

Top Ten Warning Signs of a Potential Bad Tenant **by Carolyn Gibson**

Let's assume you are already doing the basic screening duties. Everyone fills out a rental application. You check the credit report, the employment and bank account information, landlord references, and the applicant has shown the ability to pay the rent. So far, the rental candidate shows good potential for your vacant apartment.

Signs are there that you are talking to a would-be problem applicant. Sometimes we ignore them because everything else about the applicant appears to be okay. Other times, we are in such a hurry to get the unit back on a paying basis, we go ahead and rent to the person anyway. When your applicant begins to make a series of statements or excuses why he or she cannot comply with your requests for information, you may have a potential bad renter. You need to probe deeper and ask follow up questions.

Here are the top ten warning signs from rental applicants that should cause you to examine further.

1. "Why do I have to fill out an application?" Uh-oh, we have a difficult applicant. And, guess what? This question will most likely come from one of your closet friends or relative. Do not start your vacancy process by playing favorites or catering to those who do not want to follow the rules.

Beware the applicant that is surprised he or she has to comply with your renting requirements. The answer to the question is, "Because, my property is my business, and I require everyone to complete a rental application". It is the best way to treat everyone as equal, and complies with state and federal fair housing legislation. You will also appreciate being able to have something in writing to review and compare information from one candidate to another.

Here is the definitive reason why everyone should fill out a rental application: It is your policy, your property, and your rules. If a person does not have a problem giving a credit card company or a car company his or her personal business to get credit, the rental applicant should not have a problem filling out a rental application to get an apartment. Applicants have no problem at all filling out an employment application. Your apartment is at the same level of business.

2. "My mother (father, aunt, sister, etc.) said that I wouldn't have to go through the regular process." The presumption is that you will give preferential treatment. It may also signify the applicant has problems that he or she does not want you to see. Let your friends and relatives know that you are serious about your apartment and building. If you begin a tenancy by not following your own policies and procedures, they will remind you of that fact later when there is a problem.

Make everyone go through the process from beginning to end. Your favorite cousin may owe everyone in town. Your life long friend may have a criminal record he or she is not proud to reveal. Tell them you are making everyone do the same thing, to keep things honest and equal.

3. "I need an apartment for next month." Whoa, rental applicant, slow down. Beware the applicant in a hurry. You want to get the apartment rented as quickly as possible. Still, do not allow yourself to be rushed through your own verification process by a rental applicant.

There are applicants who are very good at imposing their emergency situation on an owner or manager. Especially if an applicant has children, he or she will encourage an owner or manager to rent before all of the paperwork and verifications are completed. If you do not wait, you may subsequently find that the emergency situation was actually an impending eviction. But too late - the tenant is now in your apartment.

4. "I'm living with my girlfriend, and I pay her the rent". This could indicate he was not on the lease. Ask plenty of questions. Does the owner or manager of the apartment know he is living there? Why does he need an apartment? Has he ever had his own apartment? Has a restraining order been filed on him? What happened between him and his girlfriend? How did he pay his share of the rent? Can he prove he ever paid rent? Check this person out very carefully before you give him keys to your apartment.

5. "I don't have all my information with me. Can I take the application home?" Always use a rental application to lease your units, and keep them with you. Keep track of them, how many you have, how many you gave out, etc. If the applicant is serious about the apartment, he or she should be prepared to complete an application after the unit is shown. The candidate can always return. Sometimes the person may be illiterate, or have a reading problem. Help each applicant who indicates he or she needs it. High-risk applicants depend on being able to talk their way into getting an apartment.

6. "I intend to pay three months of rent in advance if I am selected". There are people who will try to take advantage of your eagerness to rent your apartment so that you can start to get money to help pay the mortgage. Do not allow a rental applicant to wave money in your face to get you to change or rush through your process. What happens after the three months? Does the application and bank account statement confirm that he or she has this much money, and more for the future rent? Remind the applicant that he or she will have to complete your tenant selection process before you make a final decision. Also, inform the person that you have more than one application under consideration.

7. "I want to put a deposit on the apartment in case I am selected". This is offered by an applicant in order to impress, and gain a competitive advantage for the apartment. Again, do not give into money waved in your face. If the candidate is selected, all you want is the rent paid on time every month, and obedience to the rules of the lease. If you accept application processing fees, pre-selection checks or money orders and put them in an envelope, now you have other peoples' money in your home. Some applicants cannot afford to pay an application fee. Some states do not allow owners to take an application fee or deposit. Check the law in your state before you accept any rental processing fee money.

Most of the time, your search for a tenant will go smoothly. Occasionally, an applicant may cause you to feel uncomfortable. He or she will show you a few signs during the decision process that could mean future trouble. There are also definite signs that perhaps you should take a pass on a person. These signs do not have to be part of your intuition. Rather, they are very specific and, often intimidating signs that you should take a pass on the applicant.

8. The rental applicant questions every decision or part of your application process.

Every discussion becomes a debate between what you are doing regarding your process, and what she thinks you should be doing. The applicant tries to rush you through the process, constantly calling you for an answer, despite saying repeatedly you will get back to her when you have completed your course of action. The applicant appears to have a short temper, especially when you ask specific questions.

9. The applicant makes you feel nervous whenever he or she is around you. You feel severely intimidated by the applicant because he tends to yell or raise his voice when hearing something he doesn't like. He stands over you or very close to you when making a point or points his finger in your face when talking, etc. He doesn't want to give you information you have a legal right to have to make informed decisions.

You do not have to rent to a person who makes you feel uncomfortable or out of place in your own home. You should make detailed notes of the dates and times you had these types of encounters, and include it in their file folder.

10. You smell alcohol on the applicant's breath each time you meet. Or, the applicant appears to be under the influence of something more than alcohol - eyes are dilated, the person acts fidgety, can't seem to stay still, slurs his words, etc.

Think about the kind of professional relationship you want with your future tenant. One or more of these signs and its intensity should cause you to think twice about the candidate. You want a tenancy period over a number of years that will be free from stress, questioning of your authority or rules, and constant bickering. If the applicant and you aren't getting along before you even complete the process, it will not get better after he or she moves in. Avoid those candidates, and move on to those applicants that have a proven record of social, financial, and long-term stability.

With a web site at <http://www.synergyprofessionals.com>, Certified Property Manager Carolyn Gibson writes about homeownership, property management, being a tenant, landlording, and having a property management business. Her books, [How to Pick the Best Tenant](#) and [Secrets to a Successful Eviction](#) can be found at her web site and at <http://www.Amazon.com>.

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