

Welcome to Your New Home

A Simple Guide for
Home Maintenance

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Resettlement agency staff can use this guide as part of their housing orientation curriculum to educate newcomers about key home maintenance topics.

Table of Contents

[Common Household Items](#)

[Before You Move In](#)

[Maintaining Your Home](#)

[Safety & Security](#)

[Mail & Notices](#)

[Being a Good Neighbor](#)

[Energy Conservation](#)

[Summary](#)

Home Maintenance

Tasks done regularly to keep a home and appliances in good condition, preventing costly damage and ensuring a safe and functional living environment.

About Settle In

Settle In is your trusted source for reliable, responsive, and relevant, newcomer-friendly information about the United States. Available in multiple languages, Settle In's digital platforms offer essential resources, guidance, and multi-lingual support to help newcomers navigate life in the U.S.

About Switchboard

Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the United States and offers tools, learning opportunities, and technical assistance on resettlement-related topics.

Funded by ORR, Switchboard is implemented by the IRC.

This material includes content adapted from original resources developed by Mercy Housing.

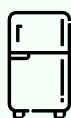
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Household Items and Icons in This Guide

Common Household Items



Eviction Notice



Refrigerator/Fridge



Sink/Faucet



Fire Extinguisher



Garbage Disposal



Bathtub/Tub



Smoke Alarm



Stove/Range



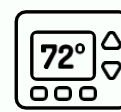
Toilet



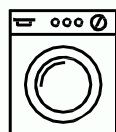
Dumpster
Trash/Garbage



Dishwasher



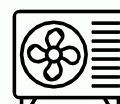
Thermostat



Clothes Washer/
Washing Machine



Intercom



Window A/C Air
Conditioner

Icons Used in This Guide



Yes

Do what the picture shows.



No

Do not do what the picture shows.

Before You Move In

Walkthrough Inspection

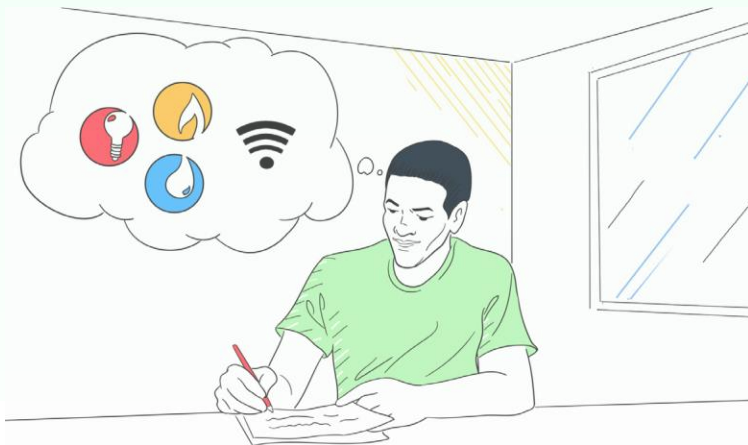


Walk through the home with your landlord to document conditions and identify any existing damage or repair needs before moving in.

Use a [checklist](#) to document walkthrough inspection results, and take photos as needed. Your landlord will keep a copy of the checklist, and you will also keep a copy for your records. This will help prevent the landlord from deducting from your security deposit for damage not caused by you.

Paying Bills

Pay your rent, utility (electric, water, gas, etc.), and other bills on time each month to avoid late payment fees and maintain good credit.



Good credit will help you get approval for future apartment applications and borrow money from lenders with better interest rates to buy a house or car, or to pay for education. Use a checklist with a recurring calendar reminder to help yourself pay bills on time.



Check your lease to confirm what forms of payment are accepted by your landlord. It is common for landlords to receive rent payments by check or by electronic payment.

Do not mail cash!



Your lease specifies your monthly rent and payment due date. If you pay past the due date, your landlord will charge a fee according to your lease agreement. If you stop paying rent or pay rent late, the landlord may give you a notice to pay or move out. The landlord may also file an eviction. When taking these actions, the landlord must adhere to requirements in the lease agreement and local laws.

For more information about tenant responsibilities, check out this [Tenant Toolkit](#).

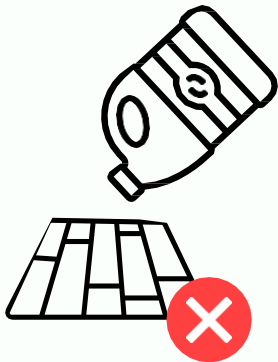
Maintaining Your Home

Living Area Safety and Maintenance



Floors

- Clean carpets with a vacuum cleaner at least twice a week in high-traffic areas and at least once a week in other areas. Sweep hard floors like hardwood, vinyl, tile, or laminate at least once a week.
- Use doormats to reduce the amount of dirt tracked into the home. Remove your shoes at the entrance of your home. This will help keep the floors clean.
- Don't pour liquids on carpets. It will soak through carpet fibers and padding underneath and create a stain that is difficult to remove. The moisture from liquids may also cause mold and mildew.



- Clean up spills immediately! You may use a solution of water and soap or a carpet cleaner, which you can buy at the grocery store.
- Never use bleach on floors!
- If you have trouble with a stain, ask your case manager for advice.
- For more serious stains, rent a rug cleaning machine from a home improvement or grocery store.

