good terms is one additional step in establishing a good rental history.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING HABITS FOR RENTERS AND HOMEOWNERS

Clients should be encouraged to develop a plan of action for performing regular housekeeping activities. Case managers should assist their clients in the development of this exercise and set a time for implementation. Everyone in the family should be assigned a housekeeping task, even if it is small. Living in a well-organized and clean environment builds a sense of pride of ownership, even if the client is renting. Developing these habits when renting, paves the way to good housekeeping habits when the client owns their own home. **“GOOD RENTERS MAKE GOOD HOMEOWNERS.”**

Poor housekeeping habits can lead to damages in the unit, roach infestation and creates poor self-esteem. Clients should understand the importance of maintaining a well kept home and how it affects all facets of their lives and their children’s lives. This element of becoming a good renter is as important as paying rent in a timely manner.

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