

4 Helpful Tips for New Landlords

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1. Don't Let Them Know You Are a New Landlord

If you are new to landlording, the prospective tenants don't need to know. When dealing with your tenants, act like you have done this a hundred times before. Talk little and listen and finish the deal or repair and get out of there.

Many of us here know you sometimes feel the pride of property ownership, are happy to show the work you have done and discuss the details on the next property you are looking at. However, discussing this with a tenant is a mistake and they will gladly stick a pin in your bubble of a head and burst it.

If you want to be tenant friendly, discuss weather, Wal-Mart, fishing or hunting -- just not your business, period. As a new landlord, don't invite problems, the landlord trail already has enough of them.

2. Always Call Their Current Landlord!

Well for all you newbies, do you call the landlord to check on a potential renter who is applying to rent?

They aren't even out and they owe for five month's rent now! Plus, they have a dog and who knows what the inside of their apartment looks like. All of this did not show up on the credit report.

This week I took an application for a husband and wife with four children. They want to rent a four-bedroom. Both have good jobs and both fill out an application.

They are thin people, are clean and seem ever so nice. They say their lease is up mid-month next month and they have given their out-of-state landlord a 30 day notice that they are moving.

I run the credit check. The first red flag is that it says last year they lived in another state over 1,000 miles away. The second red flag is they have four cell phone companies in different states not paid, but nothing else. Strange. No credit card or car debt. Or so it seems. Of course, they had cash in hand but did not seem overly in a hurry. They would wait the two days and perfectly understood why they needed to be checked out, but assured me they would check out.

Well, I found their out-of-state landlord number and boy, oh boy, did he have a story for me!!!

First, he did rent to them and he, too, ran a credit check but he did not call their previous landlord. They were to move in on the first of September but showed up six days early with all their personal property in one vehicle and wanted to move in so he let them. After they were there a week they moved in their Pit Bull dog. The lease said no pets at all. They moved into the apartment in September and by December they were already two months behind in rent! So he called them the first of January and told him he needed his two month's payment and the tenant filed suit against the landlord and wanted back all his money he paid plus moving expenses! The landlord hired an attorney and had gone to court a week ago and now they have to be out the end of this month! When in court, the judge asked them how long they needed to move and they ask the judge for two more months! The judge gave them to the end of this month.

Their lease wasn't up until September of this year. They aren't even out and they owe for five month's rent now! Plus, they have a dog and who knows what the inside of their apartment looks like. **All of this did not show up on the credit report.** It all came out when I called the current landlord. In fact, my call went to his machine and he called me back and talked to me long distance for an hour! So my question to you is, "Do you call the current landlord to chat?"

3. Act Quickly Regarding Unauthorized Pets

This is the recommendation in case you hear a rumor of a resident with an unauthorized pet. Recently on the Mrlandlord.com Q&A Forum, a landlord asked what to do after driving by their rental and finding, sure enough, there was a dog outside, even though the lease specifically says no pets of any kind.

One response from a landlord colleague was as follows: From someone who turned his head once and thought well, "how bad can it be?" and then later experienced \$6,000 in damages – "I suggest you issue a notice of default of their lease that says if ALL animals are not removed immediately upon receipt of this letter eviction proceedings will be started. I would also drive by and snap a picture or two.

4. Smoke Detector Reminder

This lifesaving tip is for all landlords. A safety feature in all rentals is the smoke detector. Smoke detectors need to be checked and maintained on a periodic basis. Who is responsible for periodic testing? Your rental agreement should make it the responsibility of the resident. An example of a rental clause is as follows: *Maintenance of smoke detectors shall be the responsibility of the tenants, who shall maintain the device as specified by the manufacturer.*

This makes the residents aware that they have an obligation to periodically test the smoke detector and to report any problems in writing. While the residents have the responsibility, should you forget about the smoke detector? No. It is a good policy to help your residents remember. Once a year, send them a postcard or letter explaining how to perform the test. Advise them to report any problems. Most residents are very happy to test their detectors and do so when they receive the reminder.

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