**What is renting?**
You rent an apartment or house when you pay the owner money every month to live there. The money you pay is called “rent.”

**What is a lease?**
A lease is a contract that you sign to rent an apartment or house. A lease says:

- how much rent you will pay and when you will pay
- how long you will rent the apartment or house
- what happens if you do not pay on time
- the rules you must follow
- other costs you have to pay

A lease will say whether the costs of utilities are included in your rent. If utilities like heating and water are included, your landlord pays those bills. If utilities are not included in your rent, you must pay those bills yourself. Utilities can be expensive.

**How long does a lease last?**
Leases might last a year or longer. If you do not plan to stay in the apartment or house for a year, look for a short-term or month-to-month lease.

If you move out before the end date in your lease, it is called breaking your lease. You might have to pay extra money. Read your lease to see how much money you will have to pay if you move out before the lease period ends.

**What is a security deposit?**
A security deposit is extra money you pay one time when you rent an apartment or house. A security deposit is not part of the rent you pay every month. The security deposit might be the same amount of money as one month of rent.

The owner of the apartment or house is called a landlord. The landlord keeps your security deposit until you move out. Most of the time, you get your deposit back when you move out. But you might not get your security deposit back if you:

- damage the apartment or house
- leave before your lease period ends

Most states have laws about how much money a landlord can charge you for a security deposit. Most states also have laws saying when a landlord may keep your security deposit. For example, you might get part or all of your security deposit back if a landlord finds someone else to take your place when you leave.

**What do I need to rent an apartment or house?**
When you apply to rent an apartment or house, you will need:

- information about your employer and your income
- identification, like a driver’s license, for a credit or background check
- information about where you lived before

You also might need money to pay for:

- your first month’s rent
• a security deposit
• extra rent if you have bad credit
• utility deposits for electricity, heat, water or other utilities
• a credit check or a background check

Do I need good credit to rent an apartment?
Landlords usually check your credit to see if you pay your bills when they are due. Some landlords might not rent to you or might ask you to pay more rent in advance if your credit history isn't good, or if you don't pay your bills when they are due.
Read more about your credit history.

What does my landlord have to do?
There are laws that landlords must follow. For example, most every state or city has a law that a landlord must provide hot water and make certain repairs. Agencies and organizations in your state can tell you what the laws are where you live.

What if I cannot afford an apartment or house?
Some apartment owners offer lower rents to people who do not have a lot of money. To apply for a subsidized apartment, contact the management office at an apartment building. You can search for subsidized apartments at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website (hud.gov).
Public housing and housing choice vouchers, also called Section 8 vouchers, are available to:
• families without a lot of money
• older people
• people with disabilities

What if a landlord wants me to wire my security deposit?
Do not wire the money. Dishonest people lie about being landlords and pretend they have apartments or houses to rent. These dishonest people try to trick others into sending them money. Wiring money is the same as sending cash. After you send the money, you cannot get it back.

Should I “rent-to-own”?
Renting-to-own means your landlord agrees that you can buy the apartment or house later. He agrees to the price. Then you pay the landlord extra money every month.

But after you have paid a lot of money, you might find out your credit is not good enough to buy the house. Dishonest landlords also might make it too hard for you to buy the house. You might lose all of the money you have paid. Renting-to-own is not a good idea.

Instead of renting-to-own, consider saving your extra money. Then use your savings to buy a house later. For more on saving money, read about making a budget.

A lease is a contract that you sign to rent an apartment or house. When you sign a lease, you agree to follow the rules written in the lease.
The landlord who owns the apartment or house also must do what the lease says and must obey the law. If you think your landlord is breaking the law or breaking the lease, there are people who can help you.

What should I do before I rent an apartment or house?
Read the lease **before** you sign it. When you sign a lease, you agree to do what it says. You might not understand everything in the lease. Find someone you trust to help you read the lease.

The landlord might make promises. Check that they are written in the lease. After you sign the lease, get a copy and keep it.

**What if a landlord won’t rent to me because of my credit or a background check?**
If you have bad credit, you need to show the landlord that you can pay your rent. The landlord might ask you to:

- show pay stubs or bank statements
- pay more money in your security deposit
- pay your first and last month’s rent before you move in

Landlords must tell you if they will not rent to you because of information in your credit report or background report. Landlords also must tell you if they will charge you more money because of information in your report. This is called an adverse action notice.

The adverse action notice must tell you how to contact the organization that created the credit report or background report. That agency must give you a free copy of your credit report if you ask for it within 60 days. You have a right to question wrong information in your report with that agency, and try to correct it.

**What should I do if I think my landlord is breaking the law?**
You might think a landlord is breaking the law or that a landlord is breaking your lease. Here is what you can do:

- Find out about your rights as a tenant. Go to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website and click on Find Rental Assistance.
- Find low-cost or free legal help. Go to Legal Services Corporation Website and look up your state under Find Legal Aid.
- Talk to your local housing counseling agency. Go to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website and click on Find Rental Assistance.

A landlord cannot change the rental deal or refuse to rent to you because of your race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, or family status. That would be discrimination.

You can file a complaint about housing discrimination with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Call 1-800-669-9777 or go to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website fair housing page.