

YOUNG ADULT'S GUIDE TO HOUSING

**A tool developed by the
JOHN BURTON FOUNDATION**

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

Congratulations on embarking on your housing search! Although the process can seem overwhelming at first, this guidebook is designed to help break down the process for you and support you in your search. The guide is divided into five sections to assist you with the process of locating, applying for, securing, establishing and maintaining housing. There are a number of forms located at the end of this guide that can be used to make the process easier. If you plan to use the forms, you may want to make a few copies of each so that you always have copies of the original blank forms for future use.

Table of Contents

I.	Budgeting for Housing	Page 2
II.	Housing Search	Page 3
III.	Applying for Housing	Page 4
IV.	Getting Established	Page 9
V.	Maintaining Housing	Page 12

Forms:

Budget Worksheet	Page 17
Roommate Questionnaire	Page 18
Housing Search Log	Page 20
Housing Unit Questions	Page 21
Application Preparation Form	Page 22
Checklist for Apartment Viewing	Page 24
Move-in/Move-out Checklist	Page 26
Moving In-What You'll Need	Page 28

I. BUDGETING FOR HOUSING

Assessing Resources and Setting a Budget

The first step is to determine how much you can afford to pay for rent. This is important information to know before beginning a housing search as there is no point to applying for housing that you can't afford to pay for. Included in the forms section is a [Budget Worksheet](#) that can help you figure out your income and expenses and how much rent you can afford to pay.

Step 1: Calculate income

Determine what your monthly income amount is. This would include the \$776 Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) payment (if applicable), any income from a job, and any other financial assistance received such as college financial aid payments that are available to be used for living expenses. If you have any income from working, you should use the actual take home pay (net income), not the amount that is received before taxes are taken out (gross income).

Tip: If you receive financial aid as one lump sum payment at the beginning of the term, remember that you will need to budget the funds you need for living expenses across the whole term.

Step 2: Calculating non-housing expenses

Not including paying rent and other housing costs every month, determine what your other monthly expenses are. This should include food, transportation, laundry, cigarettes, clothing, entertainment, toiletries and other expenses. If you have children, remember to include costs such as diapers, child care, clothes and medicines.

Step 3: Calculate housing costs

The housing budget is the amount that will be available to pay rent as well as utilities. When starting a housing search, it is important to know how much the typical monthly utilities costs are in your area so that this can be factored in when determining if a unit is affordable. If you're unsure how to estimate utility costs or other expenses, visit <http://www.californiarealitycheck.com/> and select option #1, Reality Check. This tool allows you to explore housing and associated costs for your geographic region.

Step 4: One-time expenses

There are a number of costs that must be paid when first moving into a unit. When looking for housing, it is a good idea to start saving money so that it will be available when housing is found. Below are some of the one-time costs that need to be planned for and estimates of these costs.

- ⇒ Application fees (usually around \$30 per unit)
- ⇒ Security Deposit (usually one or two month's rent)
- ⇒ Utilities and phone connection (between \$15 and \$100)
- ⇒ Moving costs (varies depending on needs)
- ⇒ Furniture and household items (\$100 - \$500 or more, depending on how much is purchased)

II. HOUSING SEARCH

- There are several websites that landlords use to list vacant properties. One of the most commonly used is called Craigslist, which can be found at www.craigslist.org. Searches can generally be limited by neighborhoods, rent amounts and number of bedrooms so that you only see listings that are of interest to you.
- If you are going to college, check with your college's housing office as well to see if they offer housing listings.
- Friends, family and acquaintances can also be a good source for leads on housing.
- Housing that is shared with roommates can also be found on Craigslist. Under the housing heading is a section called "rooms / shared". Sometimes the ads will include a description of the people who live there and/or what they are looking for. This may include specifying a gender (which is allowable in shared housing), rules or information about alcohol use and smoking on the premises, and desirable roommate qualities such as being considerate, responsible, easy going, clean etc. One should read the ads carefully and only respond to those that seem like a good fit. For example, if you are a full time student it may not be a good idea to move into a house with people who advertise that they have frequent late night parties.
- Living with others can be a good way to find housing that is less expensive and often has less formal screening criteria. You should be extra vigilant when meeting with potential roommates to make sure they seem like people that you would like to live with.

Common terms and abbreviations that are used in ads:

- Sq. ft.: square footage of the unit
- Bd: Bedroom
- Ba: Bathroom
- Full bath: A bathroom that includes a toilet, sink and bathtub or shower
- Half bath: A bathroom that includes only a sink and toilet (no tub or shower)
- 1.5 bath: Unit has one full bathroom and one half bathroom
- Washer/dryer: There is a clothes washer and dryer in the building
- Month to month: A rental agreement that is not a fixed term lease (see section 5 for more information on leases).
- Include water and garbage: The landlord pays the cost for garbage removal and the water bill.
- Includes utilities: The landlord pays all utilities including garbage, water, gas and electric bills. (This does not include phone or cable service.)
- Cable ready: Tenants can subscribe to a cable television service (at their own expense).
- Off street parking: There is car parking available on the property (may involve additional cost)

III. APPLYING FOR HOUSING

A. What to Look for Before You Call

Regardless of the type of housing, it is often helpful to go by the building before calling the landlord or prospective roommates to make sure that it is someplace that you would want to live. This can also help you to prepare questions for when you call or interview. When you go to look at a building here are some of things that should be considered:

The location

- Does the neighborhood seem like someplace that you would want to live? Does it feel safe there? It is often helpful to go by the place on the weekend and at night in addition to during the day to see if the neighborhood is different at different times.
- Is there shopping nearby? Where is the closest Laundromat? Is it close to other things that are important such as parks or places to relax?
- Is the apartment close to transportation? Is it easy to get to the places you go most often such as your workplace or volunteer site, ILSP office, school, family and friends?
- Is the neighborhood quiet? Is there noise from nearby traffic?

The building

- Does the building seem secure?
- Does it seem like it is well maintained? Are there obvious maintenance issues such as peeling exterior paint, a broken intercom system, broken windows, etc.?
- Does the building appear clean and is it well-lit?

