




LOOKING FOR AN APARTMENT

- 1. Look for For-Rent Signs.** Many landlords do not advertise in the papers. You may need to walk or drive around different neighborhoods, looking for For-Rent signs.
- 2. Look for Affordable Housing.** If you have a low income, you may be able to get an apartment where you pay a lower, “subsidized” rent. Get a list of public and subsidized housing in your area. Call First Call For Help statewide at 211 (or (651) 291-0211 from a cell phone).
- 3. Get Help.** There are agencies that offer free lists of apartments and other help in finding a place. Call 211 for First Call For Help (or (651) 291-0211 from a cell phone).
- 4. Make a Good First Impression.** When you call about an apartment, make sure that your house is quiet. When you go look at an apartment, treat it like a job interview. Dress nicely and, if you can, get child care so you can focus on making a good impression on the landlord.
- 5. Watch Out for Discrimination.** It is illegal to discriminate against you because of your race, because you have children, because you get welfare, or because you have a disability, among other reasons. If you sense discrimination, call for help right away. Call your legal aid office, the Minnesota Department of Human Rights at (651) 296-5663 or 1(800) 657-3704, or the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at 1(800) 669-9777. See our fact sheet, *Housing Discrimination*.
- 6. Get a Good Reference from Your Current Landlord.** Talk to your current landlord before you start looking. Make sure you can get a good reference. If you have problems with the landlord, try to clear them up now so that you do not get a bad reference. If your current landlord is going to give you a bad reference, get a recommendation from someone else: a different landlord you had, an employer, a church pastor, or some other respected person. Be ready to explain why your landlord will not give you a good reference.
- 7. Don’t Waste Money on Application Fees.** Do not pay a fee unless you have a good chance of getting the apartment. If you have an eviction, a criminal history, bad credit, or a bad relationship with an old landlord, explain these to the new landlord before you apply. These facts will come out when the landlord runs a screening check on you. Ask if you still have a chance to get the apartment before you pay the fee. If the landlord charges a screening fee, they must use it for a tenant screening report or to check your references.



8. **Don't pay a "pre-lease deposit" without an agreement in writing.** Some landlords ask for a deposit to "hold" an apartment before you sign the lease. If you give a landlord money to "hold" an apartment, get a written agreement that says if and when you can get the money back. Read it before signing it. For example, the agreement might say that if the landlord turns you down the deposit will be returned to you in 7 days. If the landlord does not give you a written agreement you can sue to get it back. The penalty is the amount of the deposit plus ½. If you do sign a lease and move in, the landlord must credit the "hold" money to your security deposit. If you do not move in, you may lose the money.

 9. **Fill Out Applications Carefully.** You usually have to list where you have lived for the past 2 or 3 years. Make sure you get all the addresses and dates right, and don't skip anything (even places where you only stayed for a month or two). If you do, the landlord may turn you down for a false or incomplete application. Make a list of where you have lived and bring it with you when you apply so you do not forget anything.
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10. **If You Are Turned Down, Find Out Why.** If the landlord used a tenant screening agency or credit bureau, they have to tell you which one they used. Call the agency right away to ask for a free copy of your report (if you wait too long you may have to pay). You have the right to correct any mistakes and to explain any evictions. For more information see our fact sheet, *Tenant Screening*.

 11. **Never Rent an Apartment You Haven't Seen.** It is not good enough for the landlord to show you one "just like it."

 12. **Inspect the Apartment Carefully Before You Sign the Lease.** Use the attached checklist to go through the apartment. If there are any problems, have the landlord sign the checklist and agree to fix them before you move in. Save this checklist until you move out of the apartment. It may help you get your security deposit back. If there are problems, and the landlord won't agree in writing to fix them, look for another place. If you move in, get our fact sheet *Getting a Landlord to Make Repairs*.

