

Rooming Houses

Best Practices for Landlords

Rooming Houses are part of the housing solution in every Toronto neighbourhood.

Shared accommodation is the most affordable housing option in the private market, with rooming houses being the only housing choices for some low income single adults. Rooms do not involve wait lists and are part of the housing solution in Toronto.

Strong landlord and housing worker relationships is good for business and keeps people housed.

Landlords want low turnover of tenants and housing professionals want housing stability for clients. Both want tenants to maintain housing stability, which affects many other areas of the tenants' lives.

This guide highlights suggestions for both housing workers and landlords on how to achieve long-term rooming house tenancies.

Working with Tenants and Housing Professionals Respectful Communication:

It is important to be respectful to low income tenants and housing workers, both of whom want to find and keep a stable tenancy.

Select Tenants Carefully: Talk to housing help centres and housing workers. Use suggestions from long-term tenants, good judgment, safety and security factors as a guide for selecting new tenants.

Avoid Labeling:

Receiving social assistance does not indicate that someone will be a bad tenant. Likewise, race, immigration status, gender and disability are not reliable indicators of a person's behaviour as a tenant. It is illegal to discriminate against potential tenants for these reasons. The laws on discrimination can be found through the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) (Reg284/05) www.Ontario.ca/laws. The OHRC has a fact sheet on 'Writing a fair rental housing ad'.

Provide Information:

"Information for New Tenants" brochures (available online or at Landlord and Tenant Board offices) should be given to tenants on or before the date their tenancy begins. Find the brochure online at www.ltb.gov.on.ca/.

Stay Involved:

Get to know your tenants, housing workers and housing help centres. Staying in touch with tenants and agencies that can help you and your tenants is good business.

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Keep in Contact with Tenant Supports:

Keep a record of the contact numbers for tenants' housing workers and don't hesitate to contact a housing professional if you experience problems or conflict with tenants

Avoid Eviction:

Evictions cost you money. It is worth it in the long run to work with the tenant and housing worker. The housing professional can work with you and the tenant to come up with solutions to the tenancy problems.

Tips for a Well-Maintained Rooming House

- Know where housing help centres are and if your tenants have housing workers.
- Provide your tenant with the standardized lease; this provides clarity and mutual understanding between landlord and tenant from the start of the tenancy. Ask the housing professional to help so the tenant understands.
- Combine rent and utility costs into one payment, if possible, and try to make payment dates the same as when the tenant receives income. Always provide receipts for any amount received.

- Establish house rules with tenants and ensure that they are applied consistently for all tenants to address health and safety issues and tenant relations. House rules must be consistent with RTA legislation.
- Respect your tenant's privacy by ensuring that rooms are entered only by permission and notice from the tenant.

Ensure that the following measures are taken:

- Locks are secure on bathroom doors, tenant room doors and external house doors.
- Keys are tracked. Ensure keys are not provided to non-residents.
- Emergency plans are posted in common areas.

Solve problems quickly:

Visit the property regularly. Know who lives in the units and who possesses keys. Regularly check and take care of maintenance, cleaning and repair issues. Ensure smoke detectors are active.

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Deal with bug infestations:

Follow the Integrated Pest Management approach as recommended by Toronto Public Health (416-338-7600) If on-site staff are hired make sure that they are:

- Reliable, trustworthy and caring.
- Capable of doing manual work and repairs.
- Competent in an emergency.
- Able to manage tenant relations.

Sources

Shared Accommodation in Toronto: Successful Practices and Opportunities for Change in the Rooming House Sector; and strategies identified through day-to-day housing work gathered by RENT through its work at the Homelessness Reduction Workspace.