B. Choosing Roommates

When interviewing with potential roommate(s) or identifying friends or acquaintances to room with, it is important to ask questions and assess compatibility. The [Roommate Questionnaire](#) can be used to prompt conversations with potential roommates who already have an established household, to help determine whether it's a good fit. It can also be used as a tool when you are considering looking for housing with friends to make sure that you will be compatible as roommates. Just because someone is a good friend, does not mean that they would be good for you to live with. Make sure that you are on the same page about issues such as noise, cleanliness, overnight guests, smoking, etc.

C. Tracking the Housing Search

It is important to keep a log of all of the contacts you make and the results of each. This will help you to avoid accidentally calling about the same place twice, or forgetting an appointment. A [Housing Search Log](#) that can be used to track contacts with landlords or possible roommates is included in this guidebook.

When you call or e-mail, you should get some basic information to determine that a unit fits within your budget before deciding whether to see it. Some questions that should be asked if they were not in the advertisement, or confirmed if they were, are:

- What is the monthly rent amount?
- Does the rent include any utilities? If not, what is the average cost for utilities?
- How much of a security deposit is required?
- Will there be a fixed term lease or a month-to-month agreement?
- Is there an application fee?

Also, if you have a pet make sure to find out if the landlord and/or roommates are willing to accept the pet and whether a pet deposit is required. There may be other questions that are important to ask as well about issues such as whether there is laundry available, noise level in the unit, building security, etc.

A [Housing Unit Questions](#) form is included in this guidebook that can be used to make a list of important questions. Use this form to record all of the questions that you want to make sure to remember to ask landlords and potential roommates when you call.

D. Completing a Rental Application

Often, when applying for a housing unit, applicants will be asked to fill out a written application. The application generally requests basic identifying information, income and employment information and housing history. If you are applying for a unit with friends, all those who will be living in the unit should be prepared to provide information on an application. It is a good idea to prepare all of the information that an application typically requests in advance. That way when showing up to look at an apartment, you will be able to fill out the application right there on the spot. This could give you an advantage over someone else that is not similarly prepared and will also save making extra trips back and forth to turn in the application.

An [Application Preparation Form](#) is included in this guide book to help you to prepare the information that you will need to complete applications.

Tip: The actual application forms will vary, but if you compile all of the information on the Application Preparation form you will be prepared to respond to most of the questions that are likely to be found on an application.

Be sure to answer all questions honestly. If a landlord discovers that you lied on the application this will generally disqualify you for the unit. If a question does not apply indicate “n/a” (not applicable) rather than leaving it blank. This way the landlord will know that you didn’t accidentally skip the question or refuse to answer. Other items that should be brought when going to look at a unit are:

- Driver’s license or state issued ID card and Social security card
- Proof of income
- Copy of credit report and letters of reference
- List of questions that you have and apartment checklist

Fees

Some landlords may charge a fee to process an application. State law allows landlords to charge only their actual out-of-pocket costs up to a maximum of \$37.57 to process a rental application. These fees are typically not refundable whether you get the apartment or not. Applicants can offer to provide their own copy of their credit report to avoid the fee, but landlords have no obligation to accept this.

References

Many landlords will ask for the names and phone numbers of people they can call to get information about you. If you have previous landlords who will give a positive reference, these are the best references to have. If you do not have any housing references, current or former employers, social workers, teachers and others who can speak to whether you are likely to be a good tenant can be provided. Personal references such as friends are sometimes requested as well, but shouldn’t be provided unless requested.

Before giving out someone's name and number to a landlord, you should contact that person and confirm that they are willing to function as a reference. They should be asked if they feel comfortable giving a positive reference. If they do not, they should not be used. References can also be asked to provide a written recommendation. You can then make copies of these letters and give them to landlords when applying for apartments.

F. Meeting the Landlord and/or Roommates

Presentation

If you need to meet with the landlord, he or she will be assessing whether you are likely to be a good tenant not just from what is written on the application, but from your behavior and appearance as well. It is important to make a good impression and you should keep a few things in mind when meeting a landlord.

- ❑ **Arrive at interviews on time.** Lateness will probably count against a prospective tenant; not showing up at all is pretty much the same as giving up the apartment.
- ❑ **Dress for success.** While you don't need to go overboard, you should dress in a way that conveys that you are a responsible and thoughtful person. Avoid overly casual attire or torn or dirty clothing and be aware of personal hygiene.
- ❑ **Turn off cell phones.** Do not take or make calls or send text messages while viewing the apartment or talking with the landlord.
- ❑ **Wait your turn.** Let the landlord lead the interview without interruption. If invited to ask questions before the interview is over, you can go ahead—but if not, wait until the end, then let the landlord answer each question fully before moving on.
- ❑ **Arrange childcare.** If you have children, you should arrange to leave them with friends, family, babysitting or a daycare; you should not take them to interviews unless the landlord asks to meet them.

Sample Interview Questions

It is helpful to give some thought to the questions that you may be asked by a landlord or prospective roommates ahead of time. Some landlords or current tenants may ask some preliminary questions over the phone, so callers should be prepared with answers to common questions even before calling to inquire about a unit. Below are some common questions that you might get asked during a housing search.

1. How many people will be living in the unit, even if temporarily? (Make sure that you do not intend to exceed occupancy standards. Landlords are required to allow 2 persons per bedroom.)
2. What's your current living situation? Where are you renting now?
3. Why are you looking to move?
4. When are you looking to move?
5. Have you ever been evicted?
6. Do you think your current or previous landlord would give you a good reference?
7. Have you been convicted of a felony?
8. Have you been arrested and charged with a crime, but not yet convicted?
9. Do you have any pets? If so, what kind?
10. Do you or does anyone who will live with you smoke? (Landlords are allowed by law to prohibit smoking on the premises, even in a tenant's own unit.)
11. How is your credit?
12. How long do you plan to stay here?
13. How much do you make per week/month/year? How about the other applicants? Is this "gross income" or "take home" income?

