

# A WIDER CIRCLE

---

The current global health crisis has given many people reason to worry about the security of their housing. Homeowners and apartment renters alike are struggling to make sense of ever changing news in a time when very little is certain. At A Wider Circle, we believe it's important to have an informed partner who can help navigate life's challenges. We want to support our clients as they strive to do what's best for themselves, their families and communities. With that in mind, we put together the following information.

## **5 Tips for addressing COVID-19 related housing challenges**

### **1. Don't panic**

- a. These are truly scary times, there's no denying that, and it's easy to get overwhelmed. It's important to stay as calm as possible. Feel your feelings. Being afraid is okay and expressing your true feelings is important but it's just as important to keep your reactions, behaviors and decisions measured.
- b. Following safety guidelines is a great way to be safe and ease your sense of worry. Generally, most experts are suggesting the following as ways to stay safe and healthy:
  - i. Stay home and only leave the house if you have to. Taking a walk or bike ride is generally okay but you may want to wear gloves and a mask. Check and learn the guidelines for your specific area before heading out.
  - ii. Stay at least 6ft away from other people.
  - iii. Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when you sneeze or cough
  - iv. Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds
  - v. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
  - vi. Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces
- c. For more information on staying safe at home and accessing essential services in DC, visit <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/>

### **2. Communicate with your landlord**

- a. This global health crisis is affecting everyone and many landlords understand that. As such, those who can are very likely to be willing to make accommodations for tenants facing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. It's important to remember that although evictions may be temporarily on hold, they have not (as of yet) been cancelled completely. Communicating with your landlord can help maintain or create a good relationship with them, which can be helpful in the present and in the long run. You want to avoid developing a bad reputation, credit or rental history by not paying your rent and speaking openly and honestly with your landlord about the challenges you're currently facing can help with that.

# A WIDER CIRCLE

---

- b. Reach out to your landlord. Put your hardships in writing. If you're seeing a reduction in your income as a result of COVID-19, telling your landlord in an email and asking for their assistance could help. Attach any documentation you may have received from your employer to this email. To the extent possible, include any information you have about how you plan to pay your rent in the future (for example, if you have filed for unemployment benefits and are waiting to be approved and start receiving funds).
- c. Ask what options are available. Maybe they can set up a payment plan for you or direct you to helpful resources. If your property has an online portal, check it regularly for updates and staff contact information.

### **3. Read your lease**

- a. It's important to remember that you signed a legally binding contract when you moved into your apartment. Oftentimes, we simply skim over it looking only for things that stand out. This is a great time to give your lease a thorough read.
- b. Thoroughly reading your lease can help you prepare thoughtful questions for your landlord. If there's something in your lease you don't understand or have a question about, write it down or take a picture of it and be prepared to discuss it with your landlord. If after discussing it with your landlord you feel unsatisfied with the result or answer you've been given or you don't understand why a particular decision was made, consider contacting an agency like the Office of the Tenant Advocate. They can provide tenant centered legal advice that can help you in your situation.
- c. Your lease could contain language around what to do in the event of a natural disaster or emergency. Reading it thoroughly will allow you to discover that, and help you plan a best course of action in the event that you can't pay rent or are faced with other worst case scenarios. Leases also typically contain guidance around issues such as how often and under what circumstances your landlord can enter your apartment, what kinds of behaviors count as lease violations and other useful information.

### **4. Know your rights, the rules and resources**

- a. It is extremely important that you stay aware of what you can and cannot do, legally, as it relates to your housing. Many people feel that since they are not receiving an income they should not have to pay rent. While this can seem like a reasonable thought process, it is not necessarily a legally acceptable one. It is important to do your research and find out what rights you have at this time, what the rules are around housing (particularly as it relates to rent payments) and what resources are available to help you. A few important things to keep in mind:
  - i. While evictions are being delayed, there has been no announcement as of yet that they are being cancelled. This means that if your landlord

# A WIDER CIRCLE

---

began eviction proceedings against you prior to the global health crisis, this will likely resume after the health crisis is resolved.

- ii. Rent has not been universally delayed or cancelled. Evictions in the states of Maryland, Virginia and in DC have all been delayed. However, unless specified by your landlord, renters are still expected to pay their rent.
  - iii. There is a difference between rent payments being delayed and being cancelled. Some landlords may be able to allow tenants to put off paying April's rent or if you choose not to pay, you cannot be evicted right now. However, that does not mean the rent won't become due later on down the road nor does it mean that nonpayment won't be counted against you. If your landlord pardons you from rent, it is important to determine whether they have delayed the rent or cancelled it. In either case, get it in writing via email or typed letter on company letterhead.
- b. The Office of the Tenant Advocate is a government agency designed to provide legal support and information to DC residents experiencing challenges related to their tenancy. Although they are not currently open to walk in clients, they are still fielding questions via phone and email. Visit their website by clicking the link [here](#) to find out information about COVID-19 state of emergency and tenant rights services.
  - c. As best you can and without overloading or overwhelming yourself, stay up to date with new policies, rules and regulations by watching the news and researching online. If you have any housing related questions, need housing related assistance or would like to talk to someone about housing related challenges, you can contact our Program Manager, John Kemp, via phone during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 9am to 5:30pm at 240-687-3639 or via email at [johnkemp@awidercircle.org](mailto:johnkemp@awidercircle.org).

## **5. Give the empathy you want to receive**

- a. While you might be going through a difficult time, it's important to remember that the people around you are likely going through something similar. Rent payments are used to pay employee salaries from maintenance workers, to leasing agents, to various contractors. They pay for things like building repairs, grounds upkeep and the fees associated with maintaining a website. It's important to remember that when your landlord starts asking for payment, it's not necessarily because they are heartless or uncaring. It is likely because they rely on rent payments to keep things afloat for all their tenants.
- b. Not every landlord is a big corporation. It can be easy to forget that and to assume that they all have endless supplies of funds but that is simply not the case. Some of them won't be able to defer, delay or cancel rent payments and we have to be prepared for that.

# A WIDER CIRCLE

---

- c. Your leasing agent is not the owner of your building. It's important to remember that when communicating with them about concerns. Think of them as the messenger. While we may not like the message being delivered, they are not responsible for creating it, only for its delivery. Treat people with kindness, even when frustrated. We never know what others are dealing with in their lives so it's important to treat them with the same dignity and respect we would want to be treated with.
- d. Be kind to your neighbors. There have been many reports of increases in domestic violence and divorce since the start of this global health crisis. Since being stuck at home, many people have resorted to means of coping that can be disruptive such as playing loud music. It's important to try as best you can to be empathetic to your neighbors, understanding that we may not be aware of the struggles they are experiencing. Consider speaking with your neighbors (at a safe distance) to obtain their telephone numbers or email addresses so that you can create a system by which you can check on one another. Consider polite ways to speak with neighbors who may be exhibiting disruptive behaviors. Noise disruption is not considered an emergency. Learn the police non-emergency number for your area so that you aren't contributing to overburdening emergency responders. If you suspect that someone is experiencing domestic violence, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-799-7233.

It is important to remember that we are in this together and working together is exactly how we will get through this.

Did you know that A Wider Circle is providing workforce and housing support remotely? For more information, call us at 301-532-2297 for workforce related support or 240-687-3639 for housing related support or email us at [awclw@awidercircle.org](mailto:awclw@awidercircle.org).