Walls

- Use adhesive mounting methods to hang pictures and home décor and to install other items without damaging walls. Avoid drilling holes into the walls. If you do make holes in walls, fill and repair them before moving out.
- Teach children not to make marks on the walls with pencils, crayons, or any other items.
- Do not paint walls unless you have your landlord's written permission. Even if you have the landlord's permission to paint at your own cost, it's common for the landlord to require the walls to be returned to their original colors before moving out, at your own cost.



Windows and Window Coverings

- Windows should not be painted shut. If you notice windows cannot be opened before move-in, ask the landlord to repair them. If you notice peeling paint on window frames before moving in, ask the landlord to repaint the window frames.
- Be cautious near windows and when you open and close them to prevent damage.
- Teach children not to play near windows nor in the window coverings such as shades, blinds, or drapes.



Furniture and Appliances

- Furniture (such as sofas/couches, tables, chairs, beds, bookshelves, and dressers) may be your property to keep when you move out, unless you are in a hotel or a furnished apartment. Furniture will last a long time if you keep it clean and well maintained! Take all your furniture and belongings when you move out. If you are unsure about which furniture you may keep, talk to your case manager or check your lease agreement.
- Secure all tall furniture such as bookshelves, dressers, and wardrobes to the wall so they don't tip over and injure adults and children.
- Playing on furniture can cause personal injuries or property damage. Teach children to be careful and not to play with furniture or items in your home. Never let them climb or jump on the furniture. To protect young children, add padding to corners of tables, shelves, dressers, etc.
- Common household appliances include a stove, oven, dishwasher, refrigerator, microwave oven, washer, and dryer. You should not remove any appliances that are provided by the landlord. In some cities, the landlord may not provide a refrigerator, microwave, washer, or dryer. You can only move the appliances that you purchased or leased on your own.

Bedbugs



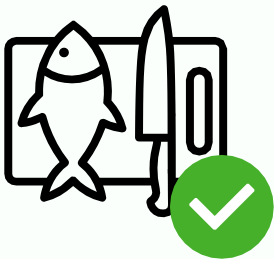
- Bedbugs live in cracks and folds of objects including fabric and furniture, edges of walls, carpets, and bedding (mattresses, bed frames, headboards, etc.). They are often hidden in cushions, couches, sofas, and beds.
- Bedbug bites are sore, itchy, and red. The skin appears raised and resembles a pimple or rash.
- Never bring furniture that other people have thrown away into your home!
- If you have bedbugs, wash all clothing, sheets, blankets, comforters, and other bedding items in hot, soapy water, and then dry them in a hot dryer on high heat for at least 30 minutes. Brush your mattresses, furniture, and carpets with a stiff brush, then vacuum them, the edges of walls, and the entire infested area. Take the vacuum bag outside to the trash right away.
- Move all furniture away from walls. Don't let fabric coverings touch the floor.
- Put cans with liquid soap in them under the legs of bed frames or near where you find bedbugs. For more detailed information on how to treat bedbugs yourself, check out this [Do- It-Yourself Bed Bug Control](#) article by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Hire an exterminator if you're still finding bedbugs after you tried treating them yourself.

Kitchen Safety and Maintenance



Food Preparation

- When using a knife, never cut directly on the counter tops; it will damage the counter tops and you will have to pay for them. Always use a cutting board when cutting with a knife.
- Never cut on the floor!



- Never put a hot pan, hot pot, or any heated tableware or cookware directly on a counter top, table, or the floor! Always place a hot pad or thick dry cloth underneath the heated tableware or cookware .



Meal Cleanup

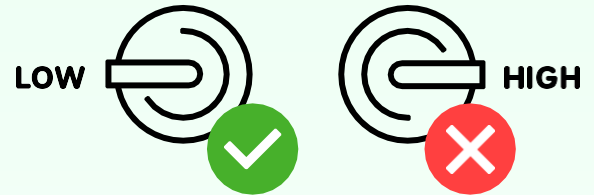
- Clean the counter tops every day, and clean up any food spills on the floor or any other surfaces immediately.
- Never leave food out on the counter or any other surface without covering it. Leaving out uncovered food will attract insects, rats, and mice. You may have to pay for professional pest control if this happens!



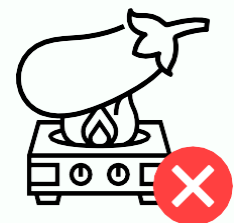
- It is better to cover the food and keep it in the refrigerator. Cover food dishes with foil or plastic wrap, or use food storage containers with lids. Clean up spills right away, and clean the inside and outside of the refrigerator weekly with mild dish soap and water.
- Sweep kitchen floors daily, and mop them with appropriate cleaning solutions weekly. If you have water-resistant floors such as tile or vinyl floors, you can mop them with soap and water. If you have wood floors, only use cleaning solutions especially designed for wood floors.
- Clean the refrigerator before moving out. You will have to pay a cleaning fee if the refrigerator is not clean!