14. What type of work do you do and where do you work or where are you going to school?
15. Do you have funds available for first month's rent plus the deposit?
16. Are you comfortable committing to a one year lease?

Tip: It can be helpful to practice interviewing in advance by doing a "mock" interview with a friend, family member or case manager.

How to answer the hard questions - bad credit, evictions and criminal history

Landlords may ask about events from the past that they believe will provide information about how a person will be as a future tenant. This can include questions about prior evictions, credit history and/or criminal background. It is important to be prepared for these questions **before** speaking to the landlord. You should know their responses even before making the initial phone call as some landlords will do preliminary screening on the telephone.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when preparing answers:

- Be prepared** – Know what is on your credit and background reports and have explanations prepared before going to meet with a landlord so that they are not caught by surprise. Determine whether any juvenile convictions will show up on a criminal background check. It can be helpful to practice responses out loud before meeting with a landlord. This will help you to be confident when the time comes to explain any negative history.
- Be honest:** Even if you have a good explanation for prior incidents, if you lie about them and are found out, in almost all cases this will result in an automatic rejection.
- Be concise** – It is important to be truthful and explain what happened, however it is not necessary to go into great detail about the circumstances of unpaid bills, evictions or criminal convictions.
- Be positive** – Determine what has changed since the negative incident(s) occurred. What is different now that gives you confidence that a similar incident wouldn't happen again? What could be said that has been gained as a result of the consequences of previous actions? How have your goals and priorities changed? You should emphasize the ways in which you have demonstrated financial responsibility and positive behavior recently.
- Be proactive** - Compile written letters of recommendation or have the names and phone numbers of references that can be presented to the landlord as evidence that the applicant will be a good tenant. Letters can come from former landlords, employers or places that you volunteer, or case managers. (References from personal friends are not generally as helpful).

G. What To Look For When at the Site

It is important when looking for housing to inspect each unit visited to determine if the unit is a good fit. You may not necessarily find a unit that meets 100% of your wishes and so you should be willing to compromise. It is generally not a good idea, however, to move into a unit where you are going to feel very uncomfortable or unsafe. Here are some general things to consider when first visiting an apartment or room:

- First look at the apartment or room itself
 - Does it have enough space? Is it clean and well maintained?
- Second look at the building
 - Is it safe?
 - Do you see evidence of pests or maintenance problems?
 - Is it clean and well-lit?
- Third, look at the neighborhood
 - Does it seem safe?
 - Is it close to transportation?
 - Is there shopping nearby?
 - What's it like at night?

Once inside the unit, there are additional things that may be considered while looking around. You should bring the [Checklist for Apartment Viewing](#) and make notes as you tour the apartment as it is often hard to remember the answers to these questions later.

What Should Be Asked?

Visiting a unit is an opportunity for you to ask questions and make sure the unit is a good fit. Some questions to consider asking are below. You don't need to ask all of these questions, only those that seem relevant. There may be other questions as well that you want to ask, depending on the particular situation. You should write down the questions that you want to ask and bring them along.

Rent and Utilities

- When is rent due? Is there a grace period? What are the late fees?
- Are any utilities included in the rent?

Maintenance and Management Issues

- How are maintenance requests made and how long does it usually take for repairs to be completed?
- How does management staff handle complaints about maintenance?
- What are your most common maintenance requests?
- How do you handle pest control? What are your most common pests?
- How can I report problems with another resident? How do you handle such issues?
- What is the parking situation like?

Safety Issues

- Have you had any break-ins in the past year? How did you address them?
- What is the most common safety complaint of residents?
- Do the windows lock?
- Does the door have a deadbolt? Can I have one installed?
- Are car break-ins a problem?

IV. GETTING ESTABLISHED

Once you have found a place to live, there are a number of issues that you will need to think about including paying a security deposit to the landlord, getting furniture and other essentials, and making sure everything is in good condition prior to moving in.

A. Security Deposit/Move-In Costs

Most landlords will require that tenants pay a security deposit before moving in. This is money that is paid in addition to the first month's rent. It is held by the landlord in case a tenant moves out without giving notice, owes back rent when leaving or causes damage to the unit that the landlord must repair after the tenant moves out. Under California law, a lease or rental agreement cannot say that a security deposit is "nonrefundable." This means that when the tenancy ends, the landlord *must* return any payment that is a security deposit, *unless* the landlord properly uses the deposit for unpaid rent, damage repairs or to clean the unit.

Almost all landlords charge tenants a security deposit. The security deposit may be called "last month's rent," "security deposit," "pet deposit," "key fee," or "cleaning fee." The security deposit may be a combination, for example, of the last month's rent plus a specific amount for security. <http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/landlordbook/when-rent.shtml> - footnote78 The law limits the total amount that the landlord can require as a security deposit. The total amount allowed as security depends on whether the rental unit is unfurnished or furnished and whether the tenant has a waterbed.

- **Unfurnished rental unit:** The total amount that the landlord requires as security cannot be more than the amount of *two months' rent*. If the tenant has a waterbed, the total amount allowed as security can be up to two and-a-half times the monthly rent.
- **Furnished rental unit:** The total amount that the landlord requires as security cannot be more than the amount of *three months' rent*. If the tenant has a waterbed, the total amount allowed as security can be up to three-and-a-half times the monthly rent.
- **Plus first month's rent:** The landlord can require a tenant to pay the first month's rent *in addition* to the security deposit. <http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/landlordbook/when-rent.shtml> - footnote82

If you don't have enough money to pay the first month's rent and the deposit up front, you could ask the landlord if they would be willing to set up a payment plan for the deposit. A payment plan is when the tenant pays a portion of the deposit over several months. For example, if the deposit is \$600 the tenant might pay \$200 each month for three months. The landlord does not have to agree to this.

B. Keeping a Move-In Record

Before moving in it is a good idea to go through the unit and document if anything needs repairing or is not in good shape. This documentation should be completed by the tenant and landlord together. This way when you move out of the unit the landlord will not be able to keep the deposit money to repair items that were damaged or missing before you got there. This is also the time to confirm that the landlord made any improvements that they promised to make previously such as painting or replacing carpeting.

