

Ten Tips Every Landlord Should Know

1. Don't rent to anyone before checking his or her credit history, references, and background. Haphazard screening and tenant selection too often results in problems-a tenant who pays the rent late or not at all, trashes your place or moves in undesirable friends-or worse.
2. Get all the important terms of the tenancy in writing. Beginning with the rental application and lease or rental agreement, be sure to document important facts of your relationship with your tenants-including when and how you handle tenant complaints and repair problems, notice you must give to enter a tenant's apartment and the like.
3. Establish a clear, fair system of setting, collecting, holding, and returning security deposits. Inspect and document the condition of the rental unit before the tenant moves in to avoid disputes over security deposits when the tenant moves out.
4. Stay on top of repair and maintenance needs to make repairs when requested. If the property is not kept in good repair, you'll alienate good tenants. And they may have the right to withhold rent, sue for any injuries caused by defective conditions, or move out without notice.
5. Don't let your tenants and property be easy marks for a criminal. You could well be liable for the tenant's losses. Landlords are sued more than any other group of business owners in the country. The average settlement paid by a landlord's insurance company is \$600,000. And the average injury award is \$1.2 million.
6. Respect the privacy of your tenant. Notify tenants whenever you plan to enter their rental unit, and provide as much notice as possible, at least 24 hours or the minimum amount required by the state law.
7. Disclose environmental hazards such as lead. Landlords are increasingly being held liable for tenant health problems resulting from exposure to environmental poisons in the rental premises.

8. Choose and supervise your manager carefully. If a manager commits a crime or is incompetent, you may be held financially responsible. Do a thorough background check and clearly spell out the manager's duties to prevent problems down the road.
9. Purchase enough liability and other property insurance. A well-designed insurance program can protect your rental property from losses caused by everything from fire and storms to burglary, vandalism, and personal injury and discrimination lawsuits.
10. Try to resolve disputes with tenants without lawyers and law suits. If you have a conflict with a tenant over rent, repairs, your access to the rental unit, noise, or some other issue that doesn't immediately warrant an eviction, meet with the tenant to see if the problem can be resolved informally. If that doesn't work, consider mediation by a neutral third party, often available at little or no cost from a publicly-funded program. If your dispute involves money, and all attempts to reach agreement fail, try a small claims court where you can represent yourself. Use it to collect unpaid rent or seek money for property damage after a tenant moves out and the deposit is exhausted.