

# Empowering Tenants in Difficult Conversations

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## *Learner Action Guide*

### What is Housing Stability?

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Housing Stability Requires:

- Having a permanent place to call home that is not time limited and governed by a lease
- Tenants have independent choice, voice and decision making in their daily life
- The resources needed to keep housing affordable so tenants can pay and maintain the housing for the long-term.
- A variety of tenant-centered services targeted to meet the individual needs of tenants and the entire household

Stable Housing is Also:

- Housing is Healthcare!
- Promotes Recovery and Hope
- Encourages self-sufficiency
- Enhances stabilization and self-awareness
- Heightens independence
- Increases community re-entry successes and Integration

### Approaches to Promote Stability

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It is important for the organizational structure to truly understand the needs of the tenants that they serve. It aids in a healthy power dynamic in housing which will lead to tenant empowerment.

#### *1. Organizational Preparedness:*

Housing stability starts prior to ever serving tenants. Service Providers should **evaluate and assess their internal expertise and capacity to meet the needs of the target population.** Some areas to consider include:

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- A. Listening to tenants to understand what they need in supportive housing. With input from tenants, develop an understanding of the target population:
  - Consider using info like community data to learn more about the need such as household composition or race demographics to anticipate cultural needs.
- B. Develop an understanding of housing law for your jurisdiction.
  - Understand policies like reasonable accommodations, affirmatively affirming fair housing laws, landlord tenant rights, and developing relationships with legal aid programs to build the legal intelligence to aid in housing stability.
- C. Create an eviction prevention program
  - Policy that outlines policies and practices that both tenants and property management can agree to before ever signing a lease to support tenants if and when lease violations occur
- D. Train often, new, refresher and ongoing professional development for staff and tenants when possible on topics like
  - Harm reduction and Overdose prevention.
  - Motivational Interviewing
  - Trauma Informed Care
  - De-escalation and crisis prevention techniques.

## 2. Ensuring Affordability:

Affordability is a key component to ensuring housing stability. Areas to discuss with the tenant to ensure housing remains affordable includes:

Early discussions of what income they have or don't have, developing an understanding of what they can afford, rent payment due dates, grace periods, budgeting and developing a rent payment or repayment plan if they fall short.

Although some smaller communities may have a limited choice in housing location, providing tenants with the choice in how much housing cost they can afford, what type of unit, location, and roommate option are factors that can support power sharing and empowering tenants to make choices in their life.

And what individualized tenant-centered services are needed that promote economic stability, support accessing benefits, budgeting, credit repair, supported employment services, vocational and educational services coordination.

**When we empower tenants with access to information and support that connection to resources, we help support housing stability in order for people to thrive.**

### 3. Community:

Another important area to focus on when promoting stability is determining how best to connect the tenant to supportive housing and surrounding community to build connection and a sense of belonging.

Some things to consider can be:

- Orientation to the building and the neighborhood.
- Support in the application process.
- Move in support.
- Frequency of engagement and brief initial engagements when building rapport.
- Proximity to public transportation, grocery stores, and medical care is critical. When public transportation is not available, services should include other transportation.

Home safety checks.

- Support with maintenance requests and relationships with property management.
- Tenant leadership forums occur regularly to hear tenant experiences and feedback and to submit recommendations to supportive housing partners (service provider, landlord, and property management).
- Support tenants in participation in local community councils to raise safety and housing concerns and advocate for community needs.

### *Empowering Tenants:*

1. Give time for tenants to review the lease, ask questions or request assistance with the reviewing the lease in detail so tenants understand their rights and what is expected. Discuss common lease violations to prepare for eviction prevention planning and worst case scenarios.
2. Provide a blank Housing Stability Guide and have the Tenant complete it with the service provider to answer important questions before there is a crisis.

In the guide address:

- Safety protocols
  - Repair strategies
  - How to request maintenance to help when there are plumbing issues, leaks, appliance malfunctions, pests, fires, mold, and the importance of keeping walkways clear.
3. Identify behaviors that are symptoms of health conditions, understanding baseline health and triggers that can lead to decompensation. To address this, develop a Wellness Recovery Action Plan with the tenant to support them in moments of imbalance.

4. Engage in harm reduction strategies to reduce harms and risky behavior that can lead to lease violations like:
  - smoking,
  - sex work, and drug use.
  - Overnight guests and regular visitors not on the lease
  - Noise violations preventing others from enjoyment of the building,
  - Cleaning the unit and preventing pests,
  - Hoarding
  - Missed rental payments,
  - Behaviors that put self or others at risk of harm or in danger.

## Defining Roles

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Each of the roles overlap but also stand independently. The common goal with the tenant, service provider and the landlord is keeping the tenant housed, staying housed and engaging new stakeholders. When we recognize that all the parties have one common goal despite different motivations is the common ground that helps everyone to work together.

### Service Provider/ Case Manager:

The social services staff provide and arrange for services needed to maintain housing and also function as advocates for the tenant.

The most important role and the one most common is to assist the tenant to meet the expectations of tenancy. Housing is an altogether brand-new concept when you have not done it for a while.

Case managers help tenants identify and achieve their goals and meet their needs by providing access to various services. A case manager addresses the physical, psychological and social needs of the person and helps him/her to obtain and sustain stable housing.