Tenants can use the [Move In/Move Out Checklist](#) to go through the unit and document the condition of each room. Once this has been done both you and landlord should sign the form to avoid disagreements later on about the move-in condition of the unit. It's also a good idea to take pictures of the apartment, especially of any existing conditions that are unusual that are being accepted as part of the rental (such as walls that are painted

unusual colors.) If you cannot get the landlord to sign the document or feel uncomfortable asking, you can make a record using the list and send a copy to the landlord.

C. Signing a Lease

Upon securing a unit, you will usually be asked by the landlord to sign a lease or rental agreement. A lease is a legal agreement between a landlord and a tenant which gives the tenant the right to live in a rental property for a period of time. Never sign a lease without reading it. Ask for a copy of the lease so you can read it over carefully and understand its terms. Failure to read the lease or understand it is not a valid excuse for not following the terms of the lease.

Also, any agreement made with the landlord should be included in the lease in writing - for example if you are paying the deposit in installments or the landlord agrees to paint the unit before you move in. If these types of agreements are made only verbally you will have no way to enforce them if the landlord doesn't hold up their end of the bargain. If the agreement is important, make sure to get it in writing.

How do a lease and a rental agreement differ?

A lease for a rental property has a finite term, such as six months or a year, for which a tenant will agree to rent the property. If the tenant leaves the unit before the lease ends, which is known as breaking the lease, the tenant may be liable for rent for the duration of the lease. For example if a tenant has a one year lease and moves out after 8 months, the tenant may be required to pay the rent for the remaining 4 months even though they are not living there.

Rental agreements are generally month-to-month, meaning that there is no set length of time that either the landlord or tenant is obligated to continue the agreement. The landlord is free at the end of each 30-day period to make changes to the rental agreement, subject to any rent control laws. Generally the landlord is required to give 30 days notice before any change can be made. A tenant can move out at the end of any 30-day period and agreements usually specify that the tenant also must provide 30-days notice prior to moving out.

Make sure you understand the following before you move in:

Term: The agreement will say when it starts and when it ends. If it is a fixed-term lease there will be a specific end date to the lease. If the agreement is month-to-month there will only be a start date.

Rent: The rent amount will be stated as well as the due date and what forms of payment are accepted (for example check, money order, cash, etc.). If there are any penalties for paying late this will be stated as well. It may also state the tenant's liability for rent if you move out before the lease expires.

Utilities: The lease or rental agreement will generally state who (the landlord or tenant) is responsible for paying utilities such as water, gas and electric and trash removal.

Deposit: The amount that you are paying as a security deposit will be stated. It may also describe what is required in order to have the deposit returned to you upon departure (for example it may say that any unpaid rent or charges for damages will be deducted from the deposit.)

Other conditions: The lease may describe other conditions such as whether the tenant is allowed to sublet the unit, whether pets are allowed, and rules about use of on-site facilities such as laundry machines

Visitors: Tenants are responsible for the behavior of their visitors. If someone who is visiting you violates the terms of the lease such as disturbing other tenants or engaging in illegal activity you may be evicted for it.

Roommates: Tenants who are sharing an apartment with one or more persons, need to be aware that they will all be held responsible for the full rent amount. So if a roommate stops paying their share of the rent, **you** are legally responsible for the roommate's share as well as your own. If your roommate doesn't pay rent, it is likely that you will be evicted as well and the eviction will be on your record as well as the roommate who defaulted.

D. Moving In - What is Needed?

Once you have the key to your new home there are several household items that they will probably need to get as well as some furniture. If you are moving in to an apartment that is already occupied by your roommates, they may have provided some of these already. The forms section of this guidebook includes a form called [Moving In-What You'll Need](#) which contains some of the items that you may find useful in your new home. You should review the list and decide which items are priorities so that they can be purchased first. Items on the list that are priorities can be circled and the check boxes can be used to keep track of what has already been acquired. Some of the other items that are less important can be purchased over time later. When buying larger items such as furniture, make sure you think about how the items will be transported to your new place before making a purchase.

E. Setting Up Utilities and Getting Financial Assistance

If utilities are not already set up, check with your new landlord to determine which utilities you will need to set up. Most commonly, these utilities will be gas and electric service, water service, telephone and internet and cable TV. If the landlord pays the bill for some of the utilities, they may already be in place. The utilities that the you are responsible for will need to be set up by you with the utility companies. You can ask your landlord who the local utility companies are in the area or look them up online. For gas and electric you may only have one option, whereas for cable, you may have several to choose from. Many utilities companies have programs for residents with low income. Check with your utilities companies for these programs and see if you qualify for a discounted rate based on your income.

F. Other Useful Information

The following are some additional questions that a tenant may want to ask the landlord upon move in if they were not previously answered. These may include:

- ❖ Where should I dispose of trash and recycling? What day is the trash collected?
- ❖ Who do I contact for repairs or to make a complaint?
- ❖ What address do I send my rent to and what forms of payment do you accept (such as cash, check, money order, etc.)? Can I drop off my rent in person?
- ❖ If there is a laundry room, are there specific hours that it is available or rules that I should be aware of?
- ❖ How do I access my mailbox? Is there a location where packages that are delivered can be stored?
- ❖ How do I get a duplicate key if I were to lose mine?

V. MAINTAINING HOUSING

Once you have moved into your new home, it is important to understand how to keep that housing. There are several things that you should keep in mind in order to avoid putting your housing at risk.

A. General Good Practices

Pay rent on time

Paying rent on the day that it is due is very important to maintaining housing. If the landlord charges a late fee, it can cost a lot of money if the rent is routinely paid late. Paying rent on time will also keep you in good standing with your landlord. Tenants should keep in mind that a landlord is legally entitled to serve a “3-Day Notice to Pay or Quit,” which is the first step towards an eviction as soon as a tenant is late with the rent. You should also be aware that if you are frequently paying rent late, that can be grounds for an eviction even if you always pay eventually. Also keep in mind, that if you have roommates and your roommates don’t pay their rent, you can be evicted.

