

# TENANT HANDBOOK



**Snohomish County Landlord Engagement Services**

**YWCA IS ON A MISSION**



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## Introduction

The YWCA's Landlord Engagement Services (LES) created this handbook as a tool for you to use while searching for housing and for building a positive rental history after you move in. If you are experiencing barriers to permanent housing such as past evictions, poor credit and/or criminal convictions this handbook will provide you with some tips and ideas to overcome them. It provides you with a place to keep track of important contacts and information you will need to fill out a rental application. It also provides some guidance around apartment shopping, lease signing, moving in, moving out and building a positive rental history by being a successful tenant and neighbor.

LES works to build partnerships between landlords and community agencies in Snohomish County. The program provides landlord outreach and assists landlords with navigating the various rental assistance programs in the community. The program brings awareness to landlords about the challenges many households experience in applying for and securing a rental home. We ask landlords to focus on considering if the prospective tenant can:

- Pay the rent on time
- Care for their rental home
- Be a successful tenant and neighbor
- Follow the guidelines of the rental agreement

It is important to remain engaged with your case manager and other community services during your housing search. They are a great resource when applying for a rental or if you have any concerns during your tenancy. We encourage you to build and maintain a positive relationship with your landlord and keep everyone informed of any changes to your household or challenges you encounter. Remember, the landlord has the housing you need, and you have something they need, a valued tenant.

A list of resources for additional support and guidance provided for you at the end of this booklet.

We hope you find this handbook useful and wish you the best as you search for a new place to call home.





# **Section 1 – Searching for an Apartment**

## **Landlord Role**

Landlords provide an essential service in the community, however, this is also their income and how they pay for living expenses and provide for their families. It is important to understand that your relationship with a landlord is a business relationship and landlords value communication from their tenants. This means even when there is an issue, it is important to continue communication and not ignore your landlord. It is reasonable for landlords to expect tenants to pay rent on time, abide by the rental agreement and properly care for the rental home. Caring for your home means caring for their property and informing them in a timely manner of any maintenance needs or damages. When you meet with a landlord, it is important to show them you can be a successful tenant.

## **Searching for an Apartment**

Be prepared. Some landlords may want to do an online or telephone pre-screening. You should be ready to answer the following questions:

- How many bedrooms do you need?
- How many people will occupy the property?
- What is your budget for housing?
- What is your total income?
- Do you have pets?
- When would you like to move in?
- Why are you moving?

Common information you need to bring to the landlord meeting:

- Social Security card or Tax ID number
- Picture Identification
- Past addresses (the last 7 years)
- Prior landlord names and contact information
- Proof of income and/or voucher information

You may also need to do an application online. Please consult with your case manager or housing navigator before applying online as they may be able to

provide tips or guidance through the process and help verify the application is legitimate.



## Deciding what you are looking for

When discussing your housing needs and priorities with your case manager or navigator, it is important to consider your real life budget and the things you need in a housing unit versus the things you want in a housing unit. Remember, leases do not last forever and you can use this as a stepping-stone to get the housing unit you want once you have built positive rental history.

If you will be paying your rent with wages or other income, it is recommended you set your housing price range around 30%-40% of your gross monthly income. Though this is ideal, keep in mind you may not be able to find a rental that meets your needs and is only 40% of your income. A well thought out budget will help you determine what you can truly afford knowing that rent is a priority to pay on time every month. You may even use this budget to show a landlord that despite not meeting their income requirements, you have a plan to be able to pay your rent and afford the basics: utilities, food, transportation, and so on. If you are receiving any type of rental or deposit assistance you will need to work with your agency provider to determine what unit size you can apply for and how much you can spend on rent. You can use the Rental Search Worksheet on page 23 to write this information down.

## House Hunting



If you are working with a case manager they may be able to assist you in your housing search, but you are encouraged to look on your own too.

*Please be aware of fraudulent advertisements and emails. It is recommended that you check with your case manager before paying an application fee or providing your personal information.*

Your case manager or housing navigator may provide a list of landlords interested in working with housing programs and open to considering



applicants with screening challenges, however it is not a guarantee that they will have a unit available or agree to rent to you. When you call a landlord or property manager to ask about a vacancy, call from a quiet place where you know you will be able to hear the conversation. Be sure to have your schedule handy so you can make an appointment to meet right away.

If no one answers, leave a message clearly stating your name, why you called and either a good way to reach you or a time you will call back. If the landlord answers the phone tell them your name and what vacancy you are interested in and where you found the ad for the unit. Ask about the location, number of bedrooms/bathrooms, when the unit will be available for showing or move-in and how much the rent is. If you have this information from the ad, verify it with them on the phone.

If the unit seems to be a good fit, the next step is to schedule a meeting with the landlord and fill out the application. Use your best judgement; dress as you would for a job interview and put your best foot forward.

**Do...**

- Show up on time or call ahead if you need to reschedule
- Dress appropriately
- Ask questions about the unit (see tips below)
- Bring the completed application or the information needed to fill one out
- Bring any rental assistance paperwork such as your Request For Tenancy Approval (RFTA)
- Silence your cell phone

**Do not...**

- Miss the meeting
- Wear clothes you would not wear for a job interview
- Chew gum, bring food, pets, or lit cigarettes
- Speak poorly of past landlords
- Bring additional persons who may disrupt the meeting

Apartment hunting is often like job hunting; some landlords will look at social media like Facebook or Twitter. Keep pages professional or make them private!

