

Section 1

Setting up home

Finding accommodation	3
Tenancy agreements	8
Emergency housing	10
Setting up home	11
Finding your way around	18
Security	19
Fire prevention	20
Other emergencies	22
Being a good neighbour	23
Household cleaning	24
Home maintenance and DIY	26



Finding accommodation

If you are looking for permanent accommodation, you have a choice of housing options:

- council accommodation
- housing association accommodation
- private rented accommodation.

Council accommodation

If you are aged 18–21 and have been looked after by a local authority, your local authority may be responsible for providing you with permanent accommodation. If you have been in care and are in full-time education, they remain responsible for your housing until you are 24.

Older care leavers may be able to get accommodation from the local authority housing department if they can show that they are in priority need. You will need to argue that you are vulnerable as a result of having been in care – for example, if you haven't had a stable home since you left care, or you have slept on the streets in the past. You may also be classed as vulnerable if you have been forced to leave your home because of violence or harassment due to your gender, ethnic origin or religion.

Your local authority will also be responsible for finding you permanent housing if you are aged 18 and older and are:

- homeless
- eligible for help
- considered in priority need of housing.

You will be seen as in priority need of housing:

- if you or your partner are pregnant
- if you have dependent children
- if you are considered to be 'vulnerable'.



Intentionally homeless

Your local authority doesn't have to find you housing if you are aged 18 and over and have made yourself intentionally homeless. You will be seen to have made yourself intentionally homeless if:

- you were evicted for antisocial behaviour
- you didn't pay the rent when you had money to do so
- you ignored advice that could have stopped you being evicted
- you left your accommodation for no good reason (in the council's view).

You won't be seen to have made yourself intentionally homeless if:

- you were evicted for antisocial behaviour that happened because of mental illness
- you got behind with your rent because of financial difficulties beyond your control –
 - you were made redundant
 - you were ill
 - your partner or flat share moved out
 - you weren't given the benefits to which you are entitled
 - you had to leave your home to take up a new job in another area.

If your local authority decides it is not your fault that you are homeless, and you have a local connection (you are living or work locally, or have close family living locally), it is obliged by law to find you permanent accommodation. You may have to wait for a permanent home, but the local authority must find you temporary housing in the meantime. This may be emergency bed and breakfast or hostel-type housing.

If the council thinks you are intentionally homeless, they only need to provide you with temporary housing for a 'reasonable' length of time – usually about 28 days – while you find yourself somewhere to live.

Some local authorities offer you a choice when they allocate permanent housing, but some do not. If you don't think the offer is suitable, you may not be offered another unless you can persuade the council that you have good reasons (eg. health reasons, or gang association) for not accepting the offer.

Young people aged 16–17

Homeless young people aged 16–17 are the responsibility of their local authority children's services, who must by law find them accommodation if they don't have anywhere to go and/or the people with parental responsibility for them can't provide them with suitable accommodation.

Young asylum seekers

Unaccompanied young people who are seeking asylum will in most cases have been looked after by social services until they turn 18. This means they are entitled to the same support as a care leaver, so their social services department must continue to help them until they are 21 years old. Over this age, asylum seekers have to apply to the UK Border Agency, which controls immigration, for asylum support.

The rules about getting this are complicated. You can get up-to-date information from www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support/accommodation/

There's more information about asylum-seekers and refugees in section 5 of this pack.



Council tenancies

When you become a council tenant, you will be an introductory (or probationary) tenant for the first year. After that, if there are no complaints about your tenancy (eg. antisocial behaviour, rent arrears), you will be accepted as a secure tenant on a permanent tenancy.

A secure tenancy means you can only be evicted in particular situations, as specified in your tenancy agreement (see **Tenancy Agreements**). You can rent out a room to a lodger and may be able to pass on your tenancy to a partner or family member, get a transfer to another council tenancy, exchange your home with another council tenancy or buy it at a discount. The council is responsible for most repairs and should consult you about the management of the property.

Local authorities can temporarily downgrade your secure tenancy if there are complaints about your behaviour or you don't pay your rent on time. This makes it easier for them to evict you.

Housing association accommodation

You can apply to a housing association for accommodation. Housing associations mostly offer short-term tenancies (see **Tenancy agreements** below) and tend to charge higher rents than the local authority, but lower than private landlords. Some housing associations only provide housing for people with special needs.

Quite often, housing associations take referrals from their local authority, which is why it is worth applying to your local authority anyway for permanent housing. They may also take people referred by social services departments, the probation service or local advice centres.

You can apply to some housing associations direct. You can get a list of local housing associations from an advice centre, or your local authority. Be warned – they also are likely to have long waiting lists.

Private rented accommodation

There is a huge choice of private rented accommodation – bedsits, one-bed flats, or larger flats and houses to share.

You need to decide:

- where you want to live
- how much you can afford
- what size of property
- location – is it close to shops, work, college, public transport, friends?
- do you want to live alone or with friends/partner?

If you are on benefits, some private landlords might not want to take you on as a tenant.

Finding rented housing

Look out for adverts in local shop windows and community notice boards, and in the local press and on the internet. Copies of the local papers are usually available at your local library.

You can also find adverts and advertise on **www.gumtree.com** or **www.rightmove.co.uk**

Your local authority or an advice centre may have lists of people offering a room to rent in their house or flat and details of local private landlords and letting agencies.

Ask friends, family and colleagues if they know of any accommodation.