Pay bills on time

It is important to pay utility bills such as gas, electric and water on time each month. These services will charge a late fee if payments are not made on time which can add up quickly and cost a considerable amount of money. Unpaid bills may also show up on your credit report and affect your ability to get housing in the future. If the utility is turned off, you may have to pay a fee to get it turned on again.

Obey the terms of the lease

The lease likely describes some basic expectations that the landlord has of all tenants such as not disturbing other tenants, not damaging the property and not engaging in illegal activities on the property. If you violate any of these rules, you can be evicted from your apartment. Following these guidelines will also help to maintain good relationships with the neighbors. Some tips to remember are:

- Keep noise to a minimum especially during hours when people are sleeping. If you are living in an apartment building and share walls with other units or have a unit directly above or below others, you should be especially aware of the impact you may be having. It can be helpful for you to give neighbors your contact information so that the neighbors can communicate if they are being disturbed by noise.
- Do not make any alterations to a unit without the landlord’s permission.
- Monitor the behavior of your guests and do not have too many visitors. Don’t allow visitors to roam around the building.
- Do not engage in illegal activity on the premises or allow guests to do so.
- Do not allow others who are not on the lease to move in with you.
- Take out the trash and recycling regularly and keep your unit clean. Avoid leaving out items such as food that may attract insects or rodents.
- If you have a pet, ensure the pet is properly cared for and cleaned up after.
- Leave the hallways and corridors clear of items and make sure your unit is not attracting pests such as cockroaches or mice.

B. Maintaining a Good Relationship with the Landlord

Maintaining communication with the landlord is key to maintaining housing. Here are some examples of situations that should prompt you to get in touch with the landlord:

- *Maintenance issues in the apartment* – If something breaks or stops working, or there are other problems with the unit such as mold, plumbing problems or pests, contact your landlord right away. While tenants are responsible to change a light bulb or unclog a toilet when necessary, never try to make complex repairs without discussing it with the landlord first. If a landlord is unresponsive, document requests by writing a letter to the landlord. Make sure to keep copies of all letters sent and received. If the landlord continues to be unresponsive contact a tenant assistance agency.

Tip: Never stop paying rent because a landlord is not making necessary repairs unless advised to do so by an attorney or advocate who specializes in tenant/landlord law.

- *If you need to change the lock* – The landlord is entitled to have a key to the unit in case they need to enter the unit due to an emergency or to make repairs. If you need to change the lock for security reasons or add an additional lock, alert the landlord before making the change and be sure to provide the landlord with a key to the new lock.
- *Maintenance issues in common areas* – If there are repair issues in common space such as burned out light bulbs in hallways or a broken intercom system, these are the responsibility of the landlord and you should alert them of the problem right away.
- *Problems with Neighbors* – If you have a problem with a neighbor such as excessive noise, visible trash or other issues, and feel comfortable doing so, try to resolve the issue directly with the neighbor. If it cannot be resolved or the neighbor is particularly problematic, alert the landlord to the problem. Always avoid getting in a fight with a neighbor or responding to a problem by doing something to get back at the neighbor. This will likely make the situation worse, and could result in a loss of housing.
- *Rent Problems* – If for some reason you are late with the rent, inform the landlord and let them know when you expect to be able to pay. If the landlord knows what is going on, they are more likely to give some leeway, whereas if you make the landlord chase you down, the landlord is less likely to be willing to work with you. If you are unable to pay your rent you should consider moving out of the unit in order to avoid an eviction. If you end up getting evicted, this will go on your record for the next seven years and will make it harder to get housing in the future.

Tip: If you ever receive any type of legal paperwork from your landlord, do not ignore it. Take it to a tenant assistance agency right away to determine how to respond. Waiting even a few days can mean the difference between keeping and losing housing.

- *If you want to make changes to a unit:* If you want to make changes to your unit such as painting walls a different color, always consult the landlord before making them. If you don't, you may lose your deposit when it comes time to move out or could be evicted for violating the lease.
- *When things change:* If there are any significant changes that affect a household such as someone moving in or out, you should alert your landlord.

C. Problems with the Landlord

If you feel like the landlord is not treating you fairly, breaking the law or is not responding to requests there are a number of agencies that can assist tenants with this. You can often find information about local tenants' rights agencies by dialing "211". Tenants should never withhold rent from their landlord without consulting with one of these agencies first. Living with a landlord who is not making necessary repairs can be very frustrating, but not paying rent is more likely to get a person evicted than to get the repairs made.

D. Eviction

Whether or not a landlord has a right to evict you varies depending on what city you live in. In some cities, a landlord can only evict a tenant for certain specific reasons. In other cities the landlord does not need a reason to ask a tenant to leave who is under a month to month rental agreement or whose lease has expired.

Evictions for Cause

If you live in a city that requires "good cause" to evict, the landlord can generally only evict you if you don't pay your rent or if you violate the terms of the lease (such as creating a nuisance, not keeping the unit clean, disturbing other tenants, engaging in illegal activity, etc.). In either of these cases the landlord can give a "3-day Notice." At the end of the three days if the tenant has not addressed the problem (either paid the rent or stopped the problematic behavior), the landlord can serve an eviction notice, known as an "Unlawful Detainer." If you have damaged the property, substantially interfered with other tenants or used the apartment for unlawful purposes (such as selling drugs) the landlord does not have to offer a chance to stop the behavior. If you get served with an Unlawful Detainer, this will go on your record for the next seven years and will make it harder for you to get housing in the future, so it is very important to try to avoid this happening.

If you receive an eviction notice you can attempt to fight the eviction or you may want to consider moving out. As mentioned above, having an eviction on your record could have serious consequences for the future. The landlord may be willing to work out an agreement with you where the landlord will agree to give you 30 or 60 days to move out if you agree to leave by the agreed upon deadline. This will give you some time to find a new place and avoid having to go through an eviction process.

Evictions Without Cause

If the landlord is not required to give a reason, they still have to give written notice. If everyone living in the unit has been there for more than one year, the landlord must give 60-days notice. If the tenants have been there for less than a year or in some cases if the landlord has sold the property to someone who plans to move in, they only need to give 30-days notice. If you believe the landlord is trying to evict you illegally you should contact a local tenant's rights organization.

