

Chapter Six



Making sure tenants’ pets are “Rental Ready”

Oftentimes just telling tenants how they and their pets should behave in rental scenarios is not enough. If landlords want to be assured that their pet-friendly rentals are problem-free they will need to take steps to be certain tenant’s pets are “rental ready”. In this chapter we examine why and how landlords and rental property managers can (and should!) be a part of the process of assuring that animals residing in their rental properties are properly trained to co-exist in multi-housing/rental scenarios. The chapter will highlight the Rules for the Road...specific tips for helping tenants to be responsible pet guardians, and helping to insure that the entire rental community and neighborhood in general enjoys a peaceful and safe living environment.

Require Proof of Spay/Neuter

This point cannot be said often enough: always make sure your tenants provide proof that their pets have been spayed/neutered. The empirical research findings have shown that spayed/neutered pets are less aggressive towards both people and other animals. There are also less incidents of dog bites, far less incidents of cats spraying, prowling and howling, and less incidents overall of pets engaging in destructive behaviors to gardens and flooring, etc. Rental property owners and managers who want to significantly reduce the chances for problems in pet-friendly rentals should make sure that tenants provide proof of spay-neuter for animals who are with them at the time they move in and for any future animals they bring into the rental housing community. Not only is it the more responsible path (pet overpopulation is a serious social problem and millions of unwanted pets are surrendered to animal control/shelters every year in the U.S.) but it helps assure less problems overall and therefore creates a safer, more peaceful environment in pet-friendly rental communities.

As a secondary consideration (though no less important to rental property owners and managers) is the issue of renting to tenants with X-amount of pets and ending up with X+1 or even X+2 or X+5 amount of pets residing in the rental unit. Even if tenants find homes for their pet's offspring (remember, there is a pet overpopulation problem in every corner of the U.S. so locating good homes for pets is often an unobtainable task) the time involved can mean weeks—if not months—for potential problems surrounding new litters to arise in the rental housing.

The only way to stop these potential problems before they start is to require all tenants to provide proof of spay/neuter. This can be done through paperwork and receipts indicating the procedure was performed, or barring that, a written statement from the tenant's veterinarian.

People-Friendly/Animal-Friendly Training

Another issue to nip in the bud is whether prospective tenants' pets are fit to live in close quarters with other humans and animals. It is important to have written or at least verbal confirmation that tenants' pets are, indeed, people-and-pets friendly. If tenants' animals are aggressive either towards people or their pets, this holds the potential to create problems within the rental community and the neighborhood at large.

So how can you determine if a prospective tenant's pet is people-aggressive or animal-aggressive, or truly 'rental-ready'? The first step is to call references—especially prior landlords and neighbors. If any red flags are raised that the pet may have a tendency to become aggressive either toward humans or other animals, place a call to the prospective tenant's veterinarian and express your concern. If the veterinarian has seen the animal for a number of years s/he should have plenty of notes about the animal's behavior and tendencies around humans and other pets. If after speaking to all of the references there are still concerns, landlords can express these concerns to the prospective tenant and suggest the option that the pet receive training from a professional. A certificate of completion and statement from a professional animal trainer followed by a telephone call should be enough for landlords to feel assured that the animal is rental ready.

Taming the Feral

A small percentage of cat owner-guardians may have pets who are semi-feral—that is, cats who were abandoned and were living in a feral cat colony (or born into a feral cat colony) before being rescued as strays and then adopted. Such animals may have spent weeks or months living “wild” either as young kittens or as adult cats that had previously been fully domesticated and living in a home before being abandoned or running off. Depending on the situation and/or how long the animal was living in feral conditions, they may have developed an intolerance for remaining indoors long-term or even for using a litter-box (requiring that the animals be let outside regularly to relieve themselves). If prospective tenants or their references report previous problems of this nature, landlords should go that extra step to assure that these animals become rental ready. Landlords should check with local no-kill animal welfare organizations to inquire about the best approach they recommend pet guardians take (such as purchasing special litter for litter-box resistant cats) to reduce potential problems. Many animal welfare advocates actually help to rescue feral kittens and manage feral cat communities and have extensive knowledge about the best strategies and techniques for helping pet owner-guardians to train and socialize felines still in semi-feral mode. Making this call and putting tenants in touch with professionals in your area who know how to problem-solve may help prevent problems and hassles in the future and is therefore well worth the effort.