You can sign up with a letting agency. They may charge you a fee for finding you accommodation, so check first.

If you do sign up with an agency, don't pay them anything until they have found you somewhere to live, as there is no guarantee they will be able to. If you are charged a fee and they don't find you a home and don't refund you, you should report them to your local authority.

Always answer adverts as soon as possible, as rented housing can go quickly. Always view the property before agreeing to anything, and always take a friend with you, or tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.



Checklist

When you visit the property, check the following.

Heating

- Type of heating.
- Does it work?
- Is there a boiler?
- Are there instructions for it?
- Have all heating appliances been safety checked recently?
- Is there a CORGI gas safety certificate for all gas appliances?
- How is the water heated?
- Does it work?
- Is there an insulation jacket on the hot water tank (to stop heat loss)?
- Where is the main water stopcock (in case of emergency leaks)?
- Where is the gas meter?
- How is the gas paid for (coin or card meter)?
- What is the current reading?
- Who is the gas supplier?

Electricity

- Where is the electric fuse box?
- Are there instructions on what to do if a fuse goes?
- Where is the electricity meter?
- What is the electricity meter reading?
- Is it connected correctly and legally?
- How do you pay for electricity (coin or card meter)?
- Who is the current electricity supplier?

Kitchen

- Are there any fire extinguishers?
- Is there a gas or electric cooker?
- If not, is there a main connection?
- Is there a fridge or space for one and a plug socket?
- Is there a washing machine?
- Does it work?
- If not, is there plumbing for a washing machine and an electric socket?
- Is there enough storage space and ventilation?

Bathroom

- Do all the taps work?
- Does the toilet flush?
- Does the shower work?
- Do the basin and bath drain out?
- Is there a window?
- If not, is there an internal extractor fan?
- Are there any signs of leaks or damp stains, particularly around the bath, toilet and shower tray?

Security

- Is the front door secure – does it have a strong lock and spy hole? Have the locks been forced or changed recently?
- Are there any smoke alarms in your accommodation? Do they work?
- Are the windows safe? Do they have window locks?
- Is there shared access to the building?
- Is there an entry phone and adequate lighting by the front door?
- Is your post safe if it's delivered to a communal area?

Other

- Is there a telephone or telephone socket?
- Is the flat furnished or unfurnished?
- Are the bills (electricity, gas, council tax, water charges) included in the rent?



Deposits

Most landlords ask for a deposit. This is usually the same amount as a month's rent. Always get a receipt.

You should be able to get your deposit back when you end your tenancy. The landlord can keep some or all of it if you haven't paid all the rent you owe or you have damaged the property or furnishings, or removed things from it, or haven't paid your gas/electricity bills.

If the landlord refuses to refund your deposit, they are supposed to tell you why. They should give you a list of:

- any specific costs
- unpaid rent or bills
- the costs of replacing or repairing any damage they say you have made
- cleaning costs.

If they don't, write to them asking for this information. Always keep copies of your letters and replies from your landlord.

Your landlord has to pay your deposit into an independent government-backed tenancy deposit scheme (TDS). If the landlord won't refund your deposit, you can appeal to the courts to force them to repay you.

You may have paid the deposit to the letting agency. If they don't refund you, tell your landlord.

You may have to provide ID, references from a previous landlord, your employer and your bank, and proof of income or a letter from your employer to prove you are earning. If you haven't rented accommodation before, ask your support worker to supply a reference.

Most landlords also ask for a month's rent in advance. Don't hand over any money without getting a receipt.

If you are on benefits, you may be able to get money for the deposit from a rent deposit or rent guarantee scheme. You then just have to repay the amount when you end your tenancy. Check with your local advice centre or local authority if there is a scheme in your area.



You can find more information about tenancy deposit schemes on the government information website at **www.direct.gov.uk**



Tenancy agreements

A tenancy agreement is a contract between you and your landlord. The agreement may be verbal or written. Verbal agreements are legally binding, like written agreements.

If you're aged under 18 you can't legally hold a tenancy. Your local authority will act as 'trustee' and sign what's known as an 'equitable tenancy' on your behalf until you are 18.

Agreements usually contain information on:

- the amount of rent you pay
- how long the tenancy lasts
- your rights and obligations
- your landlord's rights and obligations.

Tenancy agreements can be very long and confusing but they are very important – they will contain information about eviction processes, for example – so get someone you trust to check it with you if you don't understand it all, or take it to an advice centre. Make sure you read all the agreement, right to the end. Check the type of tenancy, who is responsible for arranging and carrying out repairs, who pays which bills and what happens if you want to leave.

Most tenancy agreements are 'assured shorthold tenancies' (ASTs). These set out a fixed period of time for the tenancy (usually six or 12 months, but they can be for longer). The AST protects you from eviction for the first six months of your tenancy. The tenancy can be renewed after each 'fixed term'. If your landlord doesn't formally renew your tenancy, but doesn't end it either, legally it will automatically become a 'periodic tenancy'. This means it will continue on a weekly or monthly basis, depending on whether you pay your rent weekly or monthly.

Inventory

The landlord should give you a list (an inventory) of the furniture and fittings and their condition. Check this very carefully and note on it any damage that isn't recorded. Otherwise, you may find yourself having to pay for damage you didn't do. Check the interior decoration and make a note of any marks, burns or damp. If you don't get an inventory, write your own and try to get your landlord to sign it, to avoid any difficulties later. If they won't sign it, get a friend to witness it with their signature, and take photographs, with the date.