Cooking and Baking

- When cooking food on the stove, always start with low heat and gradually increase, if necessary, to prevent burning food and scorching the cookware. If you use heat that is too high, you may even burn the bottom out of a pan or pot!



- Pay attention when you are using a stove or oven. Never leave them unattended.
- Clean your stove, cooktop, grill, and cooking area daily to prevent grease buildup, and always heat oil slowly. Use a timer to remind yourself about cooking time to prevent burning food.
- When the burners and oven racks are hot, do not touch them with bare hands. They can burn you!
- Never use your bare hands to handle cookware that has been on the stove or in the oven. Always use a thick dry cloth, hot pads, or oven gloves to protect your hands.
- Follow the recipe instructions to set your oven temperature for cooking. If you are not following a recipe, set the dial to 350° Fahrenheit for most cooking and baking. Turning the dial all the way up to the highest setting will burn your food.
- Clean up any food spills as soon as the oven or stove top cools down.
- Never cook food directly on the stove burners!



Stove and Oven

- Wipe up grease and food spills on or around the stove immediately after the stove cools down. Clean your stove and oven daily.
- Grease and spilled or burned food are dangerous. They have an unpleasant smell and attract mice, rats, and insects.
- Do not take frozen food out of the freezer and put it directly into hot grease. It can catch fire!
- Spilled grease can cause falls!
- Spilled grease can cause fires!
- Never put grease or oil down the sink because they can harden and clog up your drainpipes. Always pour them into an empty jar or can, seal it, and put it in your regular trash.



Microwave

- Before using any containers, plates, or bowls, etc. in the microwave, check to make sure they are microwave safe. If unsure, do not use them in the microwave.
- Do not heat any metal objects, single-use plastics, paper bags, or styrofoam in the microwave. Take-out containers and plastic wrappings of refrigerated food products from supermarkets are not microwavable.

Dishwasher

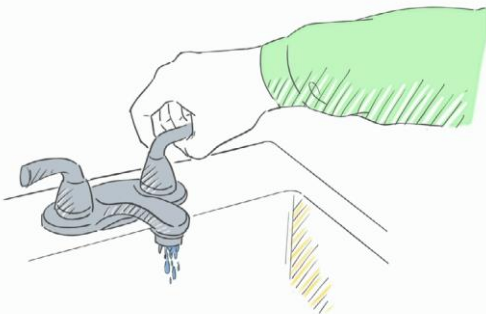
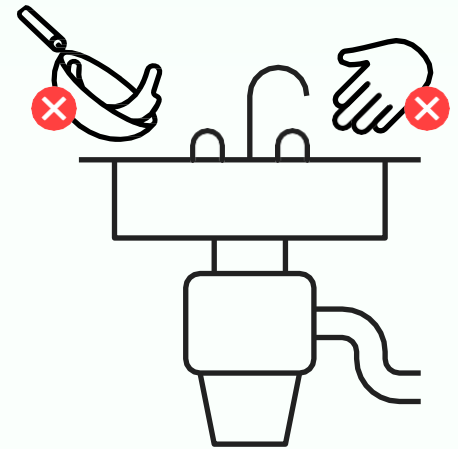


- A dishwasher will wash, rinse, and sanitize dishes and silverware. Always remove any food scraps into the garbage can and rinse the dishes and silverware before putting them in the dishwasher. A dishwasher does not scrub dishes or take the place of a garbage disposal.
- Never use liquid dish soap, laundry detergent, or hand soap in dishwashers. You must use a special detergent designed for dishwashers. Dishwasher detergent comes in powder, gel, or pods. If you use powder or gel, follow the instructions on the box or bottle, and do not overfill the cups. If you use pods, only use one pod for every wash. Do not cut open the pods, and make sure to keep them away from children.



Sink/Garbage Disposal

- A garbage disposal grinds food scraps. Your home may have one in your kitchen sink.
- Always run cold water when using the disposal to grind food scraps. Never use hot water to prevent clogs.
- Don't put starchy foods such as pasta, rice, or potato peels; fibrous foods such as celery, corn husks, or onion peels; oats; beans; nuts; bones; egg shells; fruit pits; coffee grounds; grease, oil, or other fats; or any non-food items such as metal, plastics, or produce stickers down the sink or disposal. These items will cause clogs or jam the garbage disposal.
- If your garbage disposal jams or malfunctions, water may back up in the sink. Turn the garbage disposal off right away and call your apartment maintenance person.
- Never put your hand down the disposal!



- Clean your sink and disposal weekly using dish soap and water.
- If you live in a city that requires composting, collect food scraps and follow your apartment's instructions for disposing food scraps properly instead of using a garbage disposal. To prevent smells and pests, you can put your food scraps in a proper collection bag and refrigerate or freeze them until it's time to throw them away.

