



Fight Homelessness: Be a Good Tenant

Educating tenants and potential tenants to be good tenants.

There are many reasons for homelessness (e.g., lack of a market's adequate supply of safe/decent/affordable rental housing near services/jobs, mental health issues, addiction issues, domestic violence issues, runaway issues, economic issues, disabilities/issues, lack of education). Many of these issues are very large and very expensive to address. Education is one way to address potential homeless issues that REALTORS® can assist inexpensively. One issue contributing to homelessness is an inability to get rental housing or stay in rental housing. This short document attempts to educate tenants on ways to stay in rental housing.

Cost: The one third rent rule: Look at your weekly/monthly/annual income from all sources (e.g., work, relatives, partners, government assistance, pension, savings, private assistance, sales of items). A rule of thumb is that housing costs should only use up about one third of your income (weekly/monthly). Housing costs include: rent and utilities (e.g., electricity, gas, water, sewer, internet/cable, maintenance, pets). Evaluate a rental by the total cost of the housing. Some rents include some or all of the utilities. Look at the lease to determine what is included in your rent. If costs are not included in the rent, budget for these costs as well.

What if you get behind on your rent? Before you become late with rent and if you have an issue with your income or expenses, talk to the property manager/landlord to find if there is any potential alternative to eviction such as paying partial rent, paying past due rent later, forgiveness of past due rent. Workarounds are not guaranteed, so being a good tenant with a good attitude may help you persuade the property manager/landlord to work with you during hard times. Maybe the landlord will agree in writing to allow you to perform work in lieu of some rent. Always timely respond to all property manager/landlord communications. Ignoring the problem only makes the problem worse and solutions more difficult or impossible.

What if you cannot afford the local rent? There is government and private housing designed for low income tenants. Explore these low income housing resources online and with low income government and private service organizations. Rents typically decrease with distance from town/city centers and in various areas. Look at public transportation routes.

Lease agreements are legal agreements: Read your lease. Ask questions. Get legal advice (e.g., SC legal aid 888-346-5592). Research applicable government codes/zoning and owners association rules prior to signing a lease. Be truthful on your application regarding animals, roommates, children, and other issues. There are fair housing laws/ethics prohibiting illegal discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. If a criminal record question is asked be sure to include additional information such as your clean record since, character references, how long ago the criminal issues occurred, what sorts of criminal issues occurred. Sex offender registry may restrict where you live. Comply with your lease. Leases are typically one year in duration. If you are military or anticipate moving during the lease, ensure the lease or laws allow you to move without you owing a lot of money to the landlord including losing your security deposits. You will likely need a security deposit paid upfront which is typically about equal to a month's rent. Ensure that when you move in, there is record made of the property's condition in writing and in photographs. Notate any negative property conditions because you will be liable for property damages beyond normal wear and tear at the end of your lease. Be present at the move out inspection and provide a forwarding address.

Animals: Some landlords and property managers are concerned about pets (e.g., pet wastes, pet noise, dog bites, allergies, parasites, other tenants complaining). So inquire about pet issues before you sign the lease (e.g., pets allowed, pet deposits, pet rents, per animal, type of animal allowed). While fair housing requires reasonable accommodation for service animals and assistance/comfort animals, do not misrepresent a pet as a service/assistance animal. There are criminal charges for misrepresenting an animal as a service animal.

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opportunity/assistance_animals

Handling Issues: Leasing housing involves human beings. Human beings generally react best when treated fairly and with respect. Read online how to relate to others and persuade others. Talk to others when you are not angry, upset, or intoxicated. Remain calm when communicating with the property manager and/or landlord. Property managers are often supervised by a Property Manager in Charge or a Broker in Charge. Being a good tenant may help persuade the property manager, landlord, and maintenance staff to be of assistance to you. Perform your maintenance duties per your lease. Manage fire hazards (e.g., candles, smoking, know where extinguishers are located, are there fire sprinklers). Report maintenance issues in a timely manner. Allow reasonable entry for services (e.g., changing filters, pest control). Report illegal discrimination to your lawyer, SC Human Affairs Commission, SC Real Estate Commission, SC Association of REALTORS®. <https://schac.sc.gov/housing-discrimination>

Pests/Bedbugs Prevention/management: Do your part to minimize pests and bedbugs. Report pests/bedbugs to the property management in a timely manner so remedies are less expensive. Timely and properly dispose of food and wastes so that pests are not attracted. Do not pick up furniture/bedding left on the side of the road or at the dump because these may contain bed bugs or bed bug eggs. Cooperate with property management and pest control.

Be a good neighbor: Follow the golden rule and be the neighbor that you desire. Control noise. Pick up wastes. Recognize that most people need quiet to sleep at night. Do not allow a lot of unauthorized people to stay at your place either short term for parties nor long term. Park in a reasonable manner. Clean up after any authorized animals. Use good judgment about parties (e.g., noise, parking, drinking, smoking, weight bearing floors, fighting). Report suspicious behavior to management and law enforcement. Manage domestic violence issues. Manage your package deliveries in a reasonable manner. Do not break the law.

Protect yourself: Read and understand the lease before you sign. Consider renters insurance. Provide emergency contact information. Keep your housing secure and locked. Do not flaunt valuables visible in your housing or vehicles. Secure valuables. Supervise your children, guests, and animals. Budget. Put a priority on paying your rent in a timely manner. Be a good neighbor and good tenant. Behave in common areas. Be courteous to other neighbors and property management staff. If you have past renting issues, it may help for you to explain the issues when applying for your new lease including your corrective actions.

Enjoy your housing: Be proud of your housing and enjoy your life. Many rentals have amenities so enjoy them (e.g., pool, gym, clubhouse, playground, trails, yard, porch, spa).

Talk to your landlord and property manager about any issues ASAP.

Read SC Tenant Laws: <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t27c040.php>

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