IMPORTANT: Be careful that you do not rent from a landlord whose rental building is being foreclosed or having financial trouble. If you move into a building with these kinds of problems you will have to move again soon. If you got emergency assistance, you do not want to waste it on a place that you will not be staying for at least a year. Ask the landlord if the building is behind on mortgage payments or is being foreclosed. You can also call your county Sheriff's Department to find out if the building has been through a sheriff's sale. A sheriff's sale means that there has been a foreclosure and you will probably have to move in the next 6 months or less. If you live in Hennepin County you can find out about a sheriff's sale at the Hennepin County Sheriff's Department's webpage. Go to <http://www4.co.hennepin.mn.us/webforeclosure/search.asp>.

- 13. Watch Out for Bad Landlords.** Do not rent from a landlord who will not give you their full name. Do not rent from a landlord who only gives a P.O. box for an address. A landlord must give you a street address. Do not rent from a landlord who will not give you a phone number, or who will only give you a pager number. Watch out if the landlord says that they have to evict the current tenant before you can have the apartment. If you have any doubts, ask the neighbors if the landlord is good.
- 14. Read the Lease Carefully.** Check who is responsible for snow shoveling and lawn care. Check who pays for gas, lights and water. If your building has more than one unit and you pay utilities, find out if there are separate utility meters or if the landlord divides the bills up between the tenants. If the bill is divided, they have to tell you in writing **before you rent**, how much the monthly bills for the building are. They also have to tell you when you will be billed and how the costs are divided up. You can ask the landlord to make changes in the lease before you sign it. You and the landlord should put your initials next to each change.
- 15. Always Get Receipts.** Any time you give a landlord money, get a signed, dated receipt that says how much you paid and what you paid it for. It does not have to be on a special form. **If you use a money order, you still need a receipt** because your money order stub only shows that you bought the money order, it does not show that the landlord got it.
- 16. Give Proper Notice to Your Current Landlord.** You have to tell your current landlord a full month plus one day before you are going to move out, unless your lease says something different. Check your lease to be sure because some leases have a longer notice period. Send a letter and keep a copy. It is **not** good enough to tell the landlord you are moving by phone or in person. A landlord can keep your security deposit or even charge you more than the deposit for not giving proper notice.
- 17. Pay Your Last Month's Rent.** You cannot use your security deposit as your last month's rent. If you do, the landlord can evict you in the middle of the month. The landlord can also sue you for the rent and give you a bad reference.



MOVE-IN INSPECTION AND LEASE ADDENDUM

√	PROBLEM	DESCRIPTION
WINDOWS		
	Missing/Torn screens	
	Missing/Broken storm windows	
	Broken/Cracked glass	
	Missing/ Broken locks	
	Other	
DOORS		
	No deadbolt locks	
	Broken locks	
	Missing/Broken door knobs	
	Other	
WALLS / CEILINGS/ FLOORS		
	Chipped / Flaking paint	
	Holes or cracks in walls	
	Dirt/ Stains on walls	
	Leaky roof or ceiling	
	Holes in carpet	
	Dirty carpet	
	Missing/Broken tiles or linoleum	
	Other	
PLUMBING		
	Clogged pipes/ toilet	
	Bad water pressure	
	Dripping faucets	
	Leaks	
	Other	
ELECTRICAL		
	Smoke detector	
	Exposed wiring	
	Short circuits	
	No cover plates on outlets	
	Other	

√	PROBLEM	DESCRIPTION
FURNACE		
	Not enough heat	
	Gas leaks	
	Thermostat	
	Other	
APPLIANCES		
	Broken stove/oven	
	Broken refrigerator	
	Other	
INFESTATIONS		
	Mice	
	Cockroaches	
OTHER AREAS		
	Bare patches in yard	
	Trash from previous tenant	
	Problem with garage	
	Leaky basement	
	Pay utility bills	
	Other	

LEASE ADDENDUM

The landlord and tenant agree to add to the lease that the landlord will make the repairs listed on this checklist by the following date: _____

Tenant: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Landlord: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Address of rental unit: _____