***Tip:*** *If you have minors moving with you, discuss with your case manager or housing navigator your plan of action as to whether or not to bring them with*

*you to the landlord meeting. Consider if you will be able to focus on your conversation with the landlord.*

## **Questions to ask**

- How much is the security deposit?
- What utilities am I responsible for and how much do they cost?
- Where can I park and how many vehicles am I allowed?

Landlords will often use a meeting to get a better sense of you. You can use this meeting to get to know the landlord, visit the vacant unit and provide a positive first impression. Ask to see the entire apartment/house inside and out, including common areas and any facilities such as the laundry room, storage and parking areas.

During the meeting the landlord may ask about your past including rental history, evictions, credit, employment and criminal history. Be honest but be mindful when volunteering additional information. Avoid telling lengthy stories. Often shorter answers are better. Do take ownership of your past and focus on how you are moving forward and any supports you have now that will contribute to your housing stability.

Before you leave make sure to ask when the landlord will make a decision and when you should follow-up on the status of your application.

***Tip:** How you conduct yourself when you meet with the landlord and throughout the application process can have a direct impact on the landlord's final decision to rent to you or not.*

## **Applying for Vacancies**

You may be asked to fill out a rental application before, during or after meeting the landlord or property manager. Applications generally require the following:

- **Names, birthdates, social security numbers and driver's license numbers** for all household members including minors (if applicable)
- **Landlords and addresses** of the last three places you lived, including where you currently live
  - You may put a mailing address if you have one and indicate that it is for mail only where it asks for your prior landlord's name

- Proof of your **monthly income** including paystubs, job offer letter, Social Security statement or child support award letter
- Employer contact information
- Name and phone number of an **emergency contact**
- **Voucher information**, if applicable, such as your Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA)

Be prepared by having all of this information ready to go. You may utilize the Application Cheat Sheet located on page 26 to keep all necessary information on hand.

It is important to know that when you are applying for a rental, you are conducting a business transaction. Applications will usually ask if you have ever been evicted, asked to vacate or been convicted of a crime. Background checks will show a landlord if you were honest about your history. Omitting this information may leave the landlord with the impression that you might have made poor choices in the past and that perhaps you are not making different choices now. In order to build trust with landlords, you must be honest when filling out rental applications. Stick to the facts and share information relevant to your situation. Before you meet with a landlord, rehearse addressing any barriers in your background with your case manager or housing navigator.

## **Addressing your barriers**

Some individuals struggle to secure housing due to past incidences or low income. You can address these barriers by preparing additional documents for your rental application or as a follow-up during an appeal of a denied application. Documents to address barriers may include:

- Letter of Explanation (see page 28)
- Letters of reference/good character from a case manager, parole officer, church member, present/past employer or other community provider
- Positive letter from a past landlord or property manager
- Certificates of completion such as Chemical Dependency program, Anger Management class, Parenting or other Life Skills class you have attended
- Verification that you have a repayment plan for any landlord debt
- Verification you paid bills on time in the past year (phone, utilities, etc.)
- A thorough budget that demonstrates your ability to pay rent and other necessities (refer to page 27 for a Monthly Budget worksheet)

Talk with your case manager or housing navigator about classes offered in the community that may help build your Rental Portfolio.

***Tip:** Many landlords require Renter's Insurance. Even if they do not, it is for your own protection and it shows a landlord you are a responsible renter.*

## **Paying Applications or Holding Fees**

Most rental applications require a processing fee and/or holding fee to reserve an apartment. Talk to your case manager or housing navigator before you pay a fee. Again, be aware of any scams. Do not wire money.

If you do not have enough money to pay an application or holding fee, your case manager may know of funds available to help cover these costs. Please keep in mind that resources are limited, so double check for availability before you apply.

## **Following up with Landlords**

After you have filled out an application, toured a unit and met with the landlord, there is often a wait while the landlord processes your application and makes a decision whether or not to rent to you.

If the landlord says the decision will take a week, wait a week and if they do not call you by then, you can follow up with a phone call or visit to the rental office. Remember not to overwhelm a landlord with phone calls asking about the application.

If a landlord calls to let you know you have not been selected for their rental, do not get discouraged or upset. Some landlords have an appeal or individualized assessment process where you have the opportunity to submit additional documentation that demonstrates you are a responsible tenant. Ask them if they have an appeal process and what you would need to provide for an appeal. Your case manager or housing navigator can provide you support during this process. If they do not offer you an appeal, you may want to ask the landlord why he or she has decided not to move forward with your application in case something was not addressed that would have made a difference in their decision. They may also offer you a suggestion of what you could do differently in the future. You still want to thank them for their consideration, as you never know if something will reopen.

If a landlord calls to let you know that you have been approved for his or her rental, congratulations! If you are applying with a voucher or other rental assistance, make sure you get them the necessary paperwork right away so they can schedule any required inspections. The landlord will usually tell you when the unit will be available for move-in and you will schedule a time to sign your lease.

## **Section 2 – Signing a Lease and Moving In**

### **Signing a Lease and Moving In**

When you find a landlord with a vacant unit and they approve your application, you will sign a lease agreement and fill out a move-in condition report. Consider asking your case manager to join you for the lease signing and walk-through.

Congratulations on making a positive impression on your landlord; you have found a new place to make your home. Here are some helpful tips to consider as you get ready to settle in.

