



WELCOME
TO YOUR
NEW HOME

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This booklet is to help you know what to expect about your new home. We hope it enables you to have a safe and enjoyable transition to life in America! Each section is broken down into different topics so you can refer to them as needed.

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I. YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

When you first arrive to America, your family and case manager may have already decided where you will live in your first few months here. This is done to help make your transition faster and easier. Trust that they have your best interests in mind.

To rent an apartment in America, you must have a rental history. A rental history is a record that you have rented property in the United States. It will show if rent has been paid on time every month or not. The apartment complex wants to be confident that you will be a good tenant.

Since you have no rental history in the US, your family or case manager is able to work together with select apartment complexes that understand that you do not have a rental history. The managers at these apartments rely upon the word of your resettlement agency that you will be a good tenant. Usually, they are able to work out a six-month contract time for you. The normal contract, or lease, is for a year. Understanding that you may choose to move elsewhere, these complexes are usually willing to provide a six-month lease for you, in the beginning.

It is your responsibility to sign the lease shortly after your arrival here. Then, you begin to build your own rental history. When and if you choose to move, your rental history and being a good tenant will make it easier for you to find a new home.

At the lease signing, you will meet with a representative from the apartment management. They will explain what you are signing, how long your contract is for, how much rent you must pay each month, and other important information about your apartment. Only people whose names are on the lease are allowed to live in the apartment.

When you want to rent an apartment in America, you will need to pay a security deposit and an application fee. Usually, the deposit is returned to you when your lease ends, as long as the apartment is left clean and is not damaged. The application fee is not refundable.

It is also your responsibility to apply for utilities in your name. Utilities include gas, electricity, and/or water. Some apartment complexes include the cost of part or all of the utilities in the rent.

Every complex differs with what utilities are available in your apartment. The apartment management will provide you with a list of local utility companies. If you need assistance applying for the utilities, you can talk with your family or case manager.

In the beginning of each month, you must pay the management for the use of your apartment. This payment is called rent. Rent is usually due on the first day of each month. Paying your rent **ON TIME, EVERY MONTH** is your most important responsibility, even if someone else is providing the money to pay your rent. If you do not pay rent by the due date, you will be charged a late fee or fine in addition to your regular rent. You may also be evicted (forced to leave) from your apartment if you do not pay your rent. Not paying your rent on time can make it difficult for you to rent another apartment in the future. You should pay your rent by money order or check, not cash. Ask the management for a receipt

when you pay your rent. This will serve as proof that you have paid.

The apartment management, or landlord, is responsible to maintain the appliances and fixtures that belong to them. These are:

Refrigerator	Stove/Oven
Dishwasher	Toilet
Sinks	Ceiling Lights and fans

You must take good and proper care of these items and keep your apartment clean. If any of the appliances or fixtures break, you must notify the apartment management or landlord. If it is broken through improper use, you will be charged. If it is broken through no fault of your own then you should not expect to be charged.

Your family or case manager may have brought other items to the apartment for you, such as dishes, cookware, sofa, lamps, and beds. These probably belong to you and you are responsible to move them when and if you leave your apartment. If you are unsure if something in the apartment belongs to you, ask your family or case manager.

II. Safety

911 is the telephone number to call in the United States when you have an emergency. This number is to be used for real emergencies such as a fire, severe health problem (a heart attack, for example), robbery, or other crime. This number will reach an operator who will notify the police, fire department, and/or ambulance. It is important to learn your address and phone number quickly so that when you call 911 you can give the operator this information clearly. However, even if you do not speak English very well, stay on the line. The operator will be able to see your address on their computer screen. It is important for you to be able to explain to the operator what the problem is, such as "fire," "burglary," "heart attack," etc. Before you have phone service connected, you should be able to connect any phone into the wall phone connection to access 911. If you or someone in your home calls 911 and the emergency vehicles come and find there is no emergency, you could be fined.

Your apartment should have at least one smoke detector. This is to alert you when there is smoke and possibly fire in your apartment. Please check the battery regularly to make sure it is working. Push and hold the button on the smoke detector for a few seconds. If it makes a loud sound, the battery is good.

Most apartments also have a fire extinguisher, usually located in the kitchen. This is to be used if there is a small fire in your apartment. You must notify the leasing office to replace a used fire extinguisher. It is important to plan an escape route in case of a fire in your apartment. Make sure that bikes or furniture do not block entrances.

Using the stove and oven

Kitchens are equipped with an electric or gas stove. It is important never to leave the stove unattended while you are cooking. Always make sure you turn off the burners and oven when you are finished cooking.

