

Case Management

Housing Stability Tenant Supports

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Keeping housing: What does it take?

- Pay the rent on time.
- Treat the building with respect.
- Treat other people with respect.
- Follow the lease.
- Avoid violating the law — especially if it might cause trouble for the landlord.

If your clients can do these things, they can keep their housing.

How much is a “good” tenant worth?

What does an eviction cost?

- Increased expenses:
 - Court filing fees for an eviction
 - Court process may take weeks or even months to finalize an eviction
 - Repairs and cleaning after the evicted tenant leaves
 - Advertising for new tenants, paying staff for interviewing prospective tenants
 - Paying for utilities on empty units
- Lost revenue:
 - Rent payments usually stop when the eviction is filed
 - Lost rent while cleaning/repairing the unit and finding replacement tenants

Landlords estimate that each eviction costs thousands of dollars. And after all that, there’s no guarantee the next tenant will be any better!

SSVF saves landlords money

- SSVF home visits can identify problems before they escalate into major problems for landlords.
- SSVF case managers provide tenancy supports — reducing problems that lead to eviction.
- SSVF case managers can help clients voluntarily relocate when the landlord would otherwise evict.
- SSVF programs have partnerships with community resources that may be able to create a risk mitigation fund and/or offer some minor repairs for landlords.
- SSVF rapid re-housing (RRH) programs can offer a steady supply of tenant referrals, reducing advertising costs and the time to rent-up.

Tenancy supports are landlord supports

- If you help your clients to pay the rent, follow the lease, care for the unit, and avoid conflict or problems with the police, your landlords will be happy.
- That's a better guarantee than landlords have with any other tenants.
- But if/when things don't go that smoothly, the landlords want someone who can help resolve the problem — and that's why they will work with you.
- So, what do you do to help your program participants retain their housing?

1. Pay the rent on time

- Increase income/decrease expenses — even small amounts help.
- Develop a spending plan and ways to track spending.
- Set up automatic withdrawal or vendor pay (a formal agreement where a portion of a person's benefits are paid directly to a provider of goods or services) to pay rent.
- Call or text "reminders" a week before rent is due.
- Ask landlord to accept 2 payments/month, timed with tenant paychecks.
- Create an emergency savings account for financial emergencies.
- If income is erratic, tenant can buy a series of smaller money orders made out to landlord when income is available, and can use them to pay the rent when income is unavailable.

2. Treat the building with respect

- Damage can be accidental: Sometimes people don't know how to avoid damage.
- If there is a history of damage, find out how it occurred, then help the client deal with the cause: Children? Parties? Domestic violence?
- Where new skills are needed, they are most effectively taught where they will be used — in this case, in the tenant's own unit.
- Home visits are an opportunity to help the client identify problems early — grease in sink; toys in toilet; fire-safety risks.

3. “Peaceful/quiet enjoyment”

- A clause in most leases: “Tenant shall not disturb the peaceful /quiet enjoyment of the premises.” *This is actually a tenant rights clause, protecting all tenants from many problems, including the behavior of other tenants.*
- Intentionally vague language allows landlords to evict for almost any problem behavior such as conflict with other tenants or failure to control trash, children, guests, or noise.
- Tenants are often not aware of this lease requirement; explain it to them!
- Notice problems like loud TV or trash in the building hallway when visiting the home; ask about concerns when you talk with the landlord.

4. Follow the lease

- Read and explain — in simple terminology — the client's lease
- If the language is too obscure or anything looks questionable, consult a legal services or tenant advocacy resource to learn more.
- Focus on violations that could result in eviction.

Tools for clients

Example: summarizing primary lease requirements

Things that can get me EVICTED:

- Rent is more than 5 days late
- Someone moves in with me (stays more than 2 weeks)
- I get a dog
- The police are called about me twice in 30 days

Things I can do WITH WRITTEN PERMISSION from landlord:

- Get a roommate
- Get a cat

Call: Megan (my housing case manager): 123-456-7890

5. Don't get the landlord in trouble with the police

- Landlords cannot turn a blind eye to drugs. They can lose their license or even their property in some communities.
- Likewise, some communities prioritize enforcement of local laws such as:
 - Under-age drinking
 - Occupancy standards (crowding)
 - Noise ordinances
 - Zoning (e.g. running a hair salon in your apartment)
- Landlords can face legal trouble for violations.
- Ask landlords and/or tenant organizations about important local community laws and ordinances. It's helpful to have a simple "cheat sheet" listing key requirements.

