

Tenant Rights & Responsibilities

It's critical that you take your role as a tenant seriously. A few things can make this task easier:

1. **Pay rent/utilities in full and on time** - One mistake students make is withholding rent until a landlord makes requested repairs. Unless you have set up an escrow account, you are legally obligated to pay your landlord according to your lease. Also, unless you've signed separate leases, all tenants count as one, meaning even if you've paid your portion of the rent, you're still responsible if another roommate hasn't.
2. **Keep unit reasonably well-kept** - Regular maintenance and cleaning can prevent common issues such as insect/bug infestation. Routine cleaning also makes it easier for you to spot a problem, should one arise.
3. **Notify landlord of problems immediately** - Let your landlord know of any appliance malfunctions, reoccurring insect/rodent problems, etc. when you discover it. The sooner you let them know, the sooner the problems can be remedied.
4. **Communicate effectively and responsibly** - The key to a positive living experience is effective communication between you and your landlord. Be very clear about your expectations of them, and be sure you are clear of theirs for you. Also, make sure you get all communication in writing, especially concerning repairs.

Landlord Responsibilities

Like tenants, landlords have an important role in making the rental experience positive; the following are basic expectations that landlords should meet:

1. **Keep units in safe, sanitary, livable condition** - Landlords are required to provide a tenant with a safe, sanitary, and well-maintained apartment in compliance with local and state laws. Some units are required to have a warranty of habitability, which guarantees essential services such as heat, light, electricity, and hot and cold running water (except where tenant's failure to pay utilities causes a loss of service).
2. **Respond quickly to maintenance issues** - Landlords must respond within a "reasonable time" to any problems once they are notified. However, the definition of reasonable time depends on the circumstances of each case. If the landlord does not respond, tenant(s) can notify the Property Standards Division of the Department of Environmental Resources at (301) 883-6100, by Fax at (301) 883-6050 or by email at DERcares@co.pg.md.us, which can send an inspector to determine whether the problem violates housing code. You may also wish to report the problem to the City of College Park Code Enforcement Division. If the City receives a complaint from a tenant regarding housing code violations, the city will initiate an inspection of the property. You can reach the City of College Park Public Services Department at (240) 487-3570.
3. **Communicate responsibly** - Landlords have a responsibility to provide accurate information to their tenant(s). This can be achieved by having a written lease that includes specific provisions for rental term, repair policies and other restrictions. Also, landlords should also inform tenants of anything that could affect their rental, such as remodeling, sale of the unit, etc. Finally, landlords should always notify tenants in advance of their intent to enter the rental unit, whether for inspection, repair, or otherwise.

Communicating with Your Roommate(s)

Living with someone can be difficult, especially if you've never had to share living space before. However, effective communication with your roommate(s) can help you avoid unnecessary conflicts or help you resolve those that do arise in a mature manner that suits everyone involved.

To make your messages more clear, use "I" language instead of "you" language. "I" language can help in the following ways:

- Takes "blame" out of the statement and will help prevent the receiver from becoming defensive
- Allows the sender to express their feelings and thoughts
- Allows the sender to get to the root of the problem for them
- Are more thoughtful statement and helps sender to weigh their remarks more cautiously

WHEN YOU'D SAY:	TRY THIS INSTEAD:
I can't	I can
You are wrong	My understanding
I don't	I do
You have to	It would help if you
I never	Today...
You don't understand	Let me clarify
You can't	You can
I don't know	I'll find out
I have no idea	I know who can help

Beware of Demands:

Have you ever felt like you would be blamed or punished if you did not do what was being asked of you? If so, then you know how it feels to have someone demand something from you. Demands also tend to come with criticisms and judgment.

PEOPLE SHUT DOWN WHEN THEY HEAR THINGS LIKE THIS:	FIND OUT WHAT THEY NEED BY ASKING:
<i>You should know better</i>	Can you tell me about...
The house is <i>supposed</i> to be clean at all times	What do you think about...
I <i>deserve</i> to have my girlfriend/boyfriend over any time I want	What is your opinion on...
I have the <i>right</i> to do whatever I want	What do you know about...

You can steer clear of making this mistake yourself by empathizing when your request is turned down. When we use demanding language, people will either submit or rebel. Either way, the chance of working together to meet everyone's needs is diminished.

Adapted from a creation by Shay Bright from Defusing the Angry Person by Rhea Joyce Rubin, Nonviolent Communication by Marshal Rosenberg, and The Conflict Center handouts.