PART OF THE MILE MARKER LIBRARY

12

REBUILDING

FINDING A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

Sober Housing and What to Check Before You Move In

STEPHEN DEASON

Alder Creek EDITIONS

Finding a Safe Place to Live

With Thanks

These books are offered at a low price in print and free online through the generous support of Matthew Marberry and the Michael Marberry Family Fund.

Thank you, Matthew, for helping put these books in the hands of the people who need them.

Stephen Deason

DON'T PANIC

If you are in danger, call 911.

If you are in crisis, or thinking about suicide, call or text 988.

For free help finding treatment, call 1-800-662-4357.

For the housing plan, turn to page 76.

Part of

The Mile Marker Library

BOOK 12 · REBUILDING

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Alder Creek EDITIONS

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Recovery Books

The Mile Marker Library: standalone books and tools for people getting into recovery on their own. Each one is numbered and labeled by what it helps with. Start with any of them.

RIGHT NOW

1. *Don't Panic: The First Hours After You Stop*
What to Do When You Stop Drinking or Using

2. *Wallet Crisis Card* **Free Printable**
Numbers to Call, Ready to Print

3. *Free Help Directory*
Meetings, Helplines, and Low-Cost Care

4. *Medications for Addiction, Explained*
What They Are, How to Ask, and How to Pay

DAILY PRACTICE

5. *Tools You Can Use on Your Own*
A Guide to Self-Directed Recovery

6. *Cravings and Hard Hours Workbook*
A Companion to Tools You Can Use on Your Own

7. *One Day at a Time, Written Down*
A 90-Day Gratitude Journal, in General and Christian Editions

8. *Daily Reader, 365 Days* **Forthcoming**
For Any Recovery Path

9. *Worksheet Library* **Forthcoming**
Every Journal Page and Exercise, Ready to Print

REBUILDING

10. *Money in Early Recovery*
Budgets, Debts, Benefits, and Credit

11. *Work and Recovery*
Finding a Job, Keeping It, and What to Tell Employers

12. *Finding a Safe Place to Live* **This book**
Sober Housing and What to Check Before You Move In

13. *Court, Probation, and Recovery* **Forthcoming**
What to Ask a Lawyer and What Records to Keep

PEOPLE AROUND YOU

14. *For Families*
When Someone You Love Can't Get to Treatment

15. *Group Facilitator Guide*
Running Free Peer Support Groups with These Books

16. *Employer Guide* **Forthcoming**
Hiring and Keeping People in Recovery

Who This Book Is For and How to Use It

This book is for people who do not have a safe place to sleep, or who are about to lose the one they have.

Where you sleep decides most of the rest of it. A house where people are using is the hardest place there is to stay sober, and most people do not beat it. A place you can be thrown out of on an hour's notice is a place you cannot plan from. And the week you spend looking for somewhere to live is a week you are not doing anything else.

This book is about finding a place, checking it before you commit, paying for it, and keeping it. It covers recovery residences, Oxford Houses, renting a room, getting your own place, moving in with family, and what to do when none of that is available tonight.

How to use it

- Start with Chapter 1 if you have nowhere to sleep tonight.
- Start with Chapter 5 if you have a house in mind and want to know what to ask.
- Start with Chapter 7 if something about a place feels wrong and you cannot name it.
- Start with Chapter 16 if you are trying to find help paying for housing.
- Start with Chapter 22 if you have been told to leave.

- Start with Chapter 24 if where you are living now is not safe.

The fill-in pages are yours. Every service named in this book is free or low cost.

What this book is not

It is not legal advice, and the author is not your lawyer. Landlord and tenant law is state law and sometimes city law, and it differs enormously. Where the answer depends on where you live, this book says so and points you to legal aid, who handle housing cases for free.

It also does not tell you which place is right for you. It gives you the questions, and it tells you who can help you decide.

If you are in danger right now

Emergency: 911

Crisis or thoughts of suicide: call or text 988

Free treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357

Housing, shelter, and local help: call 211

1. Tonight, If You Have Nowhere to Go

Start here and work down. Do not wait until dark to begin.

The first three calls

1. Call 211. Say: I need a place to sleep tonight. They know what is open in your area, including beds that are not listed anywhere public. This is the single most useful phone number in this book.
2. Ask 211 about coordinated entry. Most areas run one intake that gets you onto the list for every housing program at once. Getting on that list tonight matters, because it is dated from when you got on it.
3. Call the SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-662-4357 and ask about recovery housing and treatment with housing attached. Some programs have beds the shelters do not.