Tip: If you receive any type of legal notice saying that you need to move out take it to a tenant referral agency right away. Waiting even a few days can mean the difference between keeping and losing housing.

E. Moving Out Well

If you decide to move out of the unit, there are a number of steps that should be taken to leave the unit responsibly. This will help ensure both that you can get back the security deposit that was paid upon move

in and that the landlord will give a good reference when you're looking for housing in the future. The following should be kept in mind when it is time to leave.

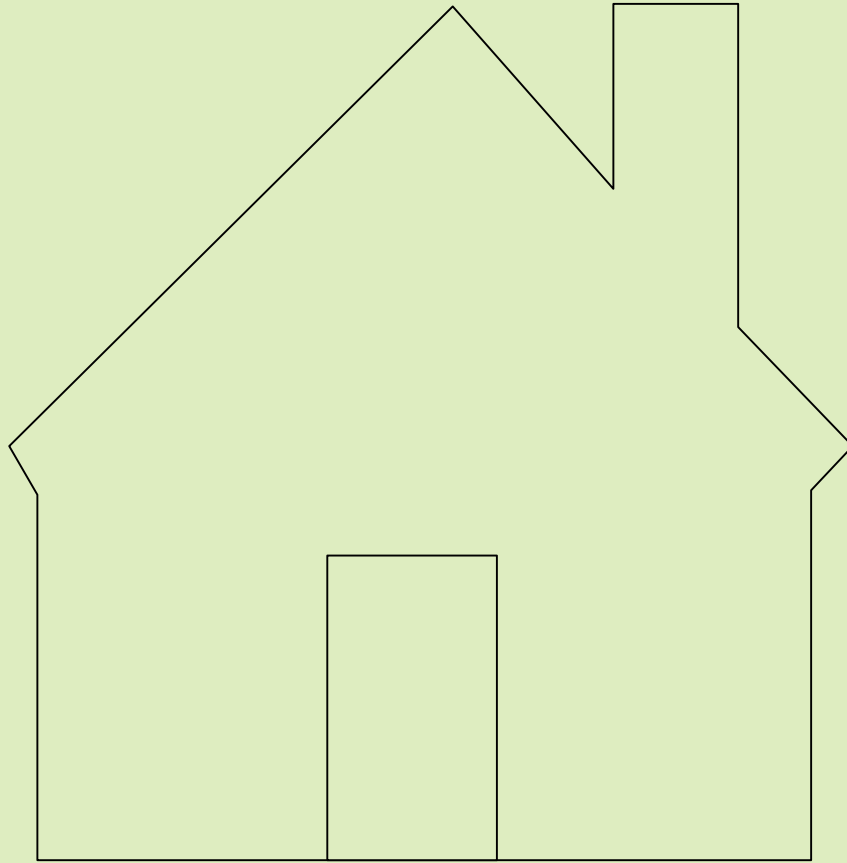
- ❖ Check the lease/rental agreement to make sure you are not vacating the property before the lease expires. A lease is a legally binding contract. If you must move out before the lease expires, should discuss the circumstances with the landlord in advance and see under what circumstances the landlord may be willing to allow the tenant to break the lease.
- ❖ Make sure to give 30 days notice in writing or whatever other notice is required in the lease. If you do not, the landlord is entitled to keep the deposit to pay for a month's rent even if you have moved out.
- ❖ When leaving, take everything with you. If there are items that they no longer want, they should be disposed of. Never leave trash or old furniture for the landlord to get rid of.
- ❖ Thoroughly clean the apartment including cleaning the floors, carpets, walls, closets, fixtures and appliances. Give particular attention to the bathrooms, stove, oven, and refrigerator. The landlord is allowed to keep the deposit to pay the cost of cleaning the unit if it is not cleaned well enough.
- ❖ If there is damage to the unit that you caused, make sure that it is repaired before moving out. This can include patching holes where pictures were hung.
- ❖ Coordinate with the landlord to do a final inspection. You can use the move in/move out checklist that was completed when they first moved in.
- ❖ Leave contact information with the landlord so that the landlord can forward any mail and knows where to send the deposit refund.
- ❖ Return all keys to the landlord including mail box key.
- ❖ Notify your social worker and other important agencies of a new mailing address. Fill out a forwarding address form with the Post Office as well.
- ❖ Discontinue all utilities, phone and cable service.

F. Getting Back the Security Deposit

California law has very specific requirements about how security deposits must be handled when a tenant moves out. It allows the landlord to use a security deposit for four purposes:

- For unpaid rent;
- For cleaning the rental unit when the tenant moves out, but only to make the unit as clean as it was when the tenant first moved in;
- For repair of damages, other than normal wear and tear, caused by the tenant guests; and
- If the lease or rental agreement allows it, for the cost of restoring or replacing furniture, furnishings, or other items of personal property (including keys), other than because of normal wear and tear.

The landlord has 21 calendar days after a tenant moves out to refund the deposit. If the landlord withholds money from the deposit they are required to send an itemized statement of what the money was used for and copies of receipts for any work done. If you believe that the landlord has improperly withheld money from a deposit after move out you should contact one a legal assistance agency.



FORMS

On the pages following are all forms referenced in this guidebook.

Make sure you have made copies of the originals before writing on them to ensure that you always have copies of the original blank forms for future use.