### **Using a Voucher**

If you are receiving a housing voucher or move-in assistance such as a Housing Choice Voucher, Shelter Plus Care, Rapid Rehousing, Housing and Essential Needs, or any other move-in assistance you will need to get the unit approved by the housing authority or agency that you are working with before you will be able to move-in. If you are not receiving rental or any other financial move-in assistance, skip to the next section.

Most rental assistance providers require the following:

1. The landlord submits a Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) form confirming you are being offered the apartment.
2. An inspector visits the rental to complete the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection to ensure your new home meets program standards and is safe and sanitary for you and your family.
  - If the unit fails inspection, the landlord will have a chance to make repairs. If the landlord has questions about this process, please ask them to call the agency or the inspector directly for clarification.
  - If the landlord is not willing or unable to make the necessary repairs, you will need to consider looking for another apartment.
  - It is the landlord's responsibility to make your unit move-in ready. If the landlord asks you to do any work on the unit before signing the lease, please discuss this with your case manager or voucher specialist first.
3. After the unit passes inspection, the agency providing you with rental assistance will determine how much your voucher will pay each month and the amount you, as the tenant, will be responsible to pay directly to

your landlord. If you are only receiving deposit assistance, the agency will issue a check to the landlord only for the amount promised; you will need to be prepared to pay your landlord the full rent and other move-in costs including additional deposits for any pets.

Each rental assistance agency works a little differently. Please check with the agency and your case manager to be sure you understand the process. Remember, if you sign a lease without following the proper process, the agency may not approve the rental and in that case, you will be responsible for the full rent until the end of your lease. The same applies for any deposit assistance as you will need to receive the agency's approval before signing the lease otherwise you could be responsible for the full deposit.

***Tip:** Be sure to notify your rental assistance agency of any changes within your household or your income as soon as possible. This usually needs to be within 10 days of any changes.*

## **Paying a Security Deposit & First Month's Rent**

Most rentals require a security deposit and the first month's rent at the time of move in. Some vouchers and rental assistance programs cover both rent and deposits. If you need help covering your deposit your case manager or housing navigator may know resources available in the community to assist you. A security deposit is in place to ensure you care for your unit. You could receive a refund of this money when you move out if you properly clean and care for it while living there. If you have any pets, will be renting a garage or other extra amenities, you may have to pay the additional deposits or monthly fees on your own.

## **Signing a Lease or Rental Agreement**

You may want to consider bringing your case manager for support when signing the lease and conducting your move-in walk-through.

Your lease or rental agreement is a legal agreement between you and your landlord about where you will live, who will live with you, how long you will live there, how much you will pay in rent, which utilities you will pay and the basic guidelines you will follow as a tenant. A lease also gives you information about what will happen if you break this legal agreement.



When you receive your lease, take the time to read it over so you understand it. Work with your case manager to fill out the Lease Quick Guide and Terms and Conditions. The Lease Quick Guide is not a legal document; it is a tool to help you identify basic information contained in your lease.

While you are at the beginning of your lease, it is important to understand the expectations for the end of your lease. Your lease should state if it will automatically become a month-to-month agreement or if you will need to move out unless you and your landlord have agreed to sign a new lease. It is important to abide by the terms of your agreement as it may affect your options at the end of your lease. You will find more information about what to do at the end of your lease on page 18.

***Tip:** When possible, request a copy of the lease ahead of time so you can thoroughly review it. If you have any questions about the terms of your lease, ask your case manager or landlord for clarification before you sign it.*

**Once your lease is signed, you are committed to follow it throughout your tenancy.**

## **Conducting a Walk-through and Move-in Condition Report**



After your lease signing, you will conduct a walk-through and fill out a move-in condition report with your landlord. Again, you may want to consider bringing your case manager with you for this part of the process. The walk-through is a chance for you to record any preexisting damage to your unit at the time of your move in so you will not be responsible for it when you move out. Even if you are receiving rental assistance that required an inspection, you still need to do your own walk-through.

Your landlord will most likely provide you with a move-in condition report and fill it out with you. If not, use the move-in condition report provided on page 32.

During the walk-through you can ask questions about where to locate the breaker, water shut-offs (if applicable) and how the heater works.

Remember to pay special attention to safety features such as locks, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors (these should be in good working order at the time of your move-in). Test the smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detectors by pressing the test button on the alarm. Let your landlord know



immediately if it does not work. Test locks on exterior doors to ensure they close securely and that your key opens them. Check locks on windows, especially those in first floor units.

Check that all appliances, outlets and lights are in good working order. If you are moving into a house, townhome or duplex also check the exterior with your landlord; this includes any front and backyards you may have. Make sure you know where you can dispose of your garbage and recycling and when the garbage and recycling are picked up.

If you identify any damage in the unit that needs attention, ask your landlord how to place a work order. A work order form is included in the documents section of this handbook (page 31) in case your landlord does not already have a form. It is also a good idea to keep a copy of the work orders you submit and keep them in a file with your lease, move-in condition report and payment receipts. If you experience any challenges in having your work orders addressed, talk with your case manager as they may be able to help.