Ending your tenancy

If you have signed a fixed term tenancy, your landlord cannot give you notice for the first six months.

You can leave without notice on the day your fixed term tenancy ends. However you may not get your deposit back – it is better to give notice.

To end a tenancy early:

- for a fixed term tenancy – the landlord must give at least two months' notice and the tenant must give at least two months' notice in writing
- for a periodic tenancy – the landlord must give at least two months' notice. The tenant must give one month's notice in writing if the rent is paid monthly, or 28 days' notice (four weeks) in writing if the rent is paid weekly. The tenancy will then end on the day the next rent payment is due.

If your tenancy is for longer than a year, you can ask for a 'break clause'. This gives you the right to end the contract on a specified date, or a choice of dates, so you can leave earlier if you need to.

These rights apply to furnished and unfurnished accommodation.

Remember, if you don't pay your rent on time, your landlord can evict you immediately. If you are having trouble paying your rent, tell your landlord. They may agree to a payment plan so you can repay any rent owing over a fixed period of time. If you don't tell them, they are more likely to evict you.

If you get into rent arrears because your housing benefit is late, contact your local council immediately, and tell your landlord. Keep copies of all letters about your claim, and tell your landlord what is happening.

Harassment and illegal eviction

Harassment and illegal eviction are criminal offences. Contact a local advice centre if your landlord:

- threatens you with violence
- goes into your home without your permission (unless there is a risk of harm to you or someone else in the property)
- tampers with the electricity, gas, or water supply
- interferes with your possessions
- tries to evict you without going through the proper procedure
- uses physical force to evict you.

You can also contact your local authority who will investigate for you and may prosecute your landlord.

Discrimination

It is illegal for a landlord to discriminate against a potential tenant on grounds of race or sex. That means they can't refuse to offer you a tenancy on these grounds. It is also illegal for them to discriminate on the grounds of disability, unless they can justify it (eg. health and safety reasons). However mostly these laws don't apply if you are a tenant in the landlord's own home. A landlord can also legally refuse to let you rent a room in their house if you are lesbian or gay.

If you think you are subject to illegal discrimination from a landlord, you can get advice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

www.equalityhumanrights.com

0845 604 6610





Emergency housing

Sometimes, you may have to leave your accommodation fast – although generally it's better to plan your housing moves.

If you do have to leave your home, ask a friend to put you up for a while – but don't overstay your welcome.

Other emergency housing options are hostels and night shelters.

Night shelters are usually free but they have very basic amenities and you can't stay more than a few nights. You can just turn up on the night, however, and get a bed if there's one free. To find out about local night shelters, contact your local authority.

Hostels mostly offer you your own room and you can stay longer, but you will have to pay and you have to be referred by your local authority or a homeless charity.

Women who are at risk of violence from their partner or someone they share a house with can get temporary accommodation in a women's refuge. There are refuges all over the UK, so you can ask to be housed in a different town if you are frightened that your partner will find you. Refuges are safe environments where women and their children who are at risk of domestic violence can find immediate safety and can stay until they are rehoused by a local authority.



If you are in an abusive relationship and need help you can ring the National Domestic Violence Helpline **0808 200 0247** free 24-hour.

For more information about domestic violence and how to get help, go to:

www.womensaid.org.uk

email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

or

www.refuge.org.uk



You can get more detailed information and advice about housing, tenancy agreements and your rights from:

www.shelter.org.uk

This is a national homeless and housing advice and information service.

Free helpline **0808 800 4444**

www.direct.gov.uk

This is a government website with information on housing, benefits, eligibility etc.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

This is the Citizens Advice Bureau online advice site.

Setting up home

So you've finally got the keys to your own home. Congratulations! Now you can have fun fixing the place up and making it look nice.

Grants and benefits

If you are a care leaver, you should get a setting up home or leaving care grant to help you furnish your home.

If you are aged 18 and over and are on benefits or a low income, you may be able to get extra money towards setting up your new home.

- You can apply for a **community care grant** to pay for furniture, clothing, household goods, moving costs and connection charges. These grants don't have to be repaid.
- You can apply for a **budgeting loan** to help pay for rent in advance, moving expenses or household items. Most people who have been on income support or jobseekers allowance for at least 26 weeks can apply. These loans are paid back through deductions from your benefits.
- If you get a community care grant, you can also claim for a **crisis loan** to cover rent in advance. You will probably have to pay it back through deductions from your benefits.
- Some grant making organisations give financial and furniture donations – ask your support worker or local authority.

Work out what you need and how much it will cost.

You can find cheap furniture from second hand shops and from adverts in the local press. Be very careful about buying used electrical goods, unless they have a guarantee. Repairs are very costly.

You can buy new flat-pack self-assembly furnishings very cheaply. They can be tricky to put together but if you're patient and follow the instructions very carefully, you should be okay. Most flat-pack furniture comes with the tools needed for assembly. If you think you need other tools, you may be assembling it wrong!

For more expensive items, it's cheaper to save up and buy them, rather than to pay for them in installments or a percentage at a time. Usually stores charge you extra (interest) for buying in installments, although some stores do offer what's known as interest-free credit.





Buying essential household items

Look at the following list of typical household items and fill in the table to find out which items you will need to buy for your new home.