Garbage/Dumpster

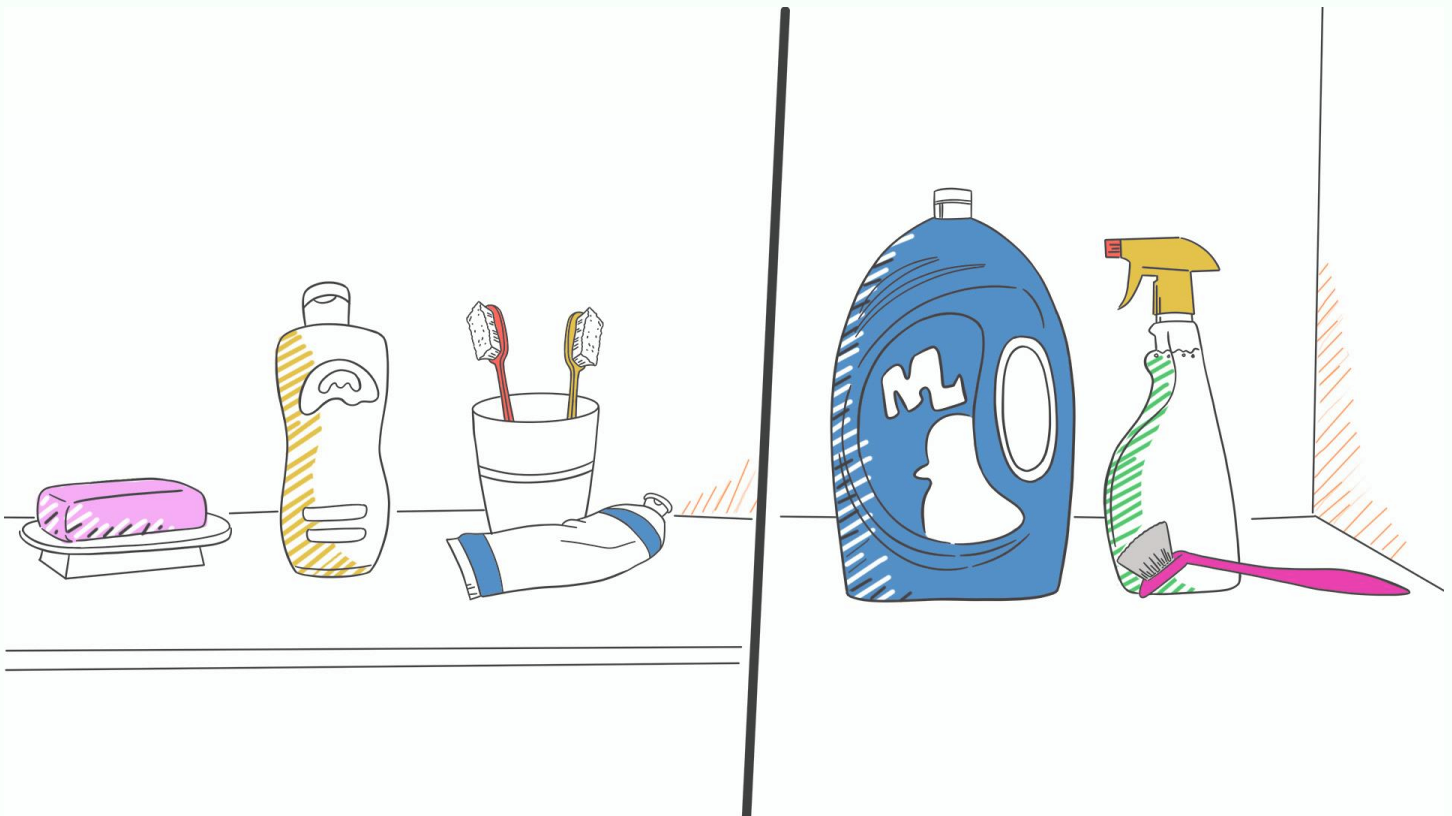
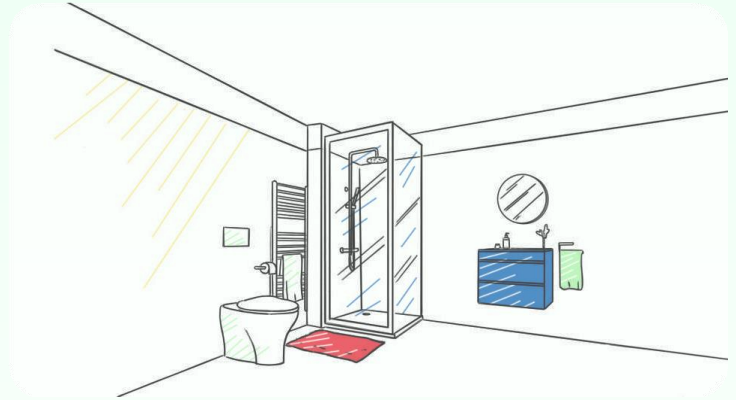
- Line all trash bins in your home with garbage bags before placing any garbage in them.
- If you are living in an apartment, take out your garbage every day to a secure garbage can or dumpster. This will prevent attracting insects, rats, and mice and causing your neighbors to complain to the apartment manager. If you are in a single-family home, find your location's trash pick-up schedule and dispose of your garbage accordingly.
- Never leave garbage in the common areas of the apartment, such as hallways, stairwells, etc., unless it's required by your landlord.
- If your community has a recycling program, follow their instructions for sorting items such as glass, metal, plastics, and organic trash (food scraps and other organic waste).