***Tip:** Document the condition of your unit with pictures and video if possible. Do make sure you let all who are present know that you are taking pictures or video. If the landlord does not want to be in the video or pictures, wait until after you have completed the walk-through and before you move your belongings into the unit. Be sure to save any pictures or videos as soon as possible and record the date they were taken. You can use these visuals when you move out to make sure you return the unit in the same condition. Your landlord may also take their own video or pictures during the walk-through.*

## **Moving In**

Congratulations! You have signed your lease, conducted your walk-through and your landlord has given you keys to your new home; it is finally moving day.



When you move, try to get an early start or plan to spread the work over a few days. Be considerate of your new neighbors when moving furniture around or hanging pictures. Moving is often noisy so you will have to quit for the day when your building's quiet hours begin.

Be sure you are familiar with your landlord's rules about parking and propping doors open. Do not break rules or block others' parking spots or entryways with

moving activities. Moving day is a great chance to meet your neighbors and get off on the right foot with them.

If you have furniture or other large objects, ask friends or relatives to help you. Moving heavy objects by yourself increases the chance you will hurt yourself or damage walls or doorways. *If you have no furniture, please contact your case manager for resources.*

If you damage your unit during move in, tell your landlord right away. Your security deposit is designed to cover damages but you do not want to wait until it is time to move out to tell your landlord. Do not be afraid to tell your landlord about these incidents.

Once you have moved your household in, there are other things you need to do at the beginning of your tenancy such as:

- **Set up utilities accounts**

Your landlord should have made clear which utility bills you are responsible for paying. Ask him or her which companies you should call in order to set up your accounts. If credit is an issue as you set up utility accounts, ask your case manager for help. Once these accounts are set up, go over the paperwork with your case manager so t you are clear on when your bills will be due, where you should submit your payments, and what forms of payment are accepted.

- **Forward your mail**

One of the best things about permanent housing is having a permanent address. Use one of the post office forwarding address forms for each address where you are currently receiving mail (i.e. relatives' homes, shelters, social service agencies). This form will tell mail carriers to redirect mail from your previous addresses to your current address.

- **Change the address on your driver's license, car registration and insurance provider**

To change the address on your driver's license and car registration visit a Washington State Department of Licensing Office with your current ID and proof of your new address (utility bills, lease, etc.). For your registration, you must bring your existing paperwork. For your license, you must bring

your existing license and \$10 to pay for the update. You will also want to contact your insurance provider to update your information.

- **Register to vote when eligible, change your registration address or register *after* a felony conviction**

A new address is a great chance to register for the first time, shift your registration to your new address, or register to vote after a felony conviction. To register for the first time or change your registration, pick up a registration form at your local library. If you were convicted of a felony but are no longer under the authority of the Department of Corrections (not in prison and no longer in community custody), you can find more information about registering on Washington's Secretary of State webpage: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/felons-and-voting-rights.aspx>

## Section 3 – Building a Positive Rental History

***Congratulations on finding permanent housing. Here are some helpful tips that can help you build positive rental history.***

### **Be a Successful Tenant and a Good Neighbor**

Building and maintaining a good working relationship with your landlord and your neighbors is essential to building positive rental history. Always treat your landlord and neighbors with respect. It is important that you take good care of your unit and any common areas you access. Tell your landlord if you have any maintenance issues. When you move in, ask how to submit work orders and who to call for maintenance emergencies.

Your lease is your guide to being a successful tenant. Be sure to ask questions if you are unsure about any of the regulations or expectations stated in the lease. It is important you follow the guidelines set out in your lease as well as any additional agreements associated with your voucher or rental assistance program (if applicable). Get in touch with your landlord, case manager or the Landlord-Tenant Hotline if you run into any problems you cannot solve on your own.

*The Dispute Resolution Center at Volunteers of America offers a Landlord-Tenant Hotline where you can seek clarification of a notice you receive or assistance in communicating with your landlord. You can reach them at 425-339-1335 (option 4) or email them at [LTinfo@voaww.org](mailto:LTinfo@voaww.org). See page 38 for additional resources.*

***Tip:*** *Even after you are settled in your new home, be sure to continue meeting with your case manager regularly. They can support you through challenges you might experience when communicating with your landlord or your neighbors.*

### **Your Basic Tenant Responsibilities**

***Following your lease is your most important responsibility as a tenant.***

Additionally, keeping the following tips in mind will help you be a successful renter and neighbor.

- Take care of your home and let your landlord know if something is damaged or broken

- Respect your neighbors and the common spaces you share
- Keep your landlord, case manager and rental assistance provider informed if you have any changes in your family composition or income.
- Utilize your case manager and/or the Landlord-Tenant Hotline if you run into problems you cannot solve on your own

## **Following Your Lease**

Read and understand your lease. Go over it with your case manager and fill out the Lease Quick Guide (page 29) and Terms and Conditions (page 30) at the back of this handbook in your own words.

Make sure you understand your landlord's expectations about rent payments. Know how much your monthly rent will be, what payment types are accepted (check, money, cash), how you can submit your rent payment, when it is due, when it is considered late and what will happen if you are late with rent. If you have any questions, call your landlord for clarification.

Landlords typically charge a fee for a late or returned rent check. To prevent paying extra fees always pay your rent on time. If you cannot pay your rent in full, offer to pay what you can as soon as you can.

In the event your income changes, ask yourself who needs to know. If you know you will have trouble paying rent on time call your case manager right away and work with them to come up with a plan and discuss it with your landlord. If you are not engaged with a case manager, it is still very important that you communicate your situation to your landlord. Do not wait until it is already past due. Landlords appreciate up front communication from their tenants and may be more likely to work with you on a payment plan if you let them know in advance.