Type of item	Item	Already have this	Need to buy this		Quantity	Estimated cost	Delivery / installation charges
			Essential	Non Essential			
Furniture	Sofa						
	Armchair(s)						
	Coffee table						
	Dining/Kitchen table						
	Dining/Kitchen chairs						
	Bed						
	Chest of drawers						
	Wardrobe						
Curtains / blinds	Living room						
	Kitchen						
	Bedroom						
	Bathroom						
	Hall						
Carpets / rugs	Living-room						
	Kitchen						
	Bedroom						
	Bathroom						
	Hall						
Household appliances	TV						
	Washing machine						
	Cooker						
	Microwave						
	Fridge						
	Freezer						
	Landline telephone						
	Vacuum cleaner						
Minor household items	Iron						
	Ironing board						
	Waste bin						
	Doormat						
	Mirror						
	Washing-up bowl						
	Screwdriver set / hammer etc						
	Alarm clock						
	Shelving						
	Lamps / shades						
	Light bulbs (energy saving)						



Type of item	Item	Already have this	Need to buy this		Quantity	Estimated cost	Delivery / installation charges
			Essential	Non Essential			
Bedding / towels	Bath towels						
	Hand towels						
	Flannels						
	Tea towels						
	Duvet						
	Duvet cover						
	Sheets						
	Pillowcases						
Cooking equipment	Kettle						
	Toaster						
	Saucepans						
	Frying pan						
	Colander						
	Baking dish/tray						
	Roasting pan						
	Chopping board						
	Can opener						
	Plastic containers						
	Cooking utensils (eg fish slice)						
Crocery	Dinner plates						
	Small plates						
	Bowls						
	Cups and saucers						
	Mugs						
	Glasses						
	Knives / forks / spoons						
	Sharp knives set						
Cleaning / general	Clothes rail						
	Broom						
	Dustpan and brush						
	Mop and bucket						
	Toilet brush / holder						
	Dusters and dish cloths						
	Fire blanket						
	Smoke alarm						

What is your budget?	£
----------------------	---

Can you afford to buy everything you need all at once? YES/NO

If you can't afford to buy everything now, decide which items are the most essential and which you can manage without.



Working out the cost

Answer the following questions regarding the costs involved in setting up your own home.

Repairs	
Is there anything in your new home that needs to be repaired?	Yes/No
Who is responsible for organising these repairs?	.....
Who will pay for them?	.....
How much will it cost to make the necessary repairs?	£
Decoration	
Does your new home need to be re-decorated?	Yes/No
Who is responsible for decorating it?	.....
How much will it cost to buy the necessary materials?	£
Who will pay for them?	.....
Cleaning	
Does your new home need to be cleaned?	Yes/No
Who is responsible for cleaning it?	.....
How much will it cost to buy the necessary cleaning materials?	£
Who will pay for them?	.....
Packing and moving	
Who will be helping you to pack up and transport your belongings?	.....
What are the removal costs (if any)?	£
Who will pay for any removal costs?	.....
Total costs	
What are the total costs of setting up home?	TOTAL £
Essential items £ Repairs £ Decorating £	
Cleaning £ Packing up and moving £	
Financial assistance	
Have you applied for financial assistance towards the costs of setting up home? Yes/No	
What type of financial assistance can you apply for?	.....
How much money will / have you receive(d)?	£
What is your income? £ Do you have enough money to set up home? Yes/No	
How can you reduce the costs (where necessary)?	.....

If you move into council housing, you may get a decorating grant to help with the costs of redecoration. Check with your support worker or housing officer.

Living alone

It can be difficult getting used to living on your own. You may be really happy to have your own place and space. Or you may also be dreading it and wondering how you are going to cope.

If you haven't lived alone before, think about what you will do to avoid feeling lonely.

- Get to know your neighbours.
- Join a club or group or do some volunteer work to make new friends.
- Make sure you keep in touch with old friends (invite them round to admire your new home).
- Arrange to meet regularly with friends and family – make sure you have something booked for the weekends, as they can be the most difficult time.
- Don't be embarrassed to ask for help – talk to a close friend – it isn't easy living alone.

Council tax

Everyone has to pay council tax for their property, whether they own it or rent it. The amount is related to the value of your property. Council tax is paid monthly and you should inform the council that you are a new tenant when you move in.

People on low income may be entitled to council tax benefit. If you live on your own, you are also entitled to a 25% single person discount. Your house may also be exempt if all the occupants are full-time students or aged under 18.

Utilities

As soon as you move in, you must inform:

- the gas company
- the electricity company
- the water companies (there are two, for water supply and for waste water).

This is so you don't get cut off and they can transfer the account to you and you don't end up paying the bills for the previous occupant. You will need to give the gas and electricity companies a meter reading (see next page).

You may also need to inform:

- the TV Licensing Authority, to transfer your licence
- the benefits agency, to change your address
- the telephone company, to transfer the number to your name.

Check the gas and electricity meters and give this information to the suppliers on the day that you move in, so you aren't charged for any services used by the previous occupant. Inform the water company on the day you move in too.



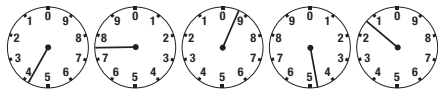
How to read meters

Whenever you move in to a new house or flat, you will need to tell your gas and electricity companies your meter readings so that you are not charged for energy used by the previous occupants. Look at the information below and write the figures from your meters in the spaces provided.

How to read electricity meters

Dial meter

- Read dials from left to right.
- If the pointer is between two numbers, write down the lowest, even if the pointer is closer to the higher number.
- If the pointer is between 9 and 0, write down 0.
- Ignore the last dial (found underneath the other five and normally in red).