Bathroom Safety and Maintenance

General Cleaning

- Clean bathrooms weekly, and if there are spills, clean them up right away. Use cleaning solutions specifically for bathrooms to clean the sink, inside and outside of the toilet, bathtub, and shower. Clean the bathroom floor using cleaning products that are appropriate for your floor materials.



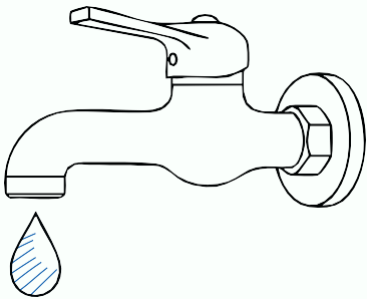
- Never allow hair or any other items to go down the drains. Always pick them up and put them in the trash. You can use a drain cover to catch hair or debris to prevent them from going down the drains.

Toilet Problems

- Use a toilet brush and toilet cleaner to clean the inside of the toilet weekly or right away if there are major stains. Wipe the outside of the toilet weekly. Wipe urine or other spills off the floor right away.
- Never flush anything other than toilet paper down the toilet. You should never flush women's sanitary products, garbage, food, paper towels, large amounts of toilet paper, or other items down the toilet. If you cause the toilet to clog, the landlord can charge you for repairs.
- Teach your children not to flush their toys or other items down the toilet.
- If your toilet overflows, call your apartment manager right away! Mop up the overflowing water as soon as possible.
- Do not use the toilet brush for anything else!



Water Leaks and Spills



- Use a shower curtain to keep water away from the floor when showering in the bathtub. Always keep the bottom of the shower curtain inside the bathtub. Keep a small rug outside your bathtub to prevent water from dripping directly onto the floor. If water gets on the floor, always wipe it up right away.
- The bottom of the tub can get slippery when wet. Adding a safety mat inside the tub can prevent falls.
- If there is a clog or leak, call your apartment manager right away! You will have to pay for damage that you don't report. If you cause the clog, the landlord will charge you for the repairs.

Laundry Safety and Maintenance

General Cleaning

- Sort dirty clothing into light and dark colors so you can wash them separately.
- Follow the washing and drying instructions on your clothing tags. If there are no specific instructions, use a cold water wash for dark clothing or when you are unsure whether the color will run. Use a warm water wash for light colors.
- When using a washing machine, only use laundry detergent (powder, liquid, or pod), and follow the instructions for adding the laundry detergent to the machine. Do not use regular hand soap or other soap products.
- Follow instructions to operate the washer and dryer. Do not overload the washer or dryer by packing clothes into them.
- Before and after drying, clean out the lint filter in the dryer. Not removing lint can start a fire.

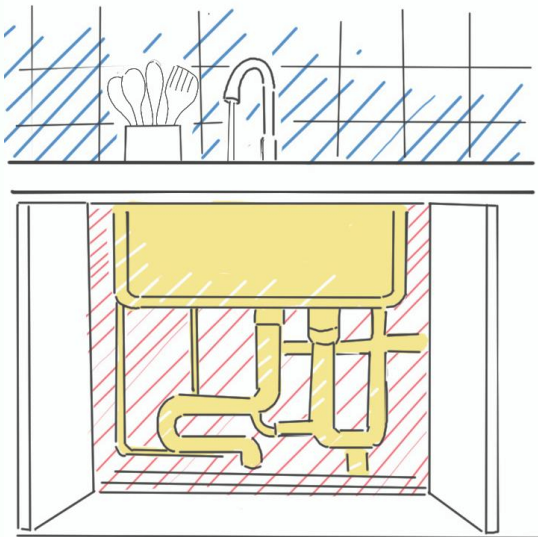
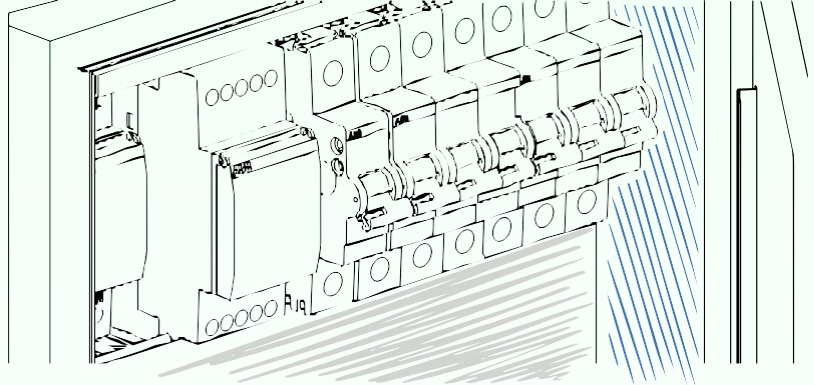


- Never leave your clothing unattended. After washing or drying is complete, remove your clothing right away.

General Home Safety and Maintenance

Electrical Panel (Breaker Box)

- In your home, you may find a small door on the wall. It contains electric breakers. Do not tamper with it, and teach your children not to touch it.
- If you notice any damage, do not attempt to fix the problems yourself. Notify your apartment manager immediately.