Calm the Barking and Other Anxious Behaviors

The occasional bark or howl at a doorbell, passing animal, or police siren is normal but incessant barking and other anxious behaviors often require training and may even require professional intervention. If prospective tenants or their references report such behaviors from the pet suggest that the animal be taken to a professional trainer (they often work wonders with barking issues) or that they speak to their veterinarian about possible solutions—sometimes something as simple as a diet change can do the trick.

Additionally, pets can become quite nervous and anxious if they are left alone for too long. During the interview process ask prospective tenants how long they are typically gone away leaving the pet alone during the workday, and what provisions they typically make (such as having a friend, family member or pet-sitter stop by) when they need to be away for extended periods such as when working overtime and on special deadlines or during business trips. Such discussions can force tenants to think about their pets and their schedules to insure there is always someone there to be with the pet should the tenant be unexpectedly required to work extra hours, and it will help landlords determine how conscientious tenants are with regard to caring for their pets' needs.

Keeping Things Current

Rental property owners should ask tenants to provide them with receipts or a statement from their veterinarian indicating that their pets are up to date with all rabies shots, vaccinations, etc. that are required by local ordinance. The pets should also be registered if required by local, county or state ordinances, so remind tenants to update their pet's registration shortly after they move (sometimes this must be done as quickly as 10 days following relocation). By making sure tenants adhere to all the requirements under local, county and state laws and ordinances landlords reduce any complications should the rare problem arise. Additionally, such actions may be required by insurance carriers so it is in the best interest of rental property owners to dot their "i's" and cross their "t's" where the law is concerned.

Tag It

If your tenants do not have their pets micro-chipped, request that they have their pets wear ID tags with their names, new address and telephone number. This way, in the rare instance that a tenant's pet gets free and is running loose on the rental property or neighborhood the animals can be readily identified and returned with minimal trauma.

Keep It Pest-Free

If your rental property units are in a climate where fleas and/or ticks are common, be sure to ask prospective tenants what method they use to prevent fleas and ticks. There are numerous options on the market ranging from prescription drugs to natural sprays, powders and shampoos, with most nonprescription methods readily available at the local grocery store. The reason this discussion is important is to discover whether tenants already have a method for pest control in place, or at least a plan of action should it become necessary. Pets do not have to go outdoors to contract fleas. For instance, even a daylong stay at a pet care center while the owners are away can be enough to give a pet cat or dog a serious case of fleas. And because fleas can multiply and spread quickly if not managed right away, landlords should be clear with tenants that pest control is an important issue—not just for the health and well-being of their pets, but for *all* tenants in the rental properties—humans and animals alike.

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The majority of pet-owner-guardians living in rental housing are conscientious, respectful and genuinely caring people—both of other tenants as well as their pets—and so most of the points that have been raised in this chapter will likely be a non-issue. Nonetheless, rental property ownership and management is a business and as such it is wise to at the very least have a candid discussion about these points with prospective tenants during the interview process. Rather than dictating the rules that are required in order for pets to be considered rental ready in your rental housing, it is far better to explain to prospective tenants *the reason* each item is required. Chances are most tenants with pets will not only be pleasantly surprised at your knowledge and interest about companion animal renters, but also your desire to maintain a happy, peaceful and safe environment for *all* tenants—humans and animals alike.

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Most people remember things better if they can have a visual illustration as a reminder. The following handout can be photocopied and given to new tenants after you have gone over the pet policy and rules during the interview process, or left on the kitchen counter so that tenants see it during move-in day.



FIREPAW, Inc.

Maintaining Good Standing in a Pet-Friendly Rental



Once you secure a pet-friendly rental your job has just begun. Now you must live up to the responsibilities of being a good pet owner/guardian and a good tenant.