Reading: 47941



Single rate digital meter

- Read numbers from left to right, including any zeros.
- Ignore any red figures.

5 2 1 4 5 0

Two rate digital meter

- Line marked LOW is for night-rate electricity.
- Line marked NORMAL is for day-rate electricity.
- Write both lines from right to left.
- Ignore any red figures.

NORMAL (day rate)

4 0 1 6 3 2

LOW (night rate)

2 8 9 1 4 0

NB: To find out how many units of electricity or cubic feet of gas you have used, take away the previous reading shown on your bill from the new reading.

How to read gas meters

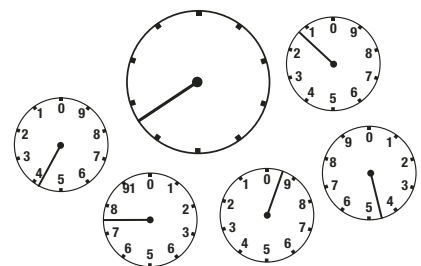
Digital meter

- Read numbers from left to right.
- Read only the white numbers.
- Ignore the dial.
- Ignore any numbers after the decimal point.

4 8 2 5 3 5

Dial/clock meter

- Read dials from left to right.
- If the point is between two numbers, write down the lowest, even if the pointer is closer to the higher number.
- If the pointer is between 9 and 0, write down 0.
- Ignore the large dial with no numbers on it.
- Ignore the last dial.



NB: Gas and electric companies often estimate their bills. This is shown on your bill with the letter E. They could be charging you too much. If you let them know the accurate readings, you can make sure you are paying only for the energy you have used.

Paying utility bills

There are different ways to pay your utility bills.

- Cash or cheque – quarterly. Post a cheque to the utility company or pay in cash or by cheque at the post office/bank.
- Direct debit – quarterly. Your bank pays the bill direct from your account into the utility company's account.
- Fuel stamps – quarterly. Buy fuel stamps at the post office and use them like cash to pay the bill.
- Flexible payment scheme – advance payment. Arrange to pay weekly, fortnightly or monthly instalments in advance of receiving the bill.
- Payment card – advance payment. A magnetic card to pay weekly, fortnightly or monthly in advance of receiving the bill.
- Token/card/key meter – prepayment. Buy tokens for your meter, or put money onto a card or key that fits your meter and pay as you use.

Try not to get into arrears (this is the legal term for getting into debt by missing payments) with your utility bills – you are likely to have your supply cut off and it can take time and cost money to get reconnected.





Finding your way around

There are lots of public and community resources on your doorstep. They include:

Library

You can access books, CDs, DVDs, use the internet, find out about local resources and activities in your area (this is usually on their bulletin boards), relax and read magazines and newspapers. And it's FREE!

This site provides a list of all the public libraries in England and Wales:
<http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac940/weblibs.html>

Youth centres

A youth club or youth social club is a place where young people can meet and take part in activities such as football, basketball, table tennis and video games, and other sporting and cultural activities.

You can get to meet other like-minded young people and make new friends as well as learn new skills. Some youth clubs also run educational or employment activities such as CV writing workshops. You can also play an active part in your youth centre by becoming involved in running it and organising activities. It's a great thing to do, and it looks impressive on your CV.

You can find out about local youth centres from your Connexions office or ask at your local library.

Sports centre

Most areas have a local sports centre that offers fitness and sports activities. It's a great place to meet new people, make new friends, relax and learn new sports and skills.

Local colleges/training providers

Your local colleges run lots of different education and training courses – short and long, daytime and evening. Some will lead to a recognised qualification. They also usually have their own libraries where (if you are registered with the college) you can access the books and internet. You can gain new qualifications and learn new skills through the training they offer and get advice and guidance from tutors and careers staff.

Print off a map from www.streetmap.co.uk and use it to explore your local area. Check out the important shops and facilities.

- Public transport (station, tube, bus routes)
- GP
- Dentists
- Hospital A&E department
- Benefits agency
- Post office
- Job centre
- Library
- Gym/leisure centre
- Supermarket
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Police station
- Council offices

Remember, if you have moved into a new area, you will have to register with a new GP and dentist (see Health section) and optician.



