

Tip Sheet for Young People: Leases

A lease is a contract you sign to rent an apartment or house. You should always get a written lease. Read the lease **before** you sign it. If you have any questions about the lease, take pictures of every page and talk about it with someone you trust **before** you sign it. It is your right to read, understand and agree with the lease **before** you sign it.

What should you look for in the lease?

- ❖ **Names.** Is your name on the lease? If your name is on the lease, you are responsible for doing everything the lease requires of you as the renter, and the landlord is responsible to you for doing everything the lease requires of him or her.
 - If you have roommates, are their names on the lease? If you are the only person on the lease, you will have to pay the whole rent if your roommates leave. Think this through carefully!
- ❖ **Dates.** Are all important dates in the lease clear, and are they correct? For example:
 - Move-in date
 - Date to pay any security deposit and the first month's rent
 - Date your rent is due (always pay on time!)
 - Date the lease ends
- ❖ **Utilities** (electric, gas, water, trash, internet/cable). Is the lease clear about which utilities you have to pay and which the landlord will pay?

Tip: Ask the landlord how much the installation charge will be for any utilities you have to set up, as well as the average monthly cost of utilities, so you can prepare your budget. Also ask for the names and contact information for the utility companies, and when trash and recycling are picked up.

- ❖ **Security deposit.**
 - Is it refundable? It should be. If it isn't, you should ask for it to be refundable, so that the landlord only gets to keep any part of the deposit the landlord truly needs to repair the damage you do.
 - Make sure the lease is clear about what is normal wear-and-tear that would not affect your security deposit, and what kind of damage would be deducted from your security deposit.
 - Make a detailed, written list of any scratches, holes, carpet stains, or other damage currently in the apartment. You and the landlord should sign and date this list, and you should keep a copy. Take pictures of damage, too. That way, you won't be blamed for damage you didn't do.
- ❖ **Changes.** Make sure the lease is clear about whether you can put up posters, paint, or do anything else to the apartment. You could lose some of your security deposit for something as simple as making a tiny hole in the wall. Know the rules and follow them!

- ❖ **Maintenance and repairs.** Is the lease clear about how to request repairs, and how long the landlord can take to complete them? If the repair is an emergency, there should be an emergency contact.

Tip: The lease should be clear that repairs are the landlord's responsibility unless they result from your "gross negligence". If you flush inappropriate items down the toilet and it overflows, or you set your oven on fire, you probably are going to have to pay for that. But you should not have to pay for normal wear-and-tear.

- ❖ **Moving out early.** Does the lease allow you to move out early if you provide advance notice (like 1 or 2 months)? Does the lease allow you to sublet? If you cannot end the lease early or sublet, make sure the lease is clear about how much you will have to pay if you break the lease. The lease should provide that if the landlord rents out your unit after you leave, the landlord cannot keep charging you, even if you did break the lease.
- ❖ **Renewing the lease when this one expires.** Are you allowed to extend the lease on a month-to-month basis? Will the lease automatically renew if you don't give notice of move-out by a certain date? Is the rent going to go up? And if so, by how much?
- ❖ **Privacy.** Is the lease clear about under what circumstances the landlord can enter your apartment?
- ❖ **Promises.** If the landlord promised you anything verbally ("I will paint that room"; "Internet is included in your rent"; "You can stay for a full year"; etc.), make sure those promises are in writing in the lease.
- ❖ **Rules and roommates.** Make sure rules about smoking, quiet hours, overnight guests, and any other rules are clear in the lease. Be sure to follow those rules. Also, if you are moving into a unit with a roommate(s) you don't know, make sure to meet them and talk about schedules and expectations before you move in.
- ❖ **Pets and parking.** If you have a car and/or pet, make sure the lease is clear about any extra charges for parking, pet deposit, etc. If you have a pet, make sure it is noted in the lease (including the species/breed of animal, since some landlords don't permit certain types of animals). Landlords must allow emotional support/service animals, with proper documentation.

Tip: Record-keeping is very important!

1. Make sure the landlord provides you with a copy of the lease and walk-through details signed by you and him/her. If you can't get copies before you leave the property, take pictures!
2. Always make sure you have proof of any payments you make—copies of checks, confirmation of any on-line transfers, and receipts for any cash. If the landlord says, "You never paid that", you need to be able to show proof that you did.

Tip: Before you start looking for an apartment, make a "Rental Resume" to show to potential landlords to increase your likelihood of getting approved to rent. Your Rental Resume can include: paycheck stubs, recent bank statement, credit report, letters of referral, contact information for recent landlords, etc. Be sure to "dress for success" when you meet the landlord to make a good impression. And remember: some landlords (and employers) will ask for social media accounts like a Facebook/Instagram/Twitter page. So be thoughtful about what you post!