

Red Flags During Tenant Background Checks

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Property Managers and landlords typically understand the importance of having a background check process for potential tenants. Proper background screenings can help to ensure your property is safe, well maintained, and desirable; it can also save money in the long run by ensuring you don't lease to someone without solid financials. Many of these problems can be easily spotted during a routine screening. For example, a tenant with very poor credit or a criminal history may give you immediate pause. Eviction history is also a common warning sign that a tenant is not a good fit for a property. But even before sending off for credit and criminal history, the process of screening can begin. You can take careful notice of behaviors and reactions to gauge if somebody is the optimal tenant starting from your first interaction. Look out for behaviors like the following.

First Contact

When responding to your vacancy ad, a potential tenant should follow any instructions given and know the basic information you provided. If you post a 2 bedroom and ask for email inquiries, and someone calls you to ask about a 3 bedroom, there is already a disconnect there. The worst-case scenario is often somebody showing up and disturbing current tenants in an order to gather information. An applicant who starts off badly may not be worth further conversations.

Application Etiquette

Any qualified tenant understands that an application is part of the process and should be prepared to fill one out. If they do have concerns about what may show up on their background check, they should share those with you beforehand rather than attempt to hide the information. If an applicant pushes back on the required paperwork, there is already a chance something is askew. Once they do fill out an application, it should be treated seriously and professionally. Lots of blank spaces or errors may be simple negligence, but can also be an attempt to mislead you with false information.

References

Many people are looking to move out after living with family members, and no one should be written off for listing family members as references. However, if these are the only references they can provide or their additional references do not seem legitimate, this could be cause for concern. Family members are sometimes listed to avoid landlord contact, so you should reach out to them and treat the family member like a landlord. Ask all the questions you typically would to gauge if this person truly lived with the family member or not.

Rental History

While eviction history is an obvious worry, you may see other aspects of a tenant's history that can be concerning. If somebody moves often within the same city, you may want to dig into this further. This can indicate someone who is moving out to avoid

evictions or is perhaps a difficult tenant. More than 3 addresses in the previous 5 years is usually enough to raise eyebrows during the application process and should lead to further questioning.

There are numerous things that can arise during the tenant background check process, but make sure to always comply with fair housing laws and provide legitimate reasons for rejecting applicants. These guidelines provide a starting point in determining when a tenant is not fit for your vacancy.