Security

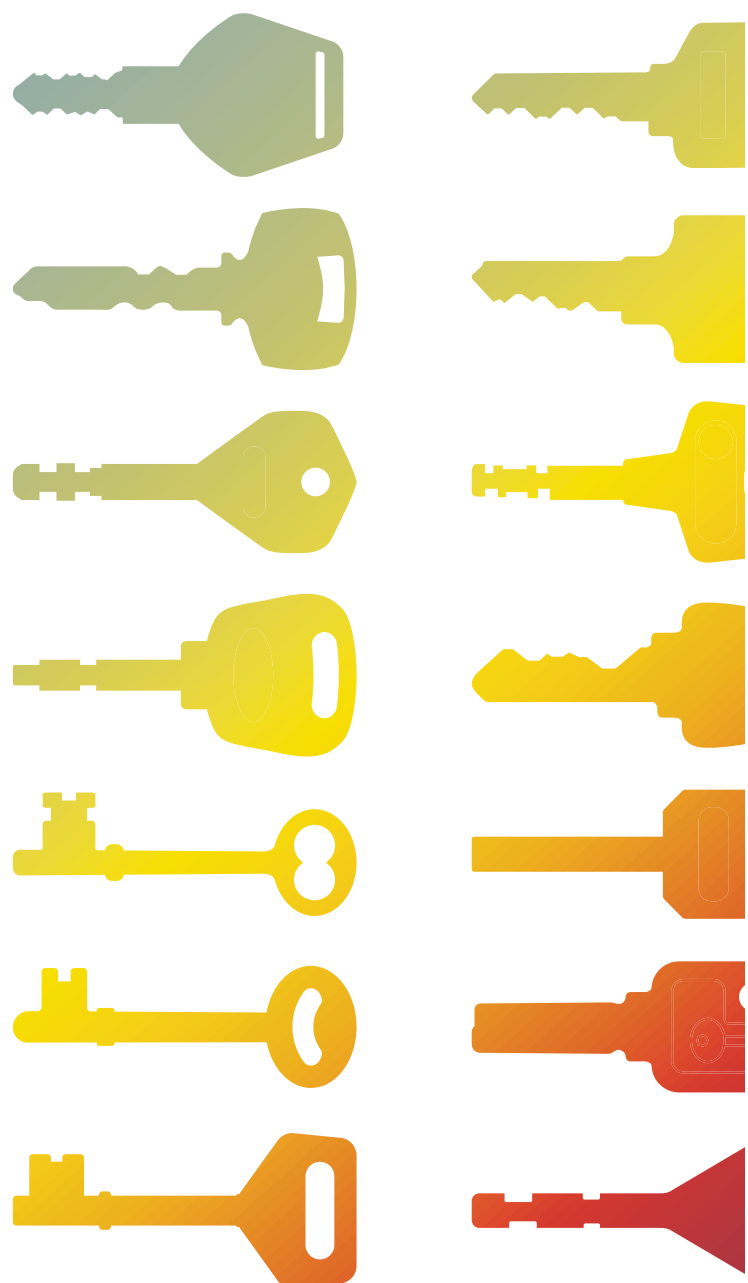


The first essential for home safety is that your home should be safe from intruders.

These are some basic home security tips.

- Make sure the locks on all your doors and windows are secure.
- Don't give your keys to anyone you don't know well.
- Contact your landlord/housing officer if you lose your keys or they are stolen, and get the locks changed (but try not to lose them as you will probably have to pay for the locksmith and keys, and this can be quite expensive).
- Close and lock all doors and windows before you go to bed and when you go out, even if it's only for a short time.
- Never leave cash or valuables where they can be seen.
- Fit a security chain to your door and a spy hole – and use them!
- Never ever let anyone into your home unless they can prove their identity. This includes people who say they are working for the council or your housing association.
- If you go away on holiday, ask a neighbour to keep an eye on your home and to pick up your mail if it can be seen from the street.

If you are worried about your security, ask your local crime prevention officer to visit and make suggestions for improving your safety. You can contact the crime prevention officer at your local police station.





Fire prevention

Make sure your flat has a smoke alarm and check it regularly. If the batteries run out, get new ones immediately. Get a fire extinguisher and a fire blanket.

There are three main types of fire extinguisher: powder, water and foam. Multi-purpose dry powder extinguishers or aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) extinguishers are usually the best for home use as they can be used on most kinds of fire.

- Read the instructions and make sure you know how to use it.
- Put it somewhere central and make sure you can carry it easily.
- Get it serviced once a year (or as often as the manufacturer recommends).
- When using the extinguisher on a fire, keep yourself on the escape route side of the blaze.

If you're not sure which extinguisher to get, contact your local Fire and Rescue Service for advice.

Fire blankets are useful for smothering small and contained fires, like chip pan fires in the kitchen, and for wrapping around a person whose clothes are on fire. Keep it in the kitchen. Don't put it away in a cupboard. Make sure you can get to it easily in an emergency.

General fire safety tips

Check appliances

- Ensure all gas appliances have a valid gas safety certificate.
- Never overload adaptors with too many plugs.
- Keep heaters at a safe distance from flammable materials.
- Get electrical appliances tested by an approved contractor.
- Never touch or use any appliances that you think might be unsafe.
- Make sure cables don't run underneath carpets or rugs.
- Don't keep extension cables coiled, as they may overheat.
- Don't exceed the recommended bulb wattage for light fittings or put too high a fuse in plugs.

Be careful

- Never cover heaters by draping washing over them.
- Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Never leave matches where children can find them.
- Never empty hot ashtrays into bins – wet the contents or wait until they have cooled down.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Never leave a burning cigarette unattended – it may fall onto a chair or the carpet.
- Switch off and unplug electrical appliances that are not designed to be left on – especially irons and heaters.
- Switch off all portable heaters.
- Close all the doors before you got to bed.



If fire breaks out

Get everyone out – and don't go back in.

- Dial 999 immediately.
- If possible, close doors behind you as you leave the building to slow the spread of fire.
- Don't open any door that feels warm to touch – there could be a fire on the other side.
- Stay as low to the ground as you can.
- Cover your nose and mouth.
- If you break a window to climb out to escape, cover the sharp edges to avoid cutting yourself and throw bedding out to cushion your fall.

Kitchen safety tips

- Don't cook when drunk or if you've taken drugs.
- Don't leave appliances like washing machines on overnight.
- Always unplug kettles and irons after use.
- Don't use cans and bottle tops as ash trays.
- Don't put plants on top of the TV or fridge.
- Don't overload adaptors with lots of plugs.
- Never throw water on a chip pan that is on fire.
- Don't leave food cooking while you are on the phone.
- Don't try to dry clothes in the microwave.
- Always break the shell before microwaving an egg.
- Don't use metallic plates or dishes in the microwave.
- Always clean the grill pan and oven after use.



