

**Court Orders Landlord to Pay \$75,000!  
(Eight Tips to Avoid Costly Mistakes)  
by Jeffrey Taylor, "Mr. Landlord"**

A Florida landlord was ordered to pay \$75,000 to settle allegations of discrimination against families with children. I pass this information on to you so that you will not make similar mistakes. The Justice Department sued the landlord under the Federal Housing Act. The suit alleged the owner violated Fair Housing Act by refusing to rent to families with children and pressuring a pregnant woman to move. The lease of the landlord contained the following provision: "Children under the age of eighteen (18) years of age are prohibited from residing...." The owner also refused to renew a couple's lease after the birth of their first child and sent a letter that read: "This is to inform you that "*Rent to You Apartments*" will not be renewing your lease... The lease agreement states that children under eighteen years of age are prohibited from residing..." The resident filed a complaint of discrimination with the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) alleging the landlord discriminated against them on the basis of familial status in violation of the Fair Housing Act. As stated earlier, the landlord was found guilty, and ordered to pay \$70,000 to four families with children and \$5,000 civil penalty to the United States.

**Below are eight tips to help you to avoid costly mistakes:**

1. Make sure your application is proper and legal and does not violate any fair housing laws or local laws.
2. Include a small section of text briefly detailing your qualifying standards and permission for the landlord to check all sources in evaluating their application for tenancy.
3. Include a phrase stating an "incomplete/inaccurate application" is a reason to be disqualified or not approved. Their signature line is below this small bit of text.
4. Ask for several phone numbers - home, work, cell, pager, etc.
5. **DO NOT ASK** "Do you have pets?" This phrase almost automatically implies the landlord does not accept animals and your applicant will almost always answer this question with a "No". Instead ask "How many animals do you have".
6. **DO NOT ASK** "Have you been evicted?" Instead, ask "How many evictions have been filed on you?" It seems like the applicant has trouble reading the question properly. Even when confronted with false information on the application, the applicant who answered this question ZERO or none will respond "I have never been evicted!" Unfortunately, that is not the question. Sometimes the tenant has had evictions filed and landlord has lost the eviction.
7. **DO NOT ASK** about a question using "family" or "children". Think of those words as lighting fuses to cause you trouble. If you are doing it, STOP IT NOW. Substitute the phrase "names and birthdates of people in your household?"
8. **EMERGENCY CONTACTS:** This section includes the phrase "including nonpayment of rent". This is an emergency. I also include this phrase right above the emergency contact information section in our rental agreement. This is powerful and allows you to contact these folks if they get behind on their rent. Yes, your tenant might throw a fit the first time you contact their relative, but you remind them they instructed you to do so on both their application and rental agreement. After perhaps some embarrassment, I have found this to be a powerful tenant training tool. They will make sure rent is paid on time to prevent their emergency contacts from being notified.

**Do Periodic Inspections**

Once you have accepted a new applicant as a resident, do not forget to do periodic inspections of their rentals every six months. A common mistake by landlords is failure to make these periodic inspections of your rental units, especially early into the rental period with a new resident. Detect early, correct early! Periodic inspections are all part of "training" new residents, which is vital and can save you tons of aggravation and money later.

*All of the above tips are shared by [mrlandlord.com](http://mrlandlord.com) rental owners and reprinted with permission from MR LANDLORD newsletter. For a free sample, call 1-800-950-2250 or visit their informative web site at [www.mrlandlord.com](http://www.mrlandlord.com) to register to win a free landlording book.*