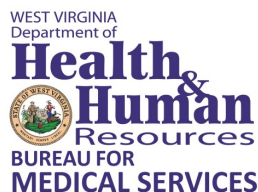




How to Be a Good Tenant

A Guide to Getting the Most Out of
Your Landlord/Tenant Relationship

Take Me Home, West Virginia Program



A good tenant...

...**is honest** in the application process. Whether an eviction, a criminal history or credit issues, it is important to be honest with a property manager when applying for housing.

In various circumstances, the applicant's history can be discussed with a housing provider and exceptions or agreements made to allow for housing a person with a less than stellar rental history or past. One thing that isn't forgiven, however, is a fraudulent application where a prospective tenant lies about a past incident. Be upfront and ask for an exception if an initial denial for housing is given.

...**does not agree to rent more than they can afford to pay.** It is generally considered best that no more than 30% of a family's income go towards their housing costs. That includes rent and utilities. In the U.S., however, most families pay upwards of 50% of their income to their housing costs. Any more than that paid toward rental costs can create a significant financial burden, which often leads to individuals not being able to pay for their rent or paying their rent instead of paying for basic necessities like food, medications or household items. Do not sign a lease if you are not sure that you can afford the monthly rental amount for a property.



...**pays their rent on time.**

Landlords depend upon rental payments to make the building mortgage payment and maintain staff for management and maintenance, so late or incomplete payments can cause issues for everyone involved.

...**maintains a safe and clean home environment**. Treat the property as your own. Keep it clean, free of clutter and report any maintenance issues as soon as they happen.

...**gets to know their neighbors**. Nothing makes a community stronger than neighbors looking out for one another. A good tenant will attempt to get to know at least the basic makeup of their neighborhood and make friendly connections that can strengthen the community.



...**remembers and respects their neighbors**. Loud noise, noise late at night, and visitors constantly coming in and out of the home may create an issue with neighbors. While it's your right to live and enjoy the use of your unit, keeping good relationships with your neighbors makes

living in a housing complex more enjoyable.

...**is open and honest** with their landlord. Open and honest discussion with the landlord, whether about issues you're having on the property or accommodations or modifications you need to make the unit livable and increase your independence, is always best. A landlord cannot engage in an interactive process to help address your needs if you don't communicate what is needed.

...**knows and follows the terms of the lease agreement**. Lease agreements can be confusing and contain language that isn't exactly clear. Before signing any lease, you should sit down with the landlord and discuss what the document contains. What are the rules for the complex? Is there anything you don't understand? What's expected of you and what is the landlord responsible for? Don't be afraid to ask questions because once you sign your name on the line you are legally bound to follow the terms of that lease throughout the lease term timeframe (usually one year).

...**makes sure all visitors know to follow the rules of the property.** When people visit your home – whether family, friends, direct care workers, etc. – it is your responsibility to make sure they are aware and follow the rules of the complex. If one of your visitors violates the terms of your lease, you might be held responsible and could face eviction.

...**tells the landlord immediately if there are any changes to income or change of household.** Most times your lease agreement states the amount of people allowed to live in the unit. If you are living in subsidized housing (like HUD or USDA properties) your rental amount is calculated by your income and any income of persons over the age of 18 in the home. If there will be a change in who is living in the unit and/or the amount of income coming into the home, you should notify the landlord as soon as possible.

...**considers renter's insurance.** Renter's insurance can protect your home in case of theft, fire or water damage. In many cases, renter's insurance is much cheaper than anticipated. Call your local insurance company to get quotes.

...**documents the apartment's condition at move-in.** Most landlords will provide a move-in checklist which asks you to tour the apartment upon move-in and remark about the condition of the home. This will allow the landlord to properly assess any damages and any normal wear and tear during your stay in the property when reevaluated upon move-out. If you have the ability, you can even document with photos or video to prove the condition of the property upon move-in and move-out. The less damage to the property upon move-out, the more likely you are to get the security deposit back in full.





...informs the landlord of their use of a service or assistance animal. Service animals and assistance animals (also commonly referred to as emotional support animals) are not subject to the pet policies of any property and fall under

a reasonable accommodation under Fair Housing Laws. The tenant is still responsible for picking up after the service/assistance animal and making sure the animal does not pose any threat to the health and safety of anyone on the property; however, the tenant is not required to pay any pet deposits and exemptions must be made to “no pets” policies for such animals. Often documentation will be required listing that the tenant has a disability and the service/assistance animal meets a need or helps him/her to overcome a barrier to fully using and enjoying the home. If you require the assistance of a service/assistance animal, inform the landlord and work with them to provide the information they need.

...keeps the home and their belongings safe by using available locks and safety features or asking for additional features to be installed. If you notice that the locks on windows or doors in the unit do not work properly, you should inform the landlord immediately so that those issues can be addressed.

...responds immediately to notices of lease violations and evictions. If you receive a notice of lease violation, contact the landlord immediately to ensure you understand what part of the lease you have violated and discuss possible remedies to ensure it doesn't happen again. Notice of evictions generally allow 30 days to find alternative housing, but it is important to discuss any notices directly with the landlord in an attempt to resolve any issues and provide the best possible outcome for all involved.



...submits maintenance requests right away. If something breaks or an issue arises in a unit, the landlord needs to know right away so that the issue can be corrected. Oftentimes tenants will say that they don't want to "bug" the landlord, and while it's

not a good idea to report minor issues that can be corrected by the tenant, the landlord would rather know about an issue (i.e., the sink is backing up) immediately when it's easier to correct.

...allows maintenance and property management in for inspections when notified. A landlord must ask for permission or give reasonable notice before the property management team or maintenance workers intend to enter the unit to make repairs or perform yearly inspections. Generally, 24-48 hours' notice is given by landlords before they intend to enter a unit unless there is an emergency that requires immediate entry. If you need more time, you can discuss possible alternatives with the landlord upon notice of intent to enter being posted.

...makes requests for reasonable accommodation to a property management team's policies **or reasonable modifications** to the structure of the home to increase accessibility in clear and direct ways. While there is no required format for making a request, it is best for everyone involved if requests are documented in writing and the process to meet those requests or eliminate barriers are documented until resolved. If a landlord fails to discuss possible accommodations or modifications, you have the right to contact the WV Human Rights Commission or U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to file a complaint of disability discrimination.



...moves out respectfully and promptly. Either at the end of a tenant lease agreement or in the course of an eviction, the tenant should pack their belongings and remove themselves peacefully in the time given by the lease or the landlord. In addition to removing the belongings, a tenant is expected to make a cursory cleaning of the unit to prepare the landlord to rent the unit to another family. Leaving behind a mess or damage may cause the next family to be delayed in entering the unit, which could create serious problems in the stability of their housing. Be conscious of the impact you will be making on others and be sure to follow the terms of the lease agreement for moving out as well. Some properties require adequate notice at the end of a lease term that the tenant does not intend to renew for another lease term and instead wishes to move from the unit.

This publication was funded by Take Me Home, West Virginia, West Virginia's Money Follows the Person (MFP) program, under federal grant award number 1LICMS330830 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CMS/HHS.

Take Me Home, West Virginia Program