Other places that have beds

- Shelters. Call ahead and ask what time intake starts, because many fill within an hour of opening.
- Churches and faith groups, which often run a bed or a voucher fund that is not listed anywhere.
- Domestic violence programs, if you are leaving a violent household. They have separate beds and they do not publish the address. The national hotline is 1-800-799-7233.
- Veterans: call 1-877-424-3838, the VA's homeless veterans line, which runs around the clock.

- Youth under 18 or just over: call 1-800-786-2929, the National Runaway Safeline.
- Hospital emergency departments and detox units, if you also need medical care. Ask the social worker about placement.

If every bed is full

It happens, and it is worth knowing what people do.

- Ask 211 for a motel voucher. Some areas have them and almost nobody asks.
- Ask the shelter for the waiting list and the time to call back. Beds open at odd hours.
- Ask any program you are already connected to: treatment, probation, a clinic, a church. People with a caseload can make a call you cannot.
- Tell one person where you are going to be tonight.

Keep this with you

Your ID, your medication, your phone charger, and your papers. If you have to leave them somewhere, leave them with a person rather than in a place.

Who I called tonight, and what they said:

Where I am sleeping tonight:

Who knows where I am:

What I will do first thing tomorrow:

---

2. The Kinds of Places People Live

The words get used loosely, and two houses calling themselves the same thing can be nothing alike. Here is what the terms usually mean.

Recovery residence, sober home, sober living
A house where everyone living there is in recovery and the house is drug and alcohol free. It is housing, not treatment. The amount of structure varies enormously, and Chapter 3 lays out the four levels so you can tell which kind you are looking at.

Oxford House
A particular model: a rented house run by the people who live in it, with no paid staff and no landlord on site. Chapter 4 covers it on its own because it works differently from everything else.

Halfway house
An older term, now used for two different things. Sometimes it means a recovery residence. Sometimes it means a federal or state facility people go to on release from incarceration, where the placement is ordered rather than chosen. Ask which one somebody means.

Transitional housing
Time-limited housing, often with a case manager, usually funded by a government program. Normally has an end

date, and the program expects you to be working toward your own place.

A room in someone's house
The most common arrangement there is, and the least regulated. Chapter 13 covers what to check.

Your own apartment
A lease in your name. Costs the most up front and gives you the most control. Chapter 14 covers getting one.

Subsidized housing
Public housing, a housing choice voucher, or a unit where the rent is set by your income. Long waits in most places, so get on the lists even if you need something sooner. Chapter 16 covers it.

Staying with family
Free, available, and the hardest one to do well. Chapter 12 is about making it work on purpose.

The kinds of places realistic for me right now:

What I can pay a week or a month:

How soon I need to be somewhere:

3. What a Recovery Residence Actually Is

Recovery residences are housing. They are not treatment, and in most states they are not licensed the way a treatment program is. That means quality runs from excellent to dangerous, and telling them apart is on you. This chapter gives you the vocabulary to do it.

The four levels

The National Alliance for Recovery Residences sets a standard that describes four levels of support. Houses that are certified will tell you their level, and knowing the levels lets you ask the right question of a house that is not certified.

- Level one, peer-run. No paid staff and nobody on site running it. The residents govern the house themselves. Oxford Houses are the best-known example.
- Level two, monitored. An owner or operator runs the house, there are written rules, and a house manager or senior resident is there day to day. Drug and alcohol testing, meeting requirements, accountability. Most independent sober homes are here.
- Level three, supervised. Paid staff and an organization behind the house, with structured programming and life-skills work. Still housing, not clinical treatment.
- Level four, clinical. Run by a licensed treatment provider with clinical staff on site. This is the only level where treatment happens inside the residence.

What certification means and does not mean

Certification is voluntary in most places. The national alliance does not certify houses itself; an affiliate organization in each state does it. A certified house has agreed to a written standard and can be complained about to the body that certified it. An uncertified house may still be good, and some long-running houses never bothered. What certification gives you is somewhere to go when something goes wrong.

- Ask: are you certified, and by whom?
- Ask: what level are you?
- Ask: who do I complain to if something here is wrong?
- If the answer to the last one is only the owner, know that going in.