Children playing in the street

Always have adult supervision when your children are playing outside. It is not safe for them to play in the street or in the parking lots, as they could be struck by passing vehicles.

Locking your doors and windows

Always keep your doors and windows locked when you are not home. Be especially careful to lock them after dark and if you are home alone.

Answering your door

Always look through the window or peephole in your door before opening your door. Sometimes, maintenance workers from the apartment office (leasing office) will need to enter your apartment. They should identify themselves clearly before you open the door. If you do not know the person, you do not have to open the door for them.

Swimming pools

Adult supervision is required when your children swim in the pool. Anyone swimming in the pool is required to wear a swimsuit (even very young children); cut off shorts and diapers are not acceptable swim wear. Also, it is unacceptable to urinate in or near any public swimming pool.

III. KEEPING YOUR HOME CLEAN

It is important for you and your family and for the neighbors with whom you share your community to keep your home tidy, clean, and safe.

Trash disposal

Always keep all of your trash in closed containers until you are ready to throw it out. Line the container with a plastic bag. Leaving trash containers open invites insects into your home. These insects can become pests and may carry diseases that affect you and your children. When the trash container is full, pull out the plastic liner bag, tie it securely and take it to a "dumpster" near your apartment. Dumpsters are large metal boxes usually colored green or brown. Dumpsters are cleaned out weekly by the government sanitation department. Place trash and trash bags INSIDE the dumpster, not outside. Do not collect items from the dumpster to take to your home. This can be dangerous to you and can bring unwanted pests and diseases into your home.

Tidiness

Keep all of your important documents in a single, safe place where you can easily find them and where your children cannot get to them. Keep your floors free of objects you could trip over. Store clothing and other items neatly in the shelves or closets provided.

Cleaning floors, kitchen and bathroom

To clean carpet and vinyl ("plastic") floors, use a broom or vacuum regularly. You should also regularly wipe vinyl floors with a mop or cloth moistened with water and cleaning solution. Do not throw water onto vinyl floors to clean them. The water can seep into the structure of your home and cause damage. Always keep kitchen counter tops and the stovetop wiped clean. Allowing dirt and debris to build up will attract insects. Wipe the inside of your refrigerator

and stove regularly with a cloth or sponge moistened with water and soap. Clean your bathroom regularly (at least once each week) by wiping the sink, bathtub and outside of the toilet with a sponge and cleaning solution. Scrub the inside of the toilet with a brush and disinfectant cleaning solution.

Food and insects

After you finish preparing meals, always place left over food in sealed containers, plastic wrap or aluminum paper. Then store food in the refrigerator so that it will not spoil. Remember that if you leave food in open containers outside the refrigerator, you will have a serious problem with insects.

Pest control

Many apartment complexes provide regular pest control service. They will send a maintenance person to your apartment to spray for roaches and other pests. Your apartment management will inform you when the pest control service will take place.

Walls

Walls in most homes are made of a thin material, which can be broken easily. Do not allow your children to write on walls or hit them with force. Do not write telephone numbers on the wall near the telephone; it is better to use paper. Use small nails carefully hammered into the wall to hang decorations on. If your walls get marked or dirty, you can use a moist sponge or cloth to lightly clean them.

Washing and drying clothes

If you wash your clothes inside your home, be careful that you do not allow water to run outside of the basin or sink and onto the floor. You should dry your clothes neatly on cords strung inside your home. If you have a patio or balcony, do not place clothes over the railing or on shrubs. The apartment management does not allow this and you could be fined.

Patios and balconies

If you live in an apartment with an outdoor patio or balcony, keep it clean and free from clutter. The apartment management does not allow you to use your patio or balcony as a storage area.

Grounds

Keep the area around your apartment and around the common areas (laundry, post boxes, pool) clean by picking up trash. Do not throw trash on the ground in any area of the apartment grounds. You could be fined by the apartment management for doing this.

IV. USING ELECTRICAL AND GAS APPLIANCES

Stove

Your stove should have four burners, or eyes. Each eye has a corresponding knob with which to operate it. If they are powered by gas you will see a flame when you turn the knob. The electric stoves have round burners that will heat up when you turn them on. Pay careful attention to make sure that you have

turned the correct eye on. If the stove does not turn on, there may be an electrical problem or a problem with the pilot light. Only use pots and pans made for stovetops. It is important to monitor the food so that neither the pan nor pot catches on fire. It may be helpful to line the burners with aluminum foil. Ask for assistance if you are unsure how to do this. The aluminum foil will help to keep the grease off the metal burner. It will save you time cleaning. The stovetop is usually able to lift up so that you clean out any food that falls into it. Regularly clean out this part of your stove.

