

# What To Know Before You Rent

## Avoiding Rental Scams and Fraud: RENTER BEWARE!

What is a rental scam?

A rental scam typically happens when a person is posing as a landlord and trying to lure in potential renters. Their goal is to steal a renter's money without providing a place to live. They might ask for security deposits or other money before you see the home or before a lease is signed. By the time you realize you have no place to live, you've sent the money to a stranger and it's gone.

### *Watch out for these red flags in housing:*

#### **Picture perfect:**

Watch out for homes that are picture perfect at an even better price. Homes that are too perfect, and are listed below the price they should be at, are probably too good to be true.

#### **Unavailable landlord:**

If the landlord is too busy to meet you in person, this might be a red flag. The landlord or property manager should be available to walk you through the property in person so you may make a visual inspection. If there is no one available, and you have only spoken to them online, this could be bad news.

#### **Quick move:**

If the landlord wants you to move in immediately, this could be a bad sign. It's important to walk through the home, meet the landlord, and go through the lease before agreeing to move. Typically a landlord will have you go through a background and credit check. If they do not, this could be a scam.

#### **Pay now sign later:**

Watch out for anyone asking for money before you have a completed lease, especially if they are asking for you to wire money and you haven't met the landlord in person or seen the home.

#### **Is it too good to be true?**

If the home is way too good to be true, at an even better price, it probably is.

#### **It doesn't make sense.**

If the listing has poor grammar, typos, and isn't well thought out, it could be a scammer.

#### **No requirements:**

Landlords and property managers usually screen tenants so they make sure to protect themselves. If the landlord doesn't have any screening requirements (background, application, or credit check), it could be a scam.

#### **Missing or unfinished lease:**

If a landlord or property manager presents an unfinished lease to you, this is likely a scam. It could also be a red flag if the lease has missing parts, incomplete writing, etc.

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## Emotional manipulation:

Watch out for statements like “I like you so I want to help you out.” “I understand your situation so I would like to rent to your family.” “I would consider you a friend.” Watch out for landlords who are a little too friendly, or trying to give you a “deal” because they like you.

## Creating competition:

If the landlord suddenly has several tenants interested in the home but wants to rent only to you, this could be a bad sign.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF

- Make sure you see the home: Meet the landlord in person to physically walk through the home.  
If the landlord is asking you to drive by the home and walk around, it’s likely a scam.
- Do not send money without a signed lease agreement.
- Do not send money electronically via Venmo, Zelle, crypto, by wire, or by PayPal. If the landlord asks you to pay with gift cards, it’s likely a scam. If you DO decide to do this, make sure you write what the payment is for in the memo. (Rent, deposit, application fee for rental).
- Look up the owner of the home and make sure it matches the landlord’s or entity’s name. The county you are renting in should have records of who owns the home through the recorder’s office.
- Think before you act: It’s okay to pause. Use your tenant toolkit to take the necessary steps to prevent scams and fraud. If you have a case manager, reach out to them for help.

## Reporting Scams

- Reach out to your local police department/authorities: Provide them with detailed information about what happened.
- Report the rental listing to the website it was listed under (Facebook, renter, etc.)
- Report to the Federal Trade Commission.



<https://www.avail.co/education/guides/a-tenants-guide-to-finding-an-apartment/how-to-spot-a-rental-scam>

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**Are there types of landlords I should avoid?** Yes. Before you enter a lease agreement, you should check the landlord out just like they are checking you out. Ask to talk to a current tenant or even the tenant you are replacing, if possible. Do your research for the property and the area you are considering.

You should also consider the potential landlord's availability. Do they return your calls promptly? Is the landlord local or do they have a local representative? Are the rental units and common areas well maintained and in good repair? The Rental Housing Association is a membership group for landlords that promotes fair practices and ethics. You may want to consider asking a prospective landlord if he or she is a member of the Rental Housing Association or the Good Landlord Program.