When supporting clients with integration into the community, we recommend providers to:

- Engage tenants -- proactively and assertively...
- Support tenants – even when they are resistant...
- Preemptively identify and address housing stability issues
- Liaise with Landlords
- Coordinate tenant councils and support groups that lift voices of PWLE

Additionally, a case manager will negotiate, advocate, inform, coordinate and serve as a liaison to other professionals and supportive services. Some of the linkages that case managers access to help people meet their goals include education and employment services, medical providers, entitlement centers, advocacy groups, substance use treatment, psychotherapists and psychiatrists.

### Tenants:

Priority is to stay permanently housed

Participate in the development of the housing plan

- Learn to advocate of themselves during the landlord outreach process
- Abide by the terms of the lease
- Be a good tenant and neighbor
- Elevate crisis in a timely manner
- Report maintenance issues
- Communicate with service providers and landlord proactively

It's important to educate tenants about these responsibilities. Some tenants may struggle with these responsibilities. It might be the first time that a tenant has had a lease, so lease education is very important, and we'll talk about that in a bit. Tenants in supportive housing have help to fulfill their responsibilities. Service providers help tenants with housing skills, and housing managers help mitigate potential issues with a landlord.

### Landlord/ Property Manager:

- Manages rent-up process including marketing, outreach, interview and selection of tenants
- Establishes a relationship with the Service Provider
- Collects rent, fills vacancies, makes repairs, and evicts tenants when necessary
- Assists in tenant organizing and processing of grievances

Both Landlord and Property Manager roles might be one in the same or two separate roles, it will depend on the owner's preference. It is important to understand how the owner thinks in order to speak their language to add them as a partner. The landlord wants:

- Rent paid on time
- Someone to call
- Property damage resolved
- Nuisance addressed

Landlords are regular people and we tend to think they are superior because they have something that we need. Talking the language while showing the Landlord how they can help the community. Being a SH LL is not a profession that you will be a multi-millionaire LL tend to get in this business out of love for the community.

- More stable tenancy
- Help from service provider in resolving problems
- Builds relationships with service community

- Serves those most in need of housing
- Potential access to rental subsidies, specialized funding sources
- Priority for low income housing tax credits
- Responds to the need for housing and services in the community

## Conflict Management

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Property and/or Housing Management staff work closely with service providers and landlords to ensure tenants sustain stable housing. Coordination to resolve conflicts occurs at 2 important phases:

1. Access and Navigate Housing Search
  - Case manager/housing locator supports individuals in finding housing and engaging with landlord. This includes – helping with application, interview process, etc. Also includes the advocate, navigator or case manager explaining SHE (subsidy and how it works and services and how they work) and outline the coordination that will be required from the get-go to support tenant (should include signing appropriate releases of information and agreement outlining communication)
2. Keeping Tenants Stably Housed
  - Once tenant moves into housing, coordination should consistently occur (and not just during crisis or problem but on a consistent basis)

Coordination should not only exist during challenges or crisis.

- Coordination is about being proactive and reactive/responsive.
- Important Coordination Moments
  - First engagement with Landlord/Property Manager
  - Right before and at move-in
  - First week of tenancy
  - Regularly schedule check-ins

There should be an established way that conflict is resolved – you don't have to have a written plan for every type of conflict that might ever happen (that would be impossible to anticipate them all), but you should have a process in place for dealing with conflict.

## Addressing Behaviors

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Avoid Eviction and Step in Early. Listen to certain things to help identify if housing stability may become an issue.

### Queues to Look Out For...

- ✓ Mention of work hours reduced or eliminated
- ✓ Looking for a new job / Filed Unemployment
- ✓ Utility payments late or behind a few months
- ✓ Sudden illness – self or family member
- ✓ Landlord calling often or “harassing”
- ✓ Received letters/notice on door

### Eviction Prevention Strategies:

1. Stress the cost to all parties to move forward with evictions. Evictions should truly be the last resort for everyone involved.
2. Work with the client and landlord to address identified problem areas
3. Work with landlord to allow the lease to run its course, then move the client to another apartment at the end of the lease
4. Negotiate restitution for damages
5. Negotiate a payment plan
6. Negotiate breakage of the lease
7. Move client rather than have the landlord go to eviction court to save the relationship with the landlord for another tenant

### Strategies for Good Tenancy:

Encourage Clients to Ask for Help - In whatever area they may struggle in order to keep their housing. Some examples might be

- Housekeeping/Organization/Personalization
- Disciplined Habits
- Work or Peer Support
- Financial Responsibility
- Social Activity: Family/Friends

## Resources:

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- Trauma Informed Care Project, [Agency Self-Assessment](#)
- [http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org/sites/default/files/valuescardsort\\_0.pdf](http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org/sites/default/files/valuescardsort_0.pdf)
- MI [Readiness Ruler](#) directions
- MI [Value Card Sort \(original deck\)](#) and [instructions](#)
- MI [Value Card Sort \(for people with schizophrenia\)](#)
- Decisional Balancing [worksheet](#)
- University of Oregon [skill building resources](#)
- [Center for Evidence Based Practice on MI](#)
- [Evaluating Supportive Housing as a Solution for People with Complex Health Care Needs](#)
- [HUD Exchange – What Does My Lease Say? Tool](#)
- [Move In: Keys to Success](#)
- [HUD Exchange – Housing First Assessment Tool](#)