

Housing Series: Reasonable Accommodation Interview Questions

Author: Bonnie Milstein

The following questions will guide service providers and the people they serve to access “reasonable accommodation” in housing. A reasonable accommodation in housing is a modification or adjustment that will enable a person with a disability to access the housing. Reasonable accommodation includes lowering cabinets for an individual who is in a wheelchair and adding fire alarms that flash for individuals who are hearing impaired. Reasonable accommodation applies to individuals with physical and mental disabilities who may face homelessness, as well as persons currently without stable housing. The questions seek information that will help the individual and the individual’s advocate secure a reasonable accommodation that will enable the person to find housing and remain housed.

Fair housing and disability rights laws make reasonable accommodations available to individuals with disabilities. These laws do not eliminate tenancy obligations and their “reasonableness” is contextual. What may be reasonable for a tenant in a 500-unit building may not be reasonable for a tenant in a 5-unit building. In the same respect, an accommodation for one tenant with vision impairments may not be appropriate for another tenant with no vision impairments. The expectation is that the landlord and tenant will share information in an interactive conversation to develop an accommodation that is reasonable for both.

Model Questions

For individuals experiencing homelessness who have been evicted¹

- Why did you lose your housing?
- Were the reasons for your eviction related to your disability? How?
- What did the landlord want you to do that you could not do?
- What could the landlord have done to help you to comply with your lease?
- Did you need help doing what the lease required?
- Could you have paid your rent on a different day or in a different way?
- Did you want a companion/service animal to live with you?

¹ State and Federal Fair Housing laws require housing providers to engage in an interactive conversation with disabled applicants and tenants who may need accommodations in policies and practices or who need modifications in their apartments and buildings. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) published “Q&As” <http://nhl.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf> about accommodations and modifications.

- Did you want to have someone live with you who would help you with disability-related activities?
- Did you need help keeping your apartment clean?
- If you were told that you were bothering other tenants, do you need help to understand what that meant?

For individuals who have received eviction notices but are still in their homes

- Why are you being evicted?
- Are the reasons for the eviction related to your disability? How?
- What might convince the landlord not to evict you?
- What kind of help or accommodation would help you keep your housing?

For individuals who think that they might be evicted

- Why do you believe you will be evicted?
- Are the reasons for the eviction related to your disability? How?
- What might convince the landlord not to evict you?
- What kind of help or accommodation would help you keep your housing?

For individuals who are experiencing homelessness and who need accommodations with their housing search²

- Time
 - How much time do you have to search for housing?
 - What is the deadline for you to find housing before you lose your rental voucher?
 - Do you need more time?
 - What challenges have you encountered in searching for housing?
- List of rentals
 - Do you know how to look for housing?
 - Did the Public Housing Agency give you a list of available rentals?
 - Do you need housing that is accessible for

² Disability and fair housing laws require housing agencies to assist all rental voucher applicants. Applicants with disabilities must receive assistance tailored to their needs, including sign language interpreters, accessible meeting rooms, and where possible, transportation to visit rentals, neighborhood tours, counseling, baby-sitting, and listings of units, including accessible units. Information is available in the [HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook](http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/hudclips/guidebooks/7420.10G/7420g08GUID.pdf) <http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/hudclips/guidebooks/7420.10G/7420g08GUID.pdf>. 7420.10G, April 2001 (reissued 2007), pp. 8–14.