Unless specified in your lease you are responsible for your utility bills. This may include electric, gas, water, sewer and garbage/recycling pick up. Non-payment of your utility bills could put you at risk of losing your housing, especially if you use a housing voucher to pay some or all of your rent and receive a utility allowance.

**Unauthorized occupants can be a quick way to lose your housing. Ensure you understand your landlord's guest policy for both day and overnight visitors. If there is someone that you want to live with you, discuss this**

**with your case manager or agency provider first. Any new occupants will need to be added to both your lease and your voucher if you have one. Discuss with your landlord the process for adding and removing other occupants from your lease.**

*Tip: If your landlord approves any exceptions to your lease, get it in writing.*

## **Taking Care of Your Home and Communicating with Your Landlord**

Try to build a positive relationship with your landlord right away. Landlords want you to be a successful tenant. Take good care of your unit! Your landlord has trusted you with their investment.

Always make sure that your unit is as clean as possible and uncluttered. Remove trash from your unit regularly. Ask your landlord where the garbage cans/dumpsters are located, what recycling services are available, if there is any special bagging or tagging requirements and when garbage/recycling pick up occurs.

Never leave garbage in common areas, including in front of your unit or in a stairwell or walkway. Many landlords will charge you a fee if you leave waste anywhere other than the designated locations.

Be careful not to damage or break anything inside of your unit. Before making any alterations to your unit (like nailing into walls, painting, etc.) be sure you know what your landlord's rules are. If you are given permission to paint or alter your unit in any way, make sure you get this permission in writing. Any damage to the unit may be taken out of your security deposit and you will be held responsible for repair costs that your deposit does not cover.

Accidents do happen; tell your landlord right away if something breaks in your unit, even if you think it is your fault. The longer you wait, the more expensive many problems become to fix. Use the work order form your landlord provides or if they do not have one use the Work Request Form included at the back of this handbook to request any repairs (page 31). Always sign and date your request and keep a copy for yourself. Caring for your home and ensuring you report any maintenance needs will help you get your security deposit refund after you move out.

If you run into a conflict with your landlord, try to talk it out. Blaming, threatening and angry calls, emails or texts rarely result in a positive outcome. If

you need help communicating with your landlord, tell your case manager or utilize the Dispute Resolution Center.

## **Be a Good Neighbor**

Keep common spaces, such as driveways, hallways, lobbies, patios, stairwells and laundry facilities clean and quiet. Be sure to monitor the behavior of all your household members and guests in and around the property. If you have a pet or a service/companion animal you must keep the animal under your control at all times and obey scoop laws and leash expectations. You may see or hear other tenants violating their lease for whatever reason; this does not mean it is ok for you to violate your lease as well. Keep in mind, sometimes neighbors may observe if you are violating the lease and report this to your landlord.

When you see garbage in the hall or outside the building that someone else may have dropped by accident, be a good neighbor and throw it away. After all, this is your community and you want to keep it looking nice!

Most landlords and residential communities have a noise curfew every night of the week. This means your neighbors should not be able to hear you with your door closed. However, just because it is not “quiet hours” does not mean that it is “loud hours”. During quiet hours, 911 may respond to excessive noise complaints. If the police are called you may be ticketed and fined and may even receive a lease violation notice from your landlord. Repeated complaints could put your housing at risk.

If you are upset with your neighbor or if your neighbor is upset with you, be respectful and reasonable. Get in touch with your case manager or landlord right away before an issue escalates. Your case manager may also be able to help you problem solve. If you cannot resolve a conflict on your own, your landlord may help you mediate situations related to noise, use of common areas, or other housing related issues.

***Tip:*** *To avoid any conflict, remember to keep noise at a reasonable level at all times.*

## Section 4 – At the End of Your Lease

Most leases end when the tenant has lived in their unit for a year. If this is the case, you will likely have the option to renew the lease or go month-to-month (with or without a new rental agreement). You also have the option to give your notice and move out of the unit. In other cases, leases are terminated early due to non-payment of rent or behavioral issues that violate the lease. Whichever way it is ending, your case manager wants you to have a smooth transition and the best possible outcome.

### Completing Your Lease

If you have stayed in your unit through the term of your lease, congratulations! You have followed through on a major personal and financial commitment to yourself and your landlord.

When you complete the terms of your lease, a landlord will often give you three choices:

- You give your notice to move
- Renew your lease
- Continue renting month-to-month

You should begin discussing your options with your family, case manager, and agency provider at least 60 days before your lease ends.

### Giving Notice

At the end of your year's lease, you will have the option of moving out. If you choose to move, you must give your landlord at least 20 days notice. Before giving notice, you should have another permanent housing option secured for a smooth transition. If you are giving notice before completing the terms of your lease, it may negatively impact your rental history and can be financially expensive. If you are working with a case manager or other housing advocate, talk with them before giving notice to make sure you have all the necessary information for rehousing.

***Tip:*** Consider the costs of moving. Although you may be expecting all or some of your deposit back, this takes time. You might need to pay for a new deposit. You may also need to consider other expenses. Work with your case manager to develop a plan ahead of time.