Tools for Clients

Example: summarizing important local laws

LAWS in MIDDLEBURY

- **Noise Ordinance:** 10:30 p.m., 7 days/week
 - Check to make sure music, TV, and guests can't be heard on the sidewalk after 10:30. Fine: \$700.
- **Social Host:** You can be arrested or fined if a guest who used too much alcohol or drugs is injured or causes injury or property damage.
- **Under-age Consumption:** If police come to your home on a noise complaint, they will ask to see ID for guests. If a minor in your housing is consuming alcohol, you will have to go to court. Fines start at \$1000.
- **Drugs:** If the police find anyone buying or selling drugs in your unit (or acquaintances outside, on the property), the landlord is required by state law to evict you.

So how do you find out about tenancy problems?

- Conversation with the individual or family: Any problems with the landlord or other tenants? Any damage to the unit, even if accidental?
- Check-in calls or visits with the landlord: How are things going? Any concerns that need attention?
- Home visits: When you visit, did you notice damage, excessive noise, or disruptive behavior of children or guests?

Be proactive: Anticipate problems

- Plan ahead, with your participant, about how to prevent previous rental problem (Housing Retention Barriers) from recurring.
- For example...
 - How will you prevent your friends from using your apartment as their party room?
 - What will you do if you know in advance that you won't have all the rent on time?
 - How can you stop your children or friends from making noise in common areas that bothers the neighbors?
 - What can you say if someone in your family wants to borrow the rent money — and you don't think they can pay you back by the first of the month?

What if being proactive isn't enough?

- Suppose the first time you find out about your client's tenancy problem is when the landlord contacts you and is really angry?
- What do you do to save the partnership (and your client's housing)?

Dealing with contentious situations

- Define the problem — ask for details about what your client (or you) may have done wrong.
- Distance yourself emotionally; speak slowly, calmly.
- Avoid ego battles, arguing, and replaying past issues.
- Apologize for yourself for any failures to meet expectations.
- You may ask for time to make a plan (after you speak with your client); set a date/time for a call or meeting.
- Or, agree on a correction plan — what you can do differently.
- Follow up with the landlord and your client. Make sure the plan is working as intended.

Dealing with contentious situations (continued)

- Here is a common contentious situation. The landlord has called you with a complaint.
- Using the principles on the previous slide, brainstorm some good responses to the landlord.

“You didn’t return my call. You promised you would return my calls!”

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- Define the problem — ask for details about the call they made: when was it, whom did they talk to, did they leave a message?
- Apologize for the failure to promptly return the call.
- Ask for time to figure out what went wrong.
- Let them know you will figure out what went wrong and then let them know. (And *do* call back to follow up!)
- Turn the conversation back to the reason for the call and let them know you will follow up with your client (if needed).
- Ask them to please call again if they have concerns.
- If they called after hours, you may want to remind them that evening/weekend calls may not be returned until the next business day.

Plan responses to common conflicts

- Brainstorm the kinds of landlord conflict situations that you and your colleagues have experienced and sketch out basic responses.
- Examples:
 - “Your tenant had an out-of-control party last night. The police were called and today all my other tenants are complaining”.
 - “Your program’s rent check is late — again.”
 - “Your rent is on time but your client hasn’t paid their share for three months.”

Home visits*

- During home visits, be aware of potential tenancy issues, but not as a “gotcha” mission.
- Home visits are an opportunity to notice “red flags” such as significant problems with noise levels, basic housekeeping, or unauthorized tenants.
- It’s also a “teachable moment”: an opportunity to discuss the importance of an issue and ways to resolve it.
- If a landlord “suddenly” evicts your program participant, you haven’t been paying attention.

*RRH programs generally have policies on home visits that protect client privacy and staff safety.

Question:

What will you do differently next week?