BUDGET WORKSHEET

Step 1: Income

Source of Income	Take home pay
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
Total monthly net income	\$

Step 2: Non-housing Expenses

Source of Expense	Monthly cost
Groceries	
Personal hygiene items	
Medical/dental	
Laundry	
Clothing	
Child care	
Transportation	
Cell phone	
Entertainment/hobbies	
Money for emergencies	
Other: _____	
Other: _____	
Total monthly non-housing expenses	\$

Step 3: Calculate housing costs

Source of Expense	Monthly cost
Rent	
Utilities (gas, elec, water)	
Telephone/Internet	
Cable TV	
Total Housing Costs	\$

Step 4: Calculate one-time costs

<input type="checkbox"/> Application fees	(usually around \$30 per unit)	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Security Deposit	(usually one or two month's rent)	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Utilities connection	(between \$15 and \$100)	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone line connection	(\$10 for low income tenants)	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving costs		\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Furniture and household items	(\$100 - \$500)	\$ _____
Total		\$ _____

ROOMMATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Unit Address: _____ Roommate name(s) _____

Sharing Space	
What areas of the house will be private and what areas will be shared?	
What are their housekeeping standards?	
How are household chores shared?	
How will general storage space be shared?	
How will storage in the kitchen (pantry, refrigerator, freezer) be allocated?	
Are there pets in the house?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Type _____
If you have a car, what are the parking arrangements?	
What are their needs regarding socializing and privacy?	
Personal Habits	
How often do they have guests over?	
Do guests often spend the night?	
How do they feel about you having guests over?	
Temperature preferences for summer and winter	
What hours do they keep?	
What are the expectations regarding smoking and/or drinking?	
What are the expectations around noise level?	
What are their television watching habits?	
How will you deal with conflict together?	

Money	
Who will you be paying rent to? Will you be on the lease?	
How are utility costs split?	
Will you be sharing food costs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will you share a phone line/phone costs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
How much notice do you need to give to move out?	
What happens if one of the roommates moves out?	
Other information:	

Once the interview is completed, take some time to consider their overall impression of the potential roommate(s). Some questions to consider are:

Do their hours, habits, preferences, and housekeeping standards match your own?	
Do they seem responsible and will they pay their share of the rent/bills on time?	
Do they seem willing to accommodate your needs or will they insist that they get their way?	
Will they respect your space, possessions and privacy?	
Are you willing to abide by any rules already in place in the house?	

HOUSING SEARCH LOG

Apartment Address:	Date/Time contacted:
Contact Name & Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Appointment scheduled Date: _____ Time: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No appointment scheduled
Lease information <input type="checkbox"/> Month to month <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year lease required <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Rent: \$ _____ Deposit: \$ _____ Utilities paid by tenant <input type="checkbox"/> Gas & Electricity <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Garbage
Notes:	

Apartment Address:	Date/Time contacted:
Contact Name & Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Appointment scheduled Date: _____ Time: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No appointment scheduled
Lease information <input type="checkbox"/> Month to month <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year lease required <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Rent: \$ _____ Deposit: \$ _____ Utilities paid by tenant <input type="checkbox"/> Gas & Electricity <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Garbage
Notes:	

Apartment Address:	Date/Time contacted:
Contact Name & Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Appointment scheduled Date: _____ Time: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No appointment scheduled
Lease information <input type="checkbox"/> Month to month <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year lease required <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	Rent: \$ _____ Deposit: \$ _____ Utilities paid by tenant <input type="checkbox"/> Gas & Electricity <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Garbage
Notes:	

HOUSING UNIT QUESTIONS

You should get some basic information to determine that a unit fits within your budget before deciding whether to see it. Use this form to record all of the questions that you want to make sure to remember to ask landlords or prospective roommates when you call. You can then record the responses on the **Housing Search Log**.

Rent and Other Charges

1. What is the monthly rent amount?
2. Does the rent include any utilities? If not, what is the average cost for utilities?
3. How much of a security deposit required?
4. Will there be a fixed term lease or a month-to-month agreement?
5. Does the landlord charge an application fee?
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Unit and building (Pets, laundry facilities, etc.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Location

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

APPLICATION PREPARATION FORM¹

Identifying information (this information should be obtained for all household members)

Name: _____ Date of Birth _____
SSN _____ Driver's License or ID Card # _____
Home/cell Phone: _____ Work phone: _____
Emergency contact: _____ relationship: _____
Address _____ Phone: _____

Housing history (Use the back of the form or a separate page to record additional housing history. Many landlords will request history for the past five years.)

Current or most recent address: _____
Dates of occupancy: ___/___ to ___/___ Rent amt. \$ _____ Sec. Dep. \$ _____
Landlord name: _____ Phone: _____
Reason for leaving _____

Prior address: _____
Dates of occupancy: ___/___ to ___/___ Rent amt. \$ _____ Sec. Dep. \$ _____
Landlord name: _____ Phone: _____
Why did you leave? _____

Employment/Income (Use additional pages to record other previous employment)

Current or most recent employer: _____
Address: _____ Phone _____
Dates of employment: _____ Monthly pay _____ Position: _____
Supervisor's name: _____ Supervisor phone: _____

Other income: Source: _____ Amount _____
Source: _____ Amount _____

References

Name: _____ Phone: _____ relationship: _____
Name: _____ Phone: _____ relationship: _____
Name: _____ Phone: _____ relationship: _____

¹ Application Preparation Form has been adapted from Portman, Janet, *Every Landlord's Guide to Finding Great Tenants*, Nolo Press, 2006

Credit References (use the back of the form or a separate page to record additional bank accounts or credit accounts.)

Bank: _____ City: _____ Acct #: _____
Type of account: _____ Balance: _____ How long had acct: _____

Credit/loan account: _____ Acct # _____ Exp date: _____
Type of acct: _____ Credit limit: _____ How long: _____
Amt. owed: _____ Monthly payment: _____

Miscellaneous

When can you occupy unit? _____
How long do you plan to stay? _____
Does anyone in your household smoke? _____
Do you have pets? _____ If yes, what type: _____
Do you have a waterbed? _____
Car make, model and license number _____

Use additional pages to provide more detailed explanations to the questions below as needed

Have you broken a lease? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you been evicted? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you filed for bankruptcy? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you been convicted of a felony? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Are you required to register as a sex offender? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you been sued? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you ever sued anyone? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Have you ever had a foreclosure? _____ If yes, explain: _____
Is your paycheck currently being garnished? _____ If yes, how much? _____
Do you have any unpaid loans? _____ How much? _____ Monthly pmt _____
Do you have any tax liens? _____ If yes, how much do you owe? _____