**Remember, only try to tackle a fire if it
is very small and in its early stages
and it is safe to do so.**

If in doubt, GET OUT and STAY OUT.



Other emergencies

Frozen pipes

In very cold weather the water in your pipes can freeze, causing the pipes to burst. This can cause a lot of damage as the water will pour out until you switch it off at the main stop cock.

Pipes and water tanks should be lagged (wrapped in insulating material to keep them warm).

If your pipes are not lagged, contact your landlord, housing officer or the local authority.

If your pipes do freeze, you'll know because there won't be any water coming out of your taps. You can try to thaw them but you have to do it very slowly and carefully, or they will burst anyway. Switch off the water at the mains stop cock (usually under the sink). Thaw them using a hair drier on its lowest setting, starting at the end nearest the tap. Or get a plumber.

Gas leaks

Landlords are supposed to have all gas appliances CORGI checked every 12 months and keep a record of inspections and repairs. Ask to see the gas safety certificate when you rent a house or flat.

Never block the ventilators in rooms with gas appliances. Poisonous gases can quickly build up and can kill.

If there is a strong smell of gas:

- turn off the gas at the mains (next to the gas meter)
- don't operate electrical equipment – a spark could ignite an explosion
- open all doors and windows
- put out any cigarettes or naked flames
- stay out of the room
- ring the local gas emergency telephone number **0800 111 999** immediately.

If there is a faint smell of gas:

- check that the pilot light on your cooker, water heater or gas fire hasn't gone out
- make sure the knobs on the gas cooker are turned off properly
- put out cigarettes and naked flames and switch off electric fires
- open all doors and windows until the gas smell goes
- if the smell of gas returns, treat it as a serious leak and call the local gas emergency number.

If you find a leak in an appliance (cooker, gas boiler), switch off the gas supply to the appliance and call the repair service as soon as possible. Do not use the appliance until it is repaired. If you can't switch it off, switch off the gas at the mains.



Being a good neighbour

Being a good neighbour is an important part of managing your tenancy. It means respecting your neighbours' rights and being considerate in your behaviour.

It will be a condition of your tenancy agreement that you (and your visitors) don't disturb your neighbours and don't cause noise or a nuisance around your home. You may be evicted if you break your tenancy agreement.

You will also be expected not to harass or abuse local authority or housing association staff.

What is anti-social behaviour?

For example:

- using abusive language
- threatening or harassing people
- dealing drugs from your home
- playing loud music
- having loud parties
- graffiti
- littering.

If the council or housing association thinks you are behaving in an anti-social way, they may ask you to sign an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) listing the problem behaviours and saying you won't do them any more.

This will be monitored for a period – usually six months – and if you are still causing problems, you may be given an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO), and you could be evicted.

An ASBO is an order issued by a Magistrate's Court and is much tougher than an ABC. It lasts for at least two years and if you breach it, it is a crime and you can go to prison or be fined (see also Section 5: Your rights and responsibilities).

Noise is a big problem, especially in multiple occupancy houses and blocks of flats, where the sound proofing isn't always very good. If everyone is considerate and keeps their noise to a minimum, especially late at night and early in the morning, it doesn't have to be a big problem.

Tell your neighbours if you are going to have a party and are likely to be playing loud music late at night. Let them know when it will start and finish. Invite them to come!

Washing machines and tumble driers can be really noisy for the people living in the flats below you – be considerate about when you do your laundry.

If you have noisy neighbours:

- talk to them first – they may not realise they are creating a bother
- try to negotiate times when they can make a noise (if they insist!) and times when they should make a special effort to be quiet
- offer to lend them some CDs of music you like
- if this fails, make a complaint to your local authority environment health department. They have legal powers to deal with noise nuisance
- speak to your housing association/landlord – they may be able to get your neighbours to quieten down, and can take legal action if necessary.

Harassment

Everyone has the right to feel safe in their own home. If you are subject to harassment and intimidation behaviour, report it to your housing association or landlord.

Harassment can include:

- violence or threats of violence
- abusive or insulting language
- aggression, including groups of people hanging round your home
- damage or threats of damage to your property
- intimidation.

If you are in immediate danger, call the police.





Household cleaning

Once you have your own home, you will be responsible for keeping it clean. If you are sharing your home, you should do your share of the cleaning.

Cleaning is often the cause of a lot of stress between people sharing a home – everyone seems to have a different standard of cleanliness, and no one ever admits those are their dirty dishes in the sink. Make a rota for cleaning and agree to stick to it.

You'll need some cleaning equipment:

- a Hoover
- floor mop and bucket
- toilet brush and holder
- cloths and dusters.

You will also need cleaning products:

- toilets – toilet cleaner, disinfectant, bleach
- kitchen and bathroom floor – bleach, disinfectant, floor cleaner
- dishes – washing up liquid, scouring powder
- wooden surfaces – furniture polish
- kitchen surfaces – disinfectant, cream cleaner, anti-bacterial spray
- windows – window cleaner
- oven – oven cleaner
- shower – shower shine spray.

You really need to clean these at least once a week (it's easier to clean things before they get very dirty).

Kitchen:

- cooker hob
- oven
- microwave
- sink
- fridge
- floor.