Plumbing Connections

- You will see drainpipes and plumbing connections under all the sinks, near toilets, or behind appliances. Do not tamper with them, and teach your children not to touch them.
- If you see water trickling down from drainpipes or plumbing connections, you must report it by calling your apartment management right away. Do not delay. You will have to pay for damage that you don't report.

Common Areas

- Do not store your personal belongings or garbage in common areas.
- Teach children not to run and play in common areas.



Yard

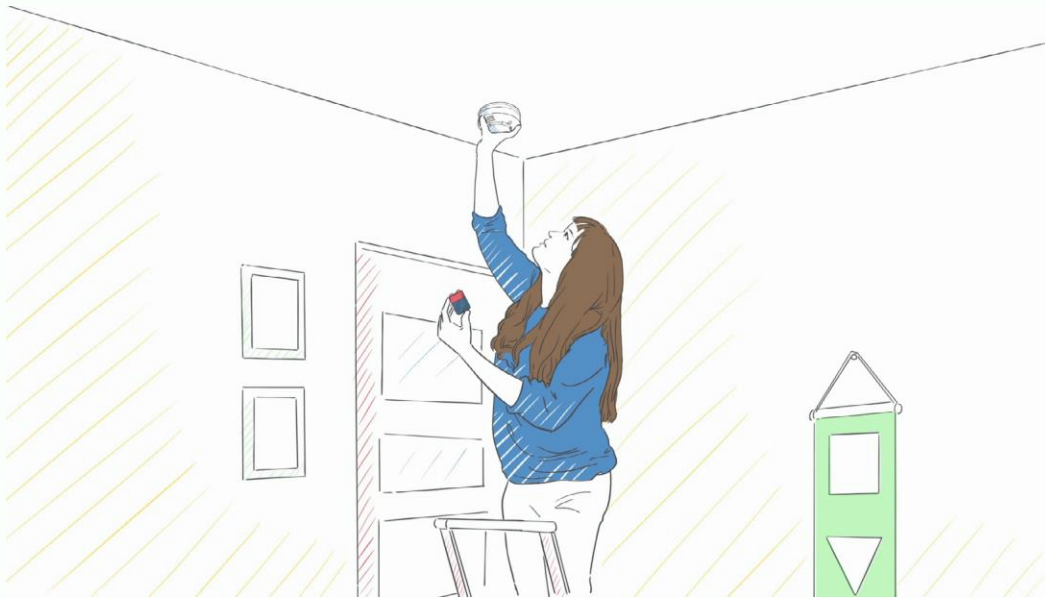
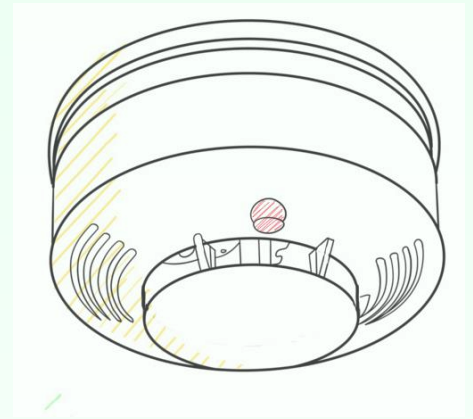
- If your home has a yard (front, back, or side), check your lease to understand your responsibilities for yard maintenance. If the lease states that yard maintenance is the tenant's responsibility, you will need to maintain the yard according to lease terms.
- Yard maintenance includes watering and mowing the lawn regularly. Some cities may have watering restrictions, so check and follow local watering rules.



Safety & Security

Smoke Alarms

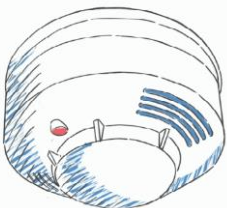
- Smoke alarms are small devices usually placed on the ceiling or high on the walls that will alert you with a series of loud, beeping sounds if they detect smoke so you can take necessary actions to evacuate safely or prevent a fire.
- Landlords are responsible for providing working smoke alarms in your home according to your local laws.
- Most smoke alarms have batteries. You are responsible for ensuring they work, and you must replace the batteries every year. Select a day that is important to you or set a reminder on your phone to replace the batteries. When the battery is low, you will hear an intermittent chirping sound. Replace the battery, and the chirping sound will stop.



- Never disable, remove, or throw away smoke alarms!
- When you move in, test each smoke alarm by pushing the button on its front. Re-test regularly. If a smoke alarm is not working, notify the apartment manager immediately.
- If there is a range hood above your stove, use it while cooking to reduce the amount of smoke in the air. If the smoke alarm goes off while you're cooking but there is no smoke and fire, silence it by pushing the button on its front. Clear the air by waving a towel near the alarm and opening a window.