CHECKLIST FOR APARTMENT VIEWING

Apartment Address: _____

Date Visited: _____

Landlord name and phone number: _____

Suitability of the living space

- ✓ Will you be able to fit furniture through the doors, up the stairs around corners or in the elevator? _____
- ✓ Are door locks provided? _____
- ✓ Are there closets for clothing and storage? _____
- ✓ Is there adequate storage space in kitchens and bathrooms? _____
- ✓ Do drawers and doors open and close easily? _____
- ✓ Can all accessible windows lock? _____
- ✓ Are window screens in good condition? _____
- ✓ Are there signs of leaks? _____
- ✓ Is there sufficient ventilation? _____
- ✓ Do electrical outlets and light switches work? _____
- ✓ Is there plaster falling from the ceiling or paint cracking on the walls? _____
- ✓ Is there are a working smoke detector? _____
- ✓ Will electrical service handle the load of your appliances? _____
- ✓ Can you control the temperature level of the apartment? _____
- ✓ Is there adequate heat and hot water? _____
- ✓ Does the plumbing work? (water is not rusty, sinks drain quickly, toilets flush properly, no leaks or drips) _____
- ✓ Is the water pressure sufficient? _____
- ✓ Is there mildew, mold or water damage? _____
- ✓ Is there evidence of roaches or rodents? _____
- ✓ Will you be able to subscribe to a cable television service? _____
- ✓ Do the appliances (refrigeration, stove, oven, dishwasher, garbage disposal) function properly? _____

Suitability of the building

- ✓ Who manages the building and is there a resident manager?

- ✓ Is there a front door access system such as a phone or buzzer with an intercom, and if so, does it work? _____
- ✓ Are there security cameras in entrances, hallways and the elevator? _____
- ✓ Is there an elevator and does it work? _____
- ✓ If there is no elevator or the elevator goes out of service, are you physically able to walk up the stairs? _____
- ✓ Is there a hall sprinkler system? _____
- ✓ Are fire escapes easily accessible, not blocked and clearly marked? _____
- ✓ Are hallways and stairwells well lit and clean? _____

- ✓ Does the mailbox door close securely? _____
- ✓ Are laundry facilities provided and are they in a safe, accessible area? How much does it cost to do laundry? _____
- ✓ Is there an easily accessible way to dispose of trash? _____
- ✓ Are pets allowed? _____

Suitability of the surrounding neighborhood

- ✓ Is there a safe park or place for relaxing nearby? _____
- ✓ Where is the nearest bus stop or BART station? _____
- ✓ How far is it from places you go regularly (case manager office, drop in centers, work or volunteer sites, food pantries etc.) _____
- ✓ How far are you from family members or friends? _____
- ✓ Where is the closest place to shop for groceries? _____
- ✓ Where is the closest place to shop for toiletries, clothing, and other necessities?

- ✓ How far away is the Laundromat? _____
- ✓ Is there evidence of high crime, drugs or vandalism in the neighborhood?

- ✓ Are you comfortable in general with the prospect of living in the neighborhood?

Notes: _____

MOVE-IN/MOVE-OUT CHECKLIST

Tenant _____ Address: _____

Move-In Inspection Date: _____ Move-Out Inspection Date: _____

Use the codes listed at the end of the chart to describe the condition of each item. If the item does not exist in your unit write "NA" for not applicable. Use the space provided to write down any comments about each item such as damaged items or items missing.

ITEM	MOVE-IN		MOVE-OUT	
Keys				
Apartment Door				
Mail Box				
Living Room/Dining Room				
Walls/Ceiling				
Flooring/Carpet				
Doors				
Windows				
Drapes/Blinds/Shades				
Light Fixtures				
Front door & locks				
Other				
Kitchen				
Overall Cleanliness				
Stove/Oven				
Refrigerator				
Counter Tops/Cabinets				
Sink & plumbing				
Dishwasher				
Garbage Disposal				
Light fixtures				
Floor				
Windows, screens and doors				
Walls/Ceiling				
Other				
Halls				
Walls/Ceiling				
Flooring/Carpets				
Doors				
Bedrooms	Bdrm 1	Bdrm 2	Bdrm 1	Bdrm 2
Walls/Ceiling				
Flooring/Carpets				
Closet/Closet Door				
Door				
Windows, screens and doors				
Drapes				

Blinds/Shades		
Light fixtures		
Other		
Bathroom		
Overall Cleanliness		
Tub/Shower		
Shower curtain		
Sink		
Toilet		
Light fixtures		
Medicine Cabinet/Mirror		
Flooring		
Door		
Windows		
Other		
Miscellaneous		
Smoke Detectors		
Fire Extinguishers		
Storage Room		
Garage		
Heating/Air Conditioning		
Patio or deck/Patio door		
Other		
Furniture		
Tables		
Chairs		
Bed		
Dresser		
Nightstand		
Lamps		
Sofa		
Other		

CODES

- S Satisfactory
- NA Not Applicable
- NC Needs Cleaning
- NR Needs Repair

Tenant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Landlord Signature: _____ Date: _____

MOVING IN - WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Bathroom and cleaning supplies

- Shower curtain, liner and rings
- Towels and washcloths
- Soap
- Broom
- Mop
- Bucket
- Dustpan
- Wastebasket
- Garbage bags
- Sponges
- All purpose cleaner
- Laundry detergent
- Bleach

Kitchen

- Plates, bowls and cups
- Knives, spoons and forks
- Pots and pans
- Strainer
- Dish towels
- Dish washing soap
- Scissors
- Microwave
- Toaster
- Coffee pot or tea kettle
- Dish drying rack

Bedroom

- Sheets, blankets, pillow cases
- Window shades or curtains
- Clothes hangers

Emergency supplies

- Flashlight and batteries
- Candles and matches
- 2 gallons of water
- Canned food for emergency
- Work gloves
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Battery powered radio

Furniture

- Bed frame and mattress
- Sofa
- Lamps
- Television
- Dresser
- Nightstand
- Kitchen or dining room table/chairs
- Desk and chair

Other

- _____
- _____
- _____