## **Renewing your lease**

Renewing your lease means signing another long-term agreement. Check with your agency provider about lease length expectations. Sometimes a landlord will change the terms of the lease slightly, which may include increasing your rent or some other alteration of rules. The advantage of renewing your lease is that you lock in whatever rent your landlord has chosen. Not only are you committing to the lease; your landlord is committing to keeping you as a tenant throughout the course of the new lease as long as you comply with the terms of the agreement. The disadvantage is that if you want to move on, you will have to wait until the end of your new lease. If you do move, you could be financially responsible for a break lease fee or for the rent until it is re-rented.

## **Transitioning to Month-to-Month**

Month-to-month is when you rent without a lease. You still have to abide by the rules and expectations of your initial lease. The advantage to continuing your tenancy month-to-month is that if you decide to move somewhere else all you need to do is give your landlord a 20-day notice before you move out. The disadvantage is that your landlord can raise your rent or ask to you leave with the appropriate notice.

## **Moving Out**

When moving you want to ensure you leave on good terms and maintain your positive rental history. This means keeping in mind that the same rules you used to move in apply when you are moving out. Be aware of parking rules and quiet hours when you plan your move out. Invite plenty of helpers to assist you in carrying large items.

Consider conducting your own pre move-out walk-through with your case manager. Review your move-in paperwork including the move-in walk-through and any pictures or videos to remind yourself of how the property looked when you moved in. Be sure to clean all areas of your unit. If your unit needs professional cleaning or has damage needing repair, you may not receive your full refundable security deposit or could end up owing additional funds to your landlord.

If it is almost time for you to turn in your keys but you still have things to move, check with your landlord to see if you can get an extension. Do this as soon as

possible since there may be another household waiting to move in. If an extension is approved, get it in writing. This may mean paying rent for the extra days.

If you are unable to clean your unit you may be able to hire a cleaning servicesm Check with your landlord on their requirements as some may have a list of approved vendors. Be sure to keep a receipt if you hire a cleaning service or a professional carpet cleaner (renting a carpet cleaner generally does not meet turnover standards).

***Tip:** Consider taking pictures and a video of the condition of your unit when it is empty and has been cleaned.*

## **Terminated Lease**

If you are **not** at risk of an eviction or lease termination, skip to the next section.

If you are reading this maybe you lost a job or are facing other hardships and cannot pay your rent. Maybe you are engaged in an activity that makes your landlord or neighbors feel unsafe, or you have received one too many noise or other disturbance complaints. Regardless of the details, if you repeatedly fail to pay your rent or otherwise violate your lease, your landlord can terminate your rental agreement and ask you to leave. If you do not leave, your landlord can begin eviction proceedings. This may end with law enforcement officers forcing you to leave your unit.

For a landlord, evictions are expensive and time consuming. For a tenant, evictions are also expensive and damaging to your rental history. Having an eviction on your background check can make it extremely difficult to find rental housing and potentially impact job searches or other opportunities.

If you received a 14 Day Notice To Pay or Vacate or any other type of notice, contact your case manager or 211 immediately to evaluate your situation. They may be able to help you come up with a plan or help mediate with your landlord. Remember, the Volunteers of America Dispute Resolution Center may also have extra support for you at this time.

In addition to getting in touch with your support systems, it is also important to keep lines of communication open with your landlord. Even if you are upset, your landlord will be far more likely to compromise if you communicate calmly and professionally with him or her.

## **Conducting a Move-out Walk-through**

Just like when you moved in, your landlord will conduct a walk-through after you have vacated the unit. You may request to be present for it or not; ultimately it will be at your landlord's discretion to allow you or others to be there. It is through this walk-through that any deductions from refundable portions of your security deposit are calculated. For this reason, when you get ready to move out be sure to remove all of your belongings and thoroughly clean your unit.

## **Your Refundable Deposit**

Regardless if you received assistance for your deposit or you paid it on your own you may be entitled for a full or partial refund. After you move out you should receive an account disposition within 21 days with your deposit refund or an explanation of why any or all of your deposit was withheld. Your landlord will mail it to your last known address; be sure to provide them with your new address or a reliable address where you can receive mail.

It is common for at least a portion of your deposit to be withheld for the landlord's cost to turn the unit. In the event you receive an account disposition showing you owe additional funds, consider working out a payment plan with the landlord as soon as possible to preserve your rental history. If you feel the amount being withheld or any additional amounts you are being billed are unfair, you could ask your landlord for clarification. If you do not feel comfortable reaching out directly to the landlord, it may be appropriate to contact your case manager or the Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) to help you address this with the landlord. You can call the DRC at 425-339-1335 (option 4) or email them at [LTinfo@voaww.org](mailto:LTinfo@voaww.org).

**Maintaining a positive relationship with your landlord is important as they may be contacted for a rental reference by future landlords when you are seeking a new home.**

## **Section 5 – Documents and Resources**

This section provides a space to take notes and store other important documents related to your housing. It also includes the following forms discussed in earlier sections of the handbook:

- Rental Search Worksheet
- Rentals Contacted
- Application Cheat Sheet
- Monthly Budget
- Writing a Letter of Explanation
- Lease Quick Guide
- Terms and Conditions
- Work Request Form
- Move-in/Move-out Condition Report
- Renter’s Contact List
- Resources

# Rental Search Worksheet

Use this as a guide to determine which units meet your needs and your budget.