Fire

- Identify the location of fire extinguishers in your apartment or building and learn how to use them appropriately.
- Many modern buildings have sprinkler systems built into them. The sprinklers will activate when a fire is detected.
- Never throw water on a grease fire! You can put a grease fire out by covering it with a lid or pan, or use flour to extinguish it.
- If a fire is small, try to smother it by covering it with another pan or lid.
- If a fire is bigger, use the fire extinguisher as you have been shown. After any use, notify your apartment manager because they must recharge your fire extinguisher so it will work the next time you need it.
- If there is a fire in your apartment and you don't think you can put it out, or if there is a fire in your building, **GET YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY OUT OF THE BUILDING AND CALL 9-1-1!**
- **LIVES ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THINGS!**
- When leaving your home or your building, stay low to the floor to keep under the smoke and to avoid inhaling it. Get outside if possible. Alert neighbors as soon as you can.
- Always use the stairs during a fire. Never get in an elevator to get away from a fire.
- If your door feels hot, don't open it. Get out using a ground-floor window or fire escape, or wait at a window for help. Use wet towels to seal gaps under and around doors to keep the smoke out, and use a damp cloth to breathe through.



Carbon Monoxide Alarm

- In addition to smoke alarms, many homes also have carbon monoxide alarms. If your local laws require them, landlords are responsible for providing them in your home.
- Carbon monoxide is a dangerous, invisible gas that can be poisonous in high amounts.
- The alarm will alert you with a series of loud, beeping sounds or flashes if it detects carbon monoxide above a certain level. If the alarm sounds, evacuate your home immediately, and notify the property manager.
- Test your carbon monoxide alarm along with your smoke detectors. They are often on the same unit.

Hallways

- Keep hallways and common areas clear of furniture and personal belongings.
- Keeping the common areas of your building clean will help build a better relationship with neighbors and help make the building safer.
- Hallways and common areas not kept clear are dangerous and may trap you in an emergency.



Door and Window Screens

- Door and window screens are important for keeping children and pets inside your home, and for keeping bugs and animals outside.
- If screens are missing or torn, call your apartment manager!

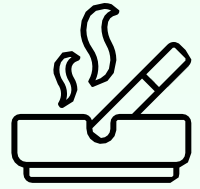
Medical Emergencies

- Call 9-1-1 if someone is badly hurt or very sick!
- Rescue people will come help right away. When they have found out the problem, they can help you decide if you need an ambulance to get to a hospital.
- There are some services you may have to pay for, such as riding to the hospital in an ambulance.



Smoking

- Most American rental units will not allow you to smoke inside your home. Please only smoke in approved designated smoking areas
- American cigarettes will keep burning even if you're not smoking them.
- Always be sure cigarettes are properly put out and no longer burning before throwing them out.
- You will be charged for all damage caused by smoking in your home, including burn marks or stains on any surfaces (such as walls, ceilings, cabinets, floors, countertops, or appliances), as well as the smell of smoke.
- Do not smoke around children or pregnant women.



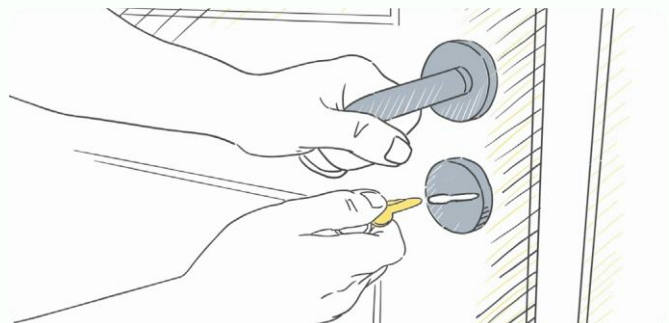
Locks, Keys, Strangers

- Never unlock your door or use the intercom to let someone you do not know into your building or home. Maintenance workers will give you an advanced warning of their arrival.
- If you see people stealing, call 9-1-1!



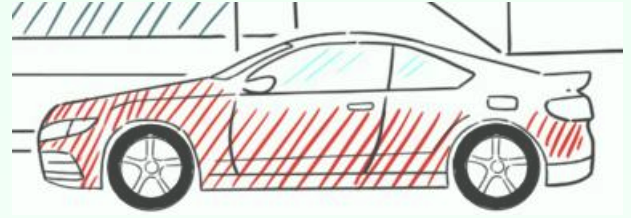
- Always keep your doors to the outside locked, even when you are home. For safety, shut and lock your windows before you leave.
- Don't let strangers come through the lobby door with you. Ask strangers to show you their identification before you let them in, including people in uniform.

- If you forget your keys or are locked out of your home, you will need to pay the landlord to open the door. It can cost you \$50 or more. If you lose your keys, you will need to pay the landlord to rekey or replace all the locks.



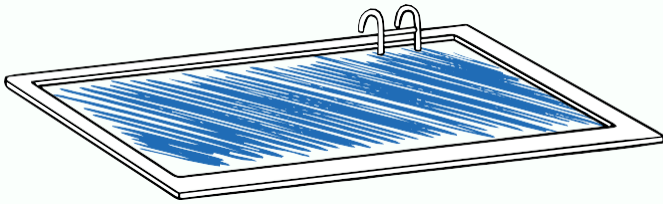
Parking

- Some apartments and housing units provide onsite parking. Depending on your unit, you may have to pay an additional cost for a parking spot.
- Follow your apartment's parking rules. If you have an assigned parking space, only park in your assigned space and never park in other tenants' parking spots.
- Parking lots are not playgrounds. Do not leave children unattended.