Oven

Your oven is usually located under the stove. It is powered the same way as the stove. The normal setting for cooking most foods is 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Some appliances have two separate knobs to control the oven. One knob indicates the temperature setting, and the other indicates baking, broiling, or cleaning. Only use pans or dishes that are safe for ovens. Do not use pans with plastic handles inside the oven. Check on the bottom of your dish to make sure that it is oven safe. You should clean your oven yearly. You can purchase a special oven cleaning spray at the store. Be careful to follow all the directions for the spray.

Grills and cooking outside

Check with the apartment management to find out if cooking on grills is permitted outside your apartment building.

Garbage disposal

The garbage disposal is a wonderful convenience if used properly. If not, it could lead to plumbing problems. Here are several tips on how to use your disposal properly:

- Only place food in the disposal.
- Do not place bones, paper, grease, or plastic in the disposal.
- Run the disposal after you have put food in. If the food sits for too long it could lead to problems with bugs.
- When you run the disposal make sure you are running cold water at the same time. If not, you will burn out the motor.
- Do not place bones or rice in the drain. These will clog your plumbing.

Dishwasher

Most apartments will come with a dishwasher. To run the dishwasher you must:

1. Load the dishes properly.
2. Place soap specially made for the dishwasher into the two containers located in the door of the dishwasher.
3. Properly close and lock the door.
4. Turn the knob on the outside of the door to "wash".

If you open the dishwasher while it is in the middle of washing or drying, you must close and lock the door again and possibly push the knob in to start it again. Only place porcelain, ceramic, or metal dishes into the dishwasher. Plastic dishes may melt so place them in the top part of the washer or wash them by hand.

Outlets

You must be very careful that you and your children only place electrical plugs into the electrical outlets. Do not try to insert fingers or metal objects into an outlet. If you have small children you may want to purchase small plastic covers to place into the unused outlets. If an outlet is not working, notify your landlord.

Fuse box and breakers

Normally, in the wall of your kitchen or laundry room, you will find a gray box called a fuse box. Inside the box you will see many switches. These switches turn the electricity off and on. Each switch corresponds to a specific area of your home. You do not need to use these switches unless you blow a fuse. You can blow a fuse by using too many electrical devices within one area at one time. The electricity will shut down in that area. To restore power, open the fuse box and look for the switch that is facing off. Turn it back to on and your power should resume. Make sure that you first turn off one of the electrical devices that you had on so as to not blow a fuse again.

V. UNDERSTANDING YOUR PLUMBING

Shower curtains

Always use a shower curtain when taking a shower, and keep it inside of the bathtub so that water does not drain onto the bathroom floor.

Toilets

Toilets are not designed for disposal of food and garbage. If too much toilet paper or waste is flushed, the toilet line can easily back up and cause the toilet to overflow onto the floor. If this happens, please call the apartment office for a maintenance person to come quickly. Please flush the toilet every time it is used. Never flush diapers or sanitary napkins (feminine products) down the toilet.

Kitchen and bathroom sinks

Unless the kitchen sink is equipped with a disposal unit, food should not be discarded through the sink. It should only be put into the garbage can or dumpster. Chicken skins, grease, seeds, rice, and bones are not easily processed by kitchen disposal units and should be tossed into the garbage.

Bathroom sinks can also clog with hair and other debris that does not pass through pipes quickly. Hardware stores and supermarkets sell chemical products that can flush clogged pipes clean. However, you should first contact the landlord if you have clogged pipes.

VI. SAVING ENERGY AND LOWERING YOUR BILLS

In your apartment, you are responsible for paying the cost of electricity, gas, and water. The more you use, the more you will pay. It is important that you save energy in order to lower your bills.

Lights

It is important that you turn off your lights when you are not using them. During the day, you can open up the blinds/curtains to let in sunlight and to warm your home in the winter. In warm weather, keep the blinds and curtains

closed to keep your home cooler. At night, only turn the lights on in the room that you are in. Turn off the lights whenever you leave a room. This saves energy and reduces your electric bill.

Water

The more water that you use, the more money you must pay for your bill. You can save money by turning off the water when you are not using it. If you do not have many dishes to wash, scrub them in the sink rather than using the dishwasher. Remember that using too much hot water can be expensive. Report leaky faucets to the landlord.

Thermostat

You can control the temperature in your home by using the thermostat (the small box located on the wall, usually in the living room). In the winter, put the setting on HEAT. In summer, put the setting on COOL. If you do not want to use the heat or air, you can put the setting on OFF.