- Wheelchair users?
 - Hearing impairments?
 - Vision impairments?
 - Breathing and stair climbing difficulties?
- Did the Public Housing Agency give you a list of accessible apartments?
- Transportation
 - Are you able to travel to see available apartments for rent?
 - What kind of travel assistance do you need?
 - Have you asked the Public Housing Agency for travel assistance? What did they offer?
- Security deposit
 - Do you know what a security deposit is?
 - Do you know how much money you need to pay the security deposit?
 - Do you need help getting the money to pay the security deposit?
- Search companion
 - Have you been searching for housing by yourself?
 - Would you like someone to go with you?
 - Has the Public Housing Agency offered to send someone with you?
 - Would you like to go with a friend?
 - Would you like someone from this agency to go with you?
- Service/companion animals³
 - Is a “no pets” rule preventing you from finding housing?
 - Did you know that a pet may be defined as a “service” or “companion” animal if it helps you with the symptoms of your disability?
 - How does your pet help you? Which disability symptoms does your animal help?
 - Have you talked to your doctor/counselor/therapist about your animal?

³ The [Joint Statement on Reasonable Accommodations](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf) <http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf>, issued by HUD and the DOJ, provides helpful and readable guidance on all these questions and more. The two agencies also published equally helpful [Joint Statements on Reasonable Modifications](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/reasonable_modifications_mar08.pdf) http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/reasonable_modifications_mar08.pdf.

- Have you explained to your landlord why you need a reasonable accommodation to keep your animal?
- Have you given your landlord a letter from your doctor/counselor/therapist confirming that you have a disability and explaining how your animal helps you live with the symptoms of your disability?
- Time of payment
 - Do you have enough money to pay the rent?
 - Can you pay the rent on the day that it is due?
 - Do you have a benefits check that arrives later than the day that the rent is due?
 - Have you asked the landlord for permission to pay the rent after you receive your check?
 - Do you need a monthly notice to remind you when your rent is due?
- Location of rent payment
 - Do you know where and how to pay your rent?
 - Can you get to the location where the rent is to be paid?
 - Have you talked to the landlord about paying rent in another place or in another way?
- Rental vouchers
 - Do you need help applying for a rental voucher?
 - Have you asked the Public Housing Agency for help filling out the application?
 - Do you know how to get the application?
 - Are you able to get into the office where the applications are located?
 - Sometimes, a Public Housing Agency has rental vouchers specifically for applicants with disabilities. Are you willing to tell the housing agency that you are eligible for these vouchers?

For people at risk of losing their housing

- Noise
 - Is the noise from a neighboring apartment worsening the symptoms of your disability?
 - Would you agree to move to another apartment?
 - Would you agree to add noise reduction materials to your apartment walls?
- Hoarding and cluttering
 - Are you being evicted because you have too much stuff in your apartment?

- Has the Fire Department told you that your apartment is a fire hazard?
- Are you willing to clean your apartment?
- Do you need help cleaning your apartment?
- Are you willing to tell the landlord that you have a disability and that you need more time to clean your apartment because of your disability?
- Accessibility
 - Are you able to go up and down the stairs into your building? Your apartment?
 - Are the doors into the building and throughout your apartment wide enough for you to pass through them?
 - Are any of the public areas or places inside your apartment difficult for you to enter?
 - Was your building constructed after 1991?⁴

About the Housing Series: Access to affordable housing is essential to prevent and end homelessness. Locating housing resources is a daunting task, even without the stereotypes and generalizations that result in discrimination against people experiencing homelessness and mental illness. PATH providers know firsthand the scarcity of housing for individuals with limited incomes. To assist PATH providers in finding affordable housing, the PATH Technical Assistance Center created the Housing Series. The Housing Series consists of information, resources and tools to help providers obtain housing for the people with whom they work. The Housing Series is available on the PATH website <http://pathprogram.samhsa.gov> under "Topics." Additional resources and tools will be added periodically. Please send comments on the Housing Series and suggestions for additional resources to path@samhsa.hhs.gov.

⁴ New multifamily housing with four or more units, built for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, must include the seven features of universal design. These features include a building entrance wide enough for a wheelchair and a route without steps; accessible public and common-use areas; and kitchens and bathrooms that allow a wheelchair to maneuver about the space. More details are in HUD's Fair Housing Act regulations, 24 CFR Section 100.205 http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2004/aprqr/pdf/24cfr100.205.pdf.