Bathroom:

- toilet
- bath/shower
- basin
- floor.

If you don't know how to clean any of these things, ask your support worker to show you. If you've never done it, how can you be expected to know?

Your home will look and feel much more comfortable if you Hoover every week and try to keep it tidy.

Always check that you are using the right cleaning products. Some products can't be used on particular surfaces because they will damage them. Check the labels.

The labels will also have health and safety warning symbols if they contain harmful chemicals. It is important that you follow the health and safety advice given. Keep all cleaning products out of the reach of children.

keep it

**Flammable**

- Keep out of reach of children.
- Use only as directed.
- Protect from sunlight.
- Do not expose to temperatures exceeding 50°C.
- Do not place in contact with hot surfaces or near naked flames.
- Keep away from sources of ignition – no smoking.

**Harmful or irritant**

- Keep out of reach of children.
- Irritating to eyes and skin.
- Avoid contact with eyes and skin.
- After contact with skin, wash immediately with plenty of water.
- In case of contact with eyes rinse immediately with plenty of water and seek medical advice.
- If swallowed, seek medical advice immediately and show this container or label.
- Do not use together with other products. May release dangerous gases.

**Toxic**

- Keep out of reach of children.
- Do not inhale, swallow or allow to penetrate the skin.
- Extremely dangerous, may cause serious health risks or even death.
- If swallowed, seek medical advice immediately and show this container or label.
- Use only as directed.

Change and wash your sheets and towels once a week. It can help you to remember if you always do it on a particular day.

The council will collect your general household rubbish. Find out which day of the week they come and make sure you put out the rubbish, in a bag or bin if they provide one, where they will take it. Make sure it's bagged up securely, to stop rats getting at it.

A lot of councils now collect glass, cans, paper, cardboard and some plastics for recycling. Some also take food waste separately. Check what they will collect and separate it from the non-recyclable household rubbish and put it out on the right day (it may not be the same day as the general rubbish collection). Most councils provide separate recycling bins.

The council will not take larger items (TVs, mattresses, washing machines etc and also garden waste) unless you make a special arrangement (and pay) for them to collect it. You can take it to the council household rubbish dump yourself. Check on your local council website where it is and when it is open.

Don't just dump your rubbish on the side of the road. This is called fly tipping and it is illegal. You may be prosecuted if you are caught doing it.



You can find handy tips on cleaning your home from the Channel 4 How Clean is Your House website:

www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/how-clean-is-your-house

This BBC site also has lots of useful tips:

www.bbc.co.uk/homes/tv_and_radio/hbb_virtualhouse.shtml





Home maintenance and DIY

Once you have signed your tenancy agreement, it is your responsibility to ensure your home is kept in good condition.

Report anything that is part of the structure that breaks or doesn't work – windows, doors, taps, radiators, boilers, electric switches and sockets, central heating and hot water boiler etc – not your DVD player or TV.

Some things you can repair quite easily (changing the fuse in a plug; replacing a light bulb, unblocking a sink). Most other things are much trickier and you should get help.

Never try to fix anything if you haven't been shown how. If you get it wrong, it could be very expensive and, in the case of electrical problems or the gas supply, it could kill you. Don't let anyone else try to fix something for you unless you are absolutely sure they know what they are doing.

There are lots of useful books on home maintenance and DIY, and websites. If you want to do it yourself, get a manual. Always use the right tools. You'll only end up having to pay someone else to fix it if you try to take short cuts.

These are some basic tools that you will need for home maintenance:

- screw drivers (small and medium size, slotted and cross head)
- set of Allen keys
- Stanley knife
- small adjustable spanner
- hammer
- combination pliers.



You can find out how to change a plug, unblock a sink (and other handy home maintenance tips) at:

<http://uktv.co.uk/home>

and

www.diyfixit.co.uk



Power failure

If your lights go out suddenly, check that it isn't a power cut affecting everyone in the area (see if your neighbour still has electricity). You can ring your electricity supplier, who should be able to tell you if there is a fault in your area and when they expect to fix it.

Has the light gone out in just one room? Check if the bulb has blown and replace it. Check you have the right wattage (this measures how bright the bulb is – the lower the number the lower the brightness) and right kind of bulb (bayonet, screw etc) for the fitting.

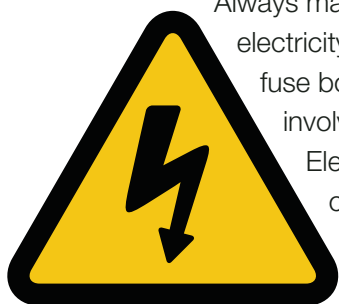
If it's just your flat/house and not a bulb, it's probably a fuse that's blown. Usually this will affect one circuit (your house/flat will have several electrical circuits, for the different rooms, ceiling lights and sockets etc), so you may have lights and power in other rooms.

Check the fuse box. Modern fuse boxes have a row of switches that should be marked with the rooms they serve. If any the switches for the rooms without power are down, switch them back up again.

If they flip back down straight away, you should contact your landlord or an electrician as you probably have an electrical fault.

If the fuses blow frequently, report it to your landlord/housing officer as there will be a major fault.

If you have an old fashioned fuse box with separate fuses that pull out, leave it alone. Contact your landlord or housing officer and ask them to fix it.



Always make absolutely sure the electricity is switched off at the main fuse box before doing anything that involves your electricity supply.

Electrical faults are a common cause of house fires, and the electricity supply in your home can kill.