You can change the temperature by moving the lever to the temperature that you want. You save more energy if you leave the temperature at a medium setting. Thermostats in America are marked in degrees Fahrenheit not Celsius. Most people leave the setting around 74 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer and around 68 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter. It is best to set the fan to AUTO. This will make the heat/air turn off when the apartment is at the right temperature. It will come on automatically when the temperature changes. This saves more energy than if you turn it on and off yourself. In winter, it is better to wear warm clothes (sweaters, socks) around the house than to wear thin clothes and turn the heat on high. Using a portable fan instead of the air conditioner can save you money, also.

Windows and doors

It is important that you keep your windows and doors closed any time that you are using your heat or air conditioning. Only open your windows to cool the house when you do not plan to use the air conditioner. If you open the windows for air, first put the thermostat on OFF.

VII. YOUR APARTMENT MANAGEMENT

When you moved in, you signed a lease for a certain period of time. One or two months prior to the lease expiring (the date stated in your lease), you must tell your landlord if you are planning to end or renew your contract. You must do this in writing so you can prove that you have communicated with them.

Renewing

If you decide to renew your lease, the landlord may increase the rent at this time. You must also sign a new lease one month prior to the current lease's expiration date.

Moving

If you are planning to move but cannot do so immediately after the lease is over, you may talk with your landlord about having a month-to-month contract. These contracts usually cost you more money but may be worth it for you because you will not be obligated to stay for more than one month.

If you have chosen to move after your lease is finished it is your responsibility to thoroughly clean the apartment and remove all your belongings. If you paid a security deposit when you moved in you will want to make sure that the office has your new address. They will inspect the apartment after you move out and determine if you will receive the security deposit back or if they must use it to make repairs. They should mail a check to you if everything is in good condition. You must also go to the local post office and fill out a change of address card. Remember to give your new address to your friends and family, magazines that you subscribe to, the bank, and any other creditors. Contact the utility companies to either transfer or turn off your services.

If you move before your lease contract is up, you must still give notice to your landlord first. You will probably have to pay a penalty fee for moving early, and you may not receive your deposit back. Breaking your contract by moving out early may give you a negative rental history which can hurt you when you are trying to move to another apartment.

Observing rules and regulations

Apartment complexes have rules that they expect their residents to follow. For example, they may have a curfew time when they want children inside their homes or specific times when swimming is allowed in the pool. Check with the office as to the rules and regulations of your complex, if you were not given a list at the time you signed your lease.

Maintenance requests

If you have a maintenance request you must go to the office and fill out a request form. Do not approach the maintenance workers when you see them in the complex and expect that they will remember your request. It is always necessary to present your request at the office. Always make your requests clearly and with respect for the person to whom you are speaking. Some requests are considered emergency and others are general maintenance. For emergency requests, you can expect a quick resolution. For general maintenance it will require more time as parts may need to be ordered or so that the workers can attend to emergencies. Following are some examples of emergency and general maintenance requests:

Emergency

Flooded apartment	Sewage back up
Broken hot water heater	Broken stove, oven, or refrigerator
Broken Air conditioning or heat	Break-in
Broken window	

General

Broken cabinet door	Smoke alarm battery replacement
Broken window blinds	Leaky faucet or small plumbing problems

If you have problems getting apartment management to respond to your maintenance request, first ask for help from your case manager or relative. If you still are not getting any response, put your request in writing to document your situation. You should expect good response to your reasonable requests. However, there may be times when you are still not satisfied and may want to pursue getting help from outside resources to solve your problem.

VIII. ADDITIONAL TIPS

The vinyl flooring (usually in the kitchen, bathroom, and sometimes entry) can be easily stained or burned. Be careful not to place hot cookware or irons on the vinyl.

Apartment complexes do not allow mechanics to work on cars parked in the parking areas of the complex. This can include changing the oil or engine repair.

Renter's Insurance is available from insurance companies. For a small fee, the insurance will cover your property inside your apartment in case of fire or theft by persons unknown to you. This is worthwhile, particularly if you have expensive or valuable items in your home.

If you receive mail in your mailbox that does not belong to anyone in your apartment, please write on the envelope "Not at this address" and place in the outgoing mail slot. The post office will then be able to forward the mail to the correct address.

Before you buy a pet or any animal for your apartment (such as a dog or cat), check with the leasing office manager. Some apartments require a separate deposit for small pets such as dogs and cats. Other animals (goats, chickens, etc) are not acceptable as pets inside your apartment. Usually, birds in a cage and fish in an aquarium are acceptable pets.

If you use a shopping cart from the supermarket to carry your groceries to your apartment, please be courteous and return the cart to the store. If you leave the cart outside your apartment, the leasing office may fine you.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency 911

Other important numbers are listed inside the front cover of your telephone book (white pages)

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