



TIPS TO PROMOTE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

For Smoke-Free Public Housing

Occasionally in multi-unit housing, conflict can occur either between residents or between residents and management. General customer service basics will serve a manager well when emotions run high:

- Listen/repeat the concern
- Acknowledge/empathize
- Solve the problem
- Agree/thank the customer

When conflicts arise due to smoke-free policy violations, positive messaging can go a long way. Remember to focus on the smoke, not the smoker and emphasize ways the smoke-free policy benefits everyone. Here are some additional tips for diffusing and resolving smoking related conflicts in public housing.



Address the concern quickly

An unaddressed concern festers and lingers. The longer a concern continues the more likely it is that emotions will take over and the original facts of a situation are less pertinent. Handle concerns about smoking violations and secondhand smoke as quickly as possible, or let the resident know you've received the complaint and how you plan to follow up. Explain that sometimes secondhand smoke complaints take time to resolve. The longer the concern waits unaddressed, the bigger the problem gets. Document all interactions in writing if possible.

Acknowledge their concern and apologize

Often times, people who are frustrated just want their story to be heard and their feelings to be recognized. Acknowledging someone's concerns is different than accepting blame. Using phrases such as: 'I can tell this situation is frustrating for you,' 'I'm sorry things aren't meeting your expectations,' 'I can see that this is upsetting for you,' or 'I'm sorry you're having this problem,' directly acknowledges their feelings and highlights that you take it seriously. Avoid stating 'I'm sorry that you feel that way.' Their concern isn't just a feeling for them but a concrete lived problem. If a resident is being exposed to secondhand smoke it is a serious health threat that impacts their day-to-day life.

Explain how the situation will be handled

It is not uncommon for residents to assume that there has been no follow up from management if they haven't heard about it. Assuring all parties that follow up will occur, and providing a timeline and actions if possible, will help eliminate those assumptions. If possible, add your enforcement protocol to your smoke-free policy so that everyone in the building is aware of how concerns will be handled. Emphasize that it is your goal to reach the best possible solution for everyone involved.

Convey your limitations and refer to others

Despite your best efforts, you cannot solve all situations. Explain sincerely that you have done all that is within your power and refer them to upper management or outside resources for further assistance.

Follow up

Following up with a resident who expressed concerns confirms your responsiveness to the resident and exemplifies that you care about their feelings and situation. Setting a calendar reminder can be an effective way to remember this.

Created by the Live Smoke Free program (www.mnsmokefreehousing.org) and adapted from Apartment Dynamics "4 Extra Effort Tips for Resident Conflict Resolution"

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