Pool

- Some apartment buildings provide pools in common areas.
- Learn and follow your building's pool rules. Pools are only available during certain hours of the day and may be closed during the winter season.
- Children can easily fall into a pool. Do not let children play at the pool by themselves without parent or guardian supervision, whether or not there is a lifeguard. A lifeguard is not a substitute for adult supervision.
- Do not bring glass to the pool area.



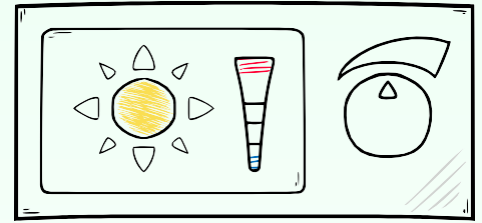
Renters Insurance

- Renters insurance may be required by your landlord, but it is a good idea to get renters insurance even if it's not required. It protects your belongings in the event of damage to the property.
- Check your lease to see if renters insurance is already included.
- Review your renters insurance policy to understand your coverage.



Winter

- Contact your caseworker or property manager to show you how to turn on the heat and use the thermostat in winter.
- Pipes in your home can freeze and cause damage if the temperature outside drops below freezing (32° F or 0° C).
- To prevent water in the pipes from freezing, it is important to leave your heaters on and above 55° F.
- If you will be gone for an extended period of time, you can also turn on your faucets to a very slow drip to prevent the pipes from freezing.
- Be sure to disconnect any exterior hoses or water containers during freezing conditions.
- Review your lease to see if there are any additional winter requirements that are your responsibilities, such as snow removal for your building.



Mail & Notices

Letters, Posted Notices

- Check your mailbox daily, and take all your mail to your home.
- Read all your mail, and put essential papers in a safe place.
- Do not throw “junk mail” on the lobby floor. Instead, put it in the recycling bin or trash.
- Call your case manager for help if there is anything in your mail you do not understand.
- If you lose your mailbox key, there may be a fee to replace it.
- If an official notice is posted on your door, you must respond immediately! This is how eviction notices are delivered.



Repair Requests

- Landlords often require you to make an electronic or written maintenance request before they will make repairs. Use the online maintenance request portal, or ask your case manager for help.
- The [Refugee Housing Solutions website](#) has a repair form you can use.
- Examples of repair requests include:
 - My toilet is clogged.
 - My garbage disposal doesn't work.
 - My screens need repair.
 - My stove doesn't work.
 - My faucet is leaking.

Being a Good Neighbor

Noise, Problem Solving, Pets

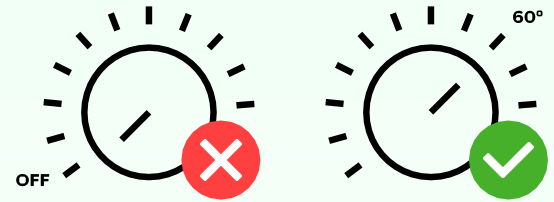
- Check your lease agreement for quiet hours. Quiet hours are usually from 10:00 PM (evening) until 8:00 AM (morning), but it can vary by location. During quiet hours, please keep children and guests quiet, keep conversations low, and don't play loud music.
- You must follow the rules about noise found in your lease.
- If you have disagreements with your neighbors, try to work them out together. If you cannot resolve your disagreements, ask for help from your case manager or apartment manager.
- Check your lease agreement for pet rules, fees, and penalties. Some apartments may not allow pets. For apartments that allow pets, they usually require a pet deposit and/or a monthly pet fee. Do not bring in a pet without notifying your landlord.
- Be sure you know what animals are allowed and if there are any weight requirements. If you don't follow pet rules as specified in your lease agreement, the landlord will charge you a pet penalty. It can be very costly.



Energy Conservation

Thermostat

- Renters usually pay for their own heat and air conditioning (cooling) through electricity and/or gas bills. These utility bills can be very expensive. You can keep your utility bills low by following these tips:
 - The thermostat (usually on the wall) controls the temperature in your home. The thermostat should be set between 70 and 75° F in the summer for cooling (if you have air conditioning) and between 65 and 75° F in the winter for heating. Turning the thermostat all the way up does not make the heat come on any faster, and if you leave it at a high temperature, it will cost a lot of money.
 - If you leave your home for a long period of time, do not turn off the thermostat. During cold weather, do not set the heater below 55° F.
- If your heater or air conditioning is running, windows should be closed.
- Always turn off most of the lights and entertainment appliances when you leave your home. Leave one or two lights on so thieves will think someone is at home.



Helpful Tips

- Never open windows when the heat is on!
- If you can feel air blowing around closed doors and/or windows, ask your landlord to add weather stripping around your doors and/or windows to keep the cold air out.
- Wearing extra layers of clothing, including socks, long pants, and tops with sleeves, will keep you warmer and is cheaper than turning up the heat.
- Never use the stove or oven for heat!
- Keep the refrigerator doors closed when not grabbing items from inside. Leaving the doors open wastes electricity and can spoil food in the refrigerator, which will make you sick.



Summary



1. Pay your bills.



2. Keep things clean.



3. Take care of property.



4. Know how to deal with fire and other emergencies.



5. Pay attention to mail and notices.



6. Be a good neighbor.



7. Do not waste energy.