

# COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*Without good communication skills it is difficult to maintain a positive working relationship with your property manager and your neighbors. Maintaining positive relationships is important because it makes renting and living close to each other more enjoyable. You need good references from the property manager to rent another unit. The following information can help you choose who to talk to about a problem, how to get your point across, how to be a good listener, and how to settle conflicts.*

## **Property Manager or Neighbor: Who Should I Talk to about the Problem?**

When problems come up, it may be hard to know who to talk to. Some problems, such as a leaky sink or a broken security door should be reported to your property manager. Problems such as noise, residents parking in the wrong parking space, or kids running in the hallway may be discussed with your neighbor. Residents can try to resolve neighbor problems between themselves. If you do not feel safe around a neighbor, ask someone you trust to help you talk with him/her. Involve the property manager as a last resort. Property managers do not appreciate being asked to get involved in neighbor problems.

## **Active Listening Skills**

In high stress situations we are often so busy being upset that we do not listen to what is being said to us. In many cases we assume we know what the person is going to say and are busy thinking about our response rather than what is actually being said. Use active listening skills to avoid conflicts:

- ▶ Face the person who is speaking and focus your attention on what is said.
- ▶ Do not interrupt except to ask questions to clear up things you do not understand.
- ▶ When the person finishes, restate in your own words what you heard.
- ▶ Ask the person if he/she thinks you correctly heard what was said.
- ▶ Respond to what the person said.

## **Positive Messages**

Positive messages go a long way toward solving communication problems. Just as our emotions can get in the way of listening, they can get in the way of clearly expressing ourselves. We do so much accusing or blaming that we do not communicate what we really want from the other person.

**RULE 1**—Own the message. Use “I,” not “you” or “they” or “we.” Example: “I want you to move your car out of my parking spot” instead of, “You always park in my spot.”

**RULE 2**—Discuss one issue at a time. Do not use the “laundry list” approach.

**RULE 3**—Describe the facts:

- ▶ What needs to be repaired or changed?
- ▶ What have you already done to fix it?
- ▶ How is it affecting you and your family?

**RULE 4**—Do not call the other person names or make accusations because:

- ▶ You will put him/her on the defensive.
- ▶ He/she may meet your negative expectation.
- ▶ All you really know is what has happened to you.

**RULE 5**—Start a conversation in a conflict situation only when you are calm and can stay calm.

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## Communicating With Your Property Manager

STEP 1—Before you call, document the situation:

- ▶ What happened?
- ▶ When did you notice it?
- ▶ What have you already done about it?
- ▶ What do you want done?

STEP 2—Call the property manager and give him/her the information about the situation.

STEP 3—After the property manager responds, restate in your own words what was said.

STEP 4—Ask the property manager if he/she thinks you correctly heard what was said.

STEP 5—Respond to what he/she said.

## Sample Letter to Property Manager

The sample letter below is made up. When you write your letter use the current date and real names, addresses, and phone numbers. Give the full name and address of the person to whom you are supposed to request repairs as stated in your lease agreement. Change the sample letter so that it has information about your situation.

Do not make threats unless you know that you can legally carry them out and have specific actions in mind. For example, do not threaten to withhold rent, unless an attorney or a rental counselor advises you. Be specific about the repair, when you first noticed the problem, what you have done to fix it, and prior contacts requesting repairs.

### Possible Individual or Group Activity:

Using your communication skills, rewrite this letter using a different issue.


January 7, 2009 (*current date*)

Jane Smith (*property manager's name*)  
Sunrise Apartment (*property manager's address*)  
1434 Main Street  
Happytown, MN 55555

Dear Ms. Smith:

We first contacted your assistant, Jim Jones, on January 4, 2007 about the lack of hot water in our apartment. We first noticed the problem that morning when we were showering. Mr. Jones said he would have someone look into it on that day, January 4. We called again on January 5 and Mr. Jones said the maintenance person had been busy, but he would be there that day. We still do not have hot water. I am not able to clean the apartment effectively without hot water and my kids are complaining about having to take showers in cold water. Please call me with a date you expect to have the repair made. If I do not hear from you by January 14, I will contact the building inspections department.

Sincerely,

  
Nancy Olson (*your name*)  
111 Sunrise Circle (*your address*)  
Apartment 201  
Somewhere, MN 55555  
Phone: (111) 234-5678 (*your phone number*)

## Steps in Settling a Conflict

Many of us try to avoid conflicts. However, that is not always possible or even a good idea. Some conflict is inevitable. It is usually best to find a solution rather than to ignore the issue and hope that it will go away. Use active listening and positive messages to settle many conflicts. The following guidelines below are helpful:

**STEP 1**—Set a time to meet when you are both calm and not busy.

**STEP 2**—Begin by giving the other person a “positive message” about what is bothering you.

**STEP 3**—Listen carefully to the other person’s point of view.

**STEP 4**—Decrease areas of disagreement by finding areas where you agree.

**STEP 5**—Offer solutions where you both give a little and get a lot.

**STEP 6**—Do not force a solution.

**STEP 7**—If you cannot resolve the conflict, suggest a mediator whom you both respect.

## Property Manager or Resident: Who Should Make Repairs?

If something goes wrong in your rental unit such as a lack of hot water or a broken window, figure out if it is something you should fix yourself.

Property managers do not like late night calls to fix a problem easily solved by the resident. Unplugging a toilet or sink, changing light bulbs, or replacing batteries in a smoke detector are things residents can easily fix themselves. Likewise property managers want to know in a timely fashion about serious problems, especially problems that damage the building such as a water leak.

## Resources to Determine Responsibility

Lease agreement and/or Policy Handbook (should explain building policies)

Your completed *Rental Condition Checklist* (*Worksheet 7*) found in the **Organizer**

Government regulations

Common sense

## Repairs and Government Regulations

Property Manager Responsibilities:

- ▶ Corrects building or housing code violations.\*
- ▶ Provides hot and cold water and operational sewage drains.\*
- ▶ Maintains heating equipment so that it is safe and capable of keeping temperatures at 67°F or warmer.\*
- ▶ Keeps electrical system in safe operating condition.\*
- ▶ Corrects other defects that could cause a substantial safety risk to residents.
- ▶ Makes repairs required by normal wear and tear.
- ▶ Maintains common areas in reasonable condition.
- ▶ Maintains equipment and common spaces.

*\*If any of these conditions are not met in the home to be rented or in the common areas of the building, the property manager must disclose the problem before renting.*

Resident Responsibilities:

- ▶ Pays for or makes simple repairs for damages caused by residents and their guests. Property managers may choose to make such repairs at resident’s expense.
- ▶ Pay for or perform simple maintenance to keep plumbing and other equipment working.
- ▶ Report problems to property manager as soon as they are noticed.

*For more information, see LANDLORDS AND TENANTS: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, available from the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office ([www.ag.state.mn.us/brochures/publandlordtenants.pdf](http://www.ag.state.mn.us/brochures/publandlordtenants.pdf)).*