**Monthly rent amount I can afford:** \$\_\_\_\_\_ \*Remember you will need to budget for utilities separate from rent.

**How many bedrooms:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many bathrooms:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Must Have:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Like to have:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Other requirements:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Location preferences:** 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

Need to be near (bus line, schools, work, medical): \_\_\_\_\_

---

Areas to avoid: \_\_\_\_\_

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Narrowing down what you are looking for will save you and your case manager time and avoid paying unnecessary application fees. Keep in mind you do not have to find your forever home at this time, but this will be an opportunity to build a positive rental history.

# Rentals Contacted

Use this to track who you have contacted and the outcome.

**Landlord or Property Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date you toured (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date Applied (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
If you applied were you approved? Yes  No  If approved, next steps: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If denied, why: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Landlord or Property Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date you toured (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date Applied (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
If you applied were you approved? Yes  No  If approved, next steps: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If denied, why: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Landlord or Property Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date you toured (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date Applied (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
If you applied were you approved? Yes  No  If approved, next steps: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If denied, why: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Landlord or Property Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date you toured (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date Applied (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
If you applied were you approved? Yes  No  If approved, next steps: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If denied, why: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Landlord or Property Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date you toured (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date Applied (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
If you applied were you approved? Yes  No  If approved, next steps: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If denied, why: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

# Application Cheat Sheet

Complete this ahead of time for easy reference when completing rental applications.

*You will need to provide the legal name, date of birth and social security number or tax ID for yourself and any other occupants (roommate, spouse, children). You will also need valid ID and your contact information (phone & email).*

**Present address:** \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Landlord/Owner Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Rent: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date moved-in: \_\_\_\_\_ Date moved-out: \_\_\_\_\_

**Previous address:** \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Landlord/Owner Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone & Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Rent: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date moved-in: \_\_\_\_\_ Date moved-out: \_\_\_\_\_

**Employer's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Monthly Income:** \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of hire: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Monthly Income:** Additional income such as second job, retirement or social security. Income such as child support or alimony need not be disclosed unless it is to be included for qualification.

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Source: \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal References:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

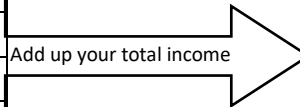
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# Monthly Budget

**Paying your rent and housing expenses are a priority.** While there are many important things to budget for, without housing, it will be difficult to maintain many of your other needs. You may also consider making a list of resources you can access for food and clothing to show that you will be able to meet your basic needs on a tight budget.

## INCOME

<b>Employment</b>	\$
<b>SSI/SSDI</b>	\$
<b>Retirement</b>	\$
<b>Child Support</b>	\$
<b>TANF Benefits</b>	\$
<b>Other:</b>	\$



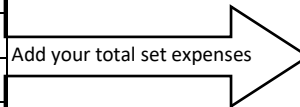
**Total Income**

\$

Before taxes  After taxes

## SET EXPENSES (with due dates)

Car payment	\$
Car insurance	\$
Phone	\$
Internet	\$
Childcare	\$
Other:	\$

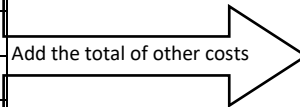


**Total Set Expenses**

-\$

## OTHER EXPENSES (no due dates)

Groceries	\$
Transportation/gas	\$
Medical/medication	\$
Service animals/pets	\$
Gifts/holidays	\$
Other:	\$



**Total Other Expenses**

-\$

Deduct the amounts in the “Total Cost” boxes from the “Total Income” box to show what funds you have available for housing costs & other needs.

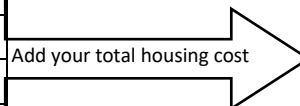
**Funds Available for Housing**

\$

## HOUSING EXPENSES

Now that you know what funds you have available, use this section to enter in the expected costs from the rental you are applying for. Use this to show the landlord you can pay your rent and other expenses.

Your rent portion	\$
Water/Sewer	\$
Garbage	\$
Electricity	\$
Gas	\$
Renter’s Insurance*	\$



**Total Housing Cost**

-\$

\*Having renter’s insurance is important for your own belongings and will show the landlord that you are a responsible tenant.



## Writing a Letter of Explanation

It is helpful to be prepared to honestly explain everything in your background that may negatively affect your application for housing. This may be an eviction, poor rental history, landlord debt, derogatory credit or criminal history. Be honest, avoid excuses and focus on steps you have taken to correct past mistakes and any current activities that are keeping you on track. Work with your case manager to determine what needs to be addressed and relevant information to include in your letter as well as the best time to provide it to the landlord. Below is a suggestion of how to write a letter of explanation to your landlord. It is a good idea to have at least one or two other people review your letter before you submit it.

*Recipient's Name*

*Company Name*

*Address*

*Date*

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

*Write out why you are providing this letter and the issues you are addressing from your background report. State the facts of what happened and when, avoid excuses or justifications for the situation. If you are addressing a few different concerns from your background you may consider bulleting each concern you are addressing.*

*Describe your current situation and any steps you have taken or are taking to address each concern. You should mention what relevant services you are engaging in or what supports you have in the area (family, case manager, communities). You should also share your current goals and how this rental unit will help you achieve them. While you may share some personal detail, keep it professional.*

*Thank the landlord for considering your application and mention any enclosed supporting documents (Tenant education class, Parenting classes, Letters of Reference, etc.). Provide the best way to contact you for further information or clarification.*

*Sincerely,*

*First and Last Name*

*Contact information*

## Lease Quick Guide

To be completed by you with your case manager

Your lease/rental agreement is a legal agreement between you and your landlord that sets out the terms and conditions of your use of a rental unit. It's important that you read and understand exactly what you are signing. Make sure you get a copy of the signed agreement and work with your case manager or housing advocate to review your rental agreement and find the following information.

