

Housing search tips

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Have you had problems finding housing because of credit, criminal or rental history problems? Here are some tips that might make your housing search more successful:

Important note! If your problem finding housing is related to a disability or behavior caused by a disability (including previous **substance abuse**), you have the right to ask for a “reasonable accommodation” (such as a change in the landlord’s rules or policies) during the application process. You may be able to ask your landlord to overlook certain parts of your rental history. Call the Fair Housing Council at 1-800-424-3247 for more information about housing applications and disabilities.

1. First, get copies of your credit reports from the three credit reporting agencies. (You can probably get those copies for free). Know what is on your report before prospective landlords do, so that you will be able to respond to negative or inaccurate charges that appear on it. For a list of the credit reporting agencies, call the Renters’ Rights Hotline (503-288-0130). Also, if you have a criminal record, find out if you can get any crimes expunged (removed) from your record. (This will take a while, but it’s still a good idea). Call the Oregon Law Center (503-224-2414) for more details.
2. Call your local social service agency (call the United Way at 503 222-5555 for the number) or the Portland Housing Center (503 288-5460) about free trainings for tenants. The classes may be called “Tenant Education”, “Housing Readiness” or “ready to Rent” classes. These classes can give you information about available housing and rent assistance, **and** some programs offer landlords a money guarantee that might make it easier for you to find a place that will accept you. You could also ask for a caseworker or advocate to help you write a letter explaining to future landlords why you’d make a good renter.
3. Don’t disclose past problems over the phone to landlords when you call to make an appointment to see a unit. Be polite over the phone. If you think your kids will interrupt you, place your call from a different room, or have someone watch over them while you are on the phone. (**Note – it’s not legal for landlords to refuse to rent to you because you have kids**).
4. Arrive 15 minutes early to your appointment. Dress as if you were going to a job interview. Don’t bring your kids if they will misbehave.
5. Ask the landlord for a tour of the unit and all common areas. Ask lots of questions. Let the landlord know you are looking for a long-term home for you and your family. Complement the landlord on what you like. Show the prospective landlord what a conscientious tenant you are. However, if the unit doesn’t meet your expectations, if it is unsafe, or if the landlord is rude to you, look someplace else. Any problems you observe now will probably only get worse later on.
6. After the tour (and if you decide this is a place where you could live), this is the time to tell the landlord about your past rental history. Explain to the landlord (briefly) what happened in the past and **explain why things are different now. Take responsibility for any mistakes that you have made.**

If your landlord charges an application fee, they must give you a piece of paper detailing what their screening process is, what exactly they check, how much the screening fee is, and how you can correct misinformation. (The landlord also has to tell you how many units are available how many applications they have already taken). Find out what the landlord’s screening criteria is and ask the landlord what they think your chances are of being accepted. If the landlord says your chances are 50/50 or worse, ask the landlord if there is something else you could do (like get a letter from your parole officer) that would help.

If the landlord seems unwilling to negotiate with you, it is probably a good bet that your application won’t be accepted. Don’t pay the screening fee. On the other hand, if the landlord seems encouraging or tells you that other tenants with the same problems have been accepted before, submitting your application might be worth a shot.