Savvy rental property owners know that tenants with animals can be a valuable asset. They know that tenants with animals tend to be more loyal, renewing their leases and staying longer than tenants without pets. Tenants with animals also tend to get along with their neighbors and have stronger bonds in the rental community than tenants without animals. Overall, people with animals hold the potential for being the perfect tenants. But that does not give tenants with animals carte blanche to behave in any they want. In order to be a responsible pet owner/guardian and tenant there are some things you will need to be sure to do...



Rules of the Road for Being a Good Tenant with Animals...



•Always clean up outdoors after your animal--*right away*. Whether it is in the common area shared by other tenants and their animals or in the general neighborhood, be sure you always bring a plastic "poop bag" or pooper-scooper when you go out with your dog. No one wants themselves or their children to step in a "surprise", so be sure to scoop the poop!



•Always clean up indoors after your animal--*right away*. If your animal has an accident, be sure to act promptly to eliminate odors and/or stains. There are a variety of highly effective pet cleaners for both pet stains and odors on the market now, sold at pet stores and larger grocery stores. A mixture of common household items--warm water, baking soda and vinegar--will also do the trick.

•Never leave your animal unattended, home alone for extended periods of time. If you need to be away longer than the normal time for commute and work time be sure you contact a relative, friend or neighbor to come in and give food and medications, spend time with the animal, and, in the case of a dog, give exercise and bathroom time. Be sure to make these arrangements with someone you trust and give them a copy of your house key *before* a situation arises in which you need them.

•Always have appropriate arrangements made for your animals when you need to be out of town. Whether it is a business trip, vacation or a family emergency trip, be sure you have a plan in place in advance for someone to care for your animals while you're away. Whether it is a pet-sitter, boarder, or friend, neighbor or family member be sure they know all the details about your pet's habits, health and preferences--and be sure to leave them your vet's contact information in case of an emergency.

•Always abide by the pet policies established by the rental property owner. Never "sneak in" animals who have not been approved to live on the premises! If you have an emergency, short-term situation where you have to pet-sit for a relative during a family emergency for instance, be sure to notify the owner or building manager. Explain the situation, letting them know it is only a temporary, short-term arrangement.

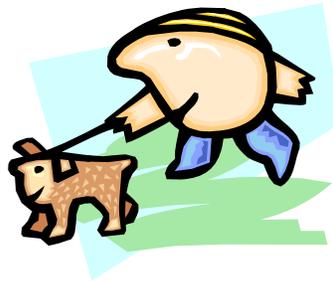
•Always resolve problems concerning your animal with your neighbors as soon as possible. If there are misunderstandings about your animal's behavior, be sure you calmly and politely explain the situation to your neighbor as well as to the complex manager and/or landlord. If your neighbor's complaint is valid, acknowledge that you appreciate their position, apologize for any inconvenience, and assure them you will resolve the problem quickly. Be certain you then resolve the problem on your own or, if necessary, seek the help of an animal trainer, animal communicator, veterinarian or other professional.

Some key things to remember about your animal to assure that both you--and your pet--are happy, good tenants...



It's important that you don't have unrealistic expectations about your animal. Your pet is an animal--not a small adult human. As such, your pet will be inclined to exhibit behaviors natural to its species. Cats will want to roam about the apartment or house at night, dogs may bark when the doorbell rings or howl when they hear a police siren. Some behaviors may be "trainable" and others will not. The important issue is to understand your pet's limitations. For instance...

~ Like you, your dog has to go to the bathroom more than once a day. Also like you, your dog will be unable to "hold it" for extended periods. If you are going out after work to be with friends or run errands, be sure to make a pit-stop home and allow your dog to take a trip outside. Additionally, like you, your dog will not always be able to "go to the bathroom on command". Be sure you give your dog enough "out time" to go to the bathroom when s/he is ready--this could take 20 minutes or more!



~ Recognize your animal's limitations. If your dog or cat gets anxious under certain circumstances, avoid those circumstances or do something to accommodate your animal. If your animal gets upset and nervous when your schedule changes, do what's necessary to calm and reassure your pet. Spend more quality time when you *are* home, get a friend or neighbor to visit your animal when you would normally be there, leave the radio on softly while you're away, leave your pet one of your t-shirts or other personal item that has your scent on it, call your home recorder and leave a voice message in a calm, reassuring tone, etc.