Monthly rent amount (if you receive a voucher, write total amount you are responsible for)	\$
Term of lease	Lease Start Date: Lease End Date:
Day of month rent is due	
Day of the month late charges begin	
Charge for late rent check/returned rent check	
Forms of payment accepted	<input type="checkbox"/> Check <input type="checkbox"/> Money Order <input type="checkbox"/> Cash <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Utilities paid by you	<input type="checkbox"/> Electricity <input type="checkbox"/> Cable TV <input type="checkbox"/> Garbage/recycling service <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Sewer <input type="checkbox"/> Gas <input type="checkbox"/> Other

# Terms and Conditions

Leases usually have a section called “Terms and Conditions”. This section sets out the rules of your tenancy. Use the list below to help find the rules. Use a highlighter to find those parts of your lease that set out a rule. Once you have found the rules, write the rules in your own words in the blank line next to the item.

- Occupants \_\_\_\_\_
- Pets \_\_\_\_\_
- Damage and repairs \_\_\_\_\_
- Submitting work orders \_\_\_\_\_
- Care and maintenance \_\_\_\_\_
- Landlord access \_\_\_\_\_
- Visitors \_\_\_\_\_
- Letting others use your apartment \_\_\_\_\_
- Failure to pay rent \_\_\_\_\_
- Deposit refunds \_\_\_\_\_
- Termination \_\_\_\_\_
- Safety and smoke detectors \_\_\_\_\_
- Parking \_\_\_\_\_
- Notice of absence \_\_\_\_\_
- Notice to Vacate requirements \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

# Work Request Form

If your landlord does not have a work request form you can use this to provide written notice of the maintenance issue you are experiencing. Give one copy to your landlord & keep one for your records.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Best time to contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address/Unit Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of Problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Move In/Move Out Report

Your landlord will most likely have their own form to use.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Tenant(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_ Program Case Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Address of unit \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Living Room</b>				
Factor	Move-in Condition	Comments	Move-out Condition	Comments
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Windows & Coverings				
Doors				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Other				

General Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tenant(s) Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Kitchen</b>				
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Move-in Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Move-out Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Windows & Coverings				
Stove				
Refrigerator				
Dishwasher				
Sink				
Disposal				
Countertops				
Cabinets				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Other				
Other				

General Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Tenant(s) Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Bathroom # _____ Location: _____</b>				
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Move-in Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Move-out Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Shower/tub				
Sink				
Mirror				
Toilet				
Towel bars				
Sink				
Disposal				
Windows				
Blinds or Curtains				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Fan				
Other				

General Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Tenant(s) Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Bedroom # _____ Location: _____</b>				
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Move-in Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Move-out Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Closet				
Windows & Coverings				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Fan				
Other				

<b>Bedroom # _____ Location: _____</b>				
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Move-in Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Move-out Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Closet				
Windows & Coverings				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Fan				
Other				

Tenant(s) Initials: \_\_\_\_\_



<b>Other Room Description: _____</b>				
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Move-in Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Move-out Condition</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Walls				
Ceiling				
Flooring				
Windows				
Blinds or Curtains				
Electrical				
Lighting				
Fan				
Other				

# of Smoke Detectors: \_\_\_\_\_ Locations: \_\_\_\_\_

# of CO<sup>2</sup> detectors: \_\_\_\_\_ Locations: \_\_\_\_\_

**All detectors tested & in working condition:  Yes**

Tenant(s) Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Landlord Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tenant #1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tenant #2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Landlord/Manager Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Renter's Contact List

	Name	Phone Number
Police/Fire/Medical Emergency		911
Police Non-Emergency		
Fire Non-Emergency		
Case Manager		
Agency Provider		
Apartment Manager/Landlord		
Apartment /Landlord Emergency Contact		
Community Health & Human Services	211	211
Utility Company		
Utility Company		
Utility Company		
Crisis Hotline		
Dispute Resolution Center	Volunteers of America Western Washington	425-339-1335 (option 4) <a href="mailto:LTinfo@voaww.org">LTinfo@voaww.org</a>

## **Resources**

- **Washington 211**  
<https://win211.org/>
- **Annual Credit Report**  
[www.annualcreditreport.com/](http://www.annualcreditreport.com/)
- **Best Practice and Tips for Tenants**  
<https://tenantsunion.org/en/rights/best-practices-and-tips-for-tenants>
- **Domestic Violence Services of Snohomish County**  
<https://dvs-snoco.org/>
- **Northwest Justice Project**  
<https://nwjustice.org/home>
- **Northwest Fair Housing Alliance**  
<http://www.nwfairhouse.org/>
- **PUD Low-Income Discount Programs**  
<https://www.snopud.com/account/discounts.ashx?p=1188>
- **Residential Landlord-Tenant Act**  
<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=59.18>
- **Snohomish County Legal Services**  
<https://snocolegal.org/>
- **Snohomish County Office of Weatherization & Energy Assistance**  
<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/2004/Weatherization-Energy-Assistance-OWEA>
- **Volunteers of America Western Washington Dispute Resolution Center**  
<https://www.voaww.org/drc>
- **Washington State Department of Health and Social Services**  
<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/>
- **Washington State Human Rights Commission-Fair Housing**  
<https://www.hum.wa.gov/fair-housing>