How to find them

- Call 211 and ask for certified recovery residences in your area.
- Call the SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-662-4357.
- Ask your state's recovery residence association, which 211 can name for you.
- Ask at meetings. People who have lived in a house will tell you the truth about it faster than any list.

Houses I am looking at, and their level:

Whether each one is certified, and by whom:

Who told me about each one:

---

4. Oxford House

Oxford House is worth its own chapter because it does not work like the others. There are more than three thousand of these houses, each one a rented house run by the people living in it.

How it works

- No paid staff in the house. The residents elect officers for six-month terms and run it themselves.
- Everyone pays an equal share of the rent and the bills. The weekly amount varies by house and area.
- No alcohol and no illegal drugs. Somebody who uses is voted out by the house.
- Every member has an equal vote, however long they have been there.
- You can stay as long as you keep paying and stay sober. There is no time limit, and plenty of people stay a year or more.

How to get in

You apply to a particular house, go in for an interview with the people who live there, and they vote. Approval takes a large majority of the house. If one house turns you down, you apply to another one, and being turned down at one house does not follow you.

Find houses at oxfordhouse.org, or call 211 and ask for Oxford Houses in your area.

What to think about

Self-governance means the house is only as good as the people currently in it. A house with a strong set of members is a very good place to live. A house that has drifted is a house with nobody paid to fix it. Visit, meet the people, and ask how long the current members have been there.

Oxford Houses near me, and their phone numbers:

The date I applied, and to which house:

What they said:

---

5. Questions to Ask Before You Move In

Ask these on the phone before you visit, and again at the house. Write the answers down. A house that will not answer plainly has told you something.

Money

- What is the rent, and is it weekly or monthly?
- What is due before I move in, in total?
- Is there a deposit, and what gets it back?
- What is included: utilities, food, bus passes, laundry?
- What happens if I am short one week?
- Is there an application fee or an intake fee? What is it for?

The rules

- Are the rules in writing, and can I have a copy before I decide?
- What is the curfew?
- Is there drug and alcohol testing, how often, and who pays for it?
- Am I required to attend meetings? How many, and does it have to be a particular kind?
- Am I required to attend a particular treatment program or see a particular counselor?
- What are the rules about visitors, phones, cars, and work schedules?
- What gets somebody asked to leave, and who decides?

Medication

- If I take medication for addiction, is that allowed here?
- Where is medication stored, and who has access to it?
- If I take medication for anything else, how is that handled?

Some houses refuse residents on buprenorphine or methadone. Know before you move, because finding out afterward costs you the move. If a house turns you away for prescribed medication, read Chapter 15, because that may be unlawful.

The practical

- How many people live here, and how many to a room?
- Is there a bed available now, or a waiting list?
- Can I keep my job and my hours?
- How do I get to work and to meetings from here?
- Who is here during the day?
- How long do people usually stay?

The ones people forget

- What happens to my things if I leave or am asked to leave?
- What happens if I relapse? Am I out immediately, and what help do I get?
- Who do I talk to if I have a problem with a housemate?
- Who owns this house, and who runs it day to day?

The house I am asking about:

The answers that concerned me:

What I still need to find out:

---

6. Visiting the House

Go and see it before you agree to anything. A phone call tells you what somebody wants you to know. A visit tells you the rest.

Look at

- The bathroom and the kitchen. These tell you more about how a house is run than the front room does.
- Where you would sleep, and how many beds are in it.
- Whether there are smoke detectors, and whether there is a way out of every sleeping room.
- Locks on the doors, and whether there is anywhere to put something you do not want taken.
- Whether the house is full, and whether anyone looks like they do not want to be there.
- Whether there is food.

Ask to talk to somebody who lives there, alone

Say to the manager: can I talk to one of the residents for a minute? A house with nothing to hide will say yes. Then ask the resident three things: what is the worst thing about living here, has anybody been thrown out recently and why, and would you move in again.

Trust the room

You have spent years reading rooms. That skill works here. If the place feels wrong and you cannot say why, you do not have to explain it to anybody. Keep looking.

If you cannot visit

Sometimes you are placed from treatment or from jail with no chance to see the house. Ask somebody you trust to call and ask the questions in Chapter 5 for you, and ask for the rules in writing before you arrive. You can still ask every one of those questions on the first day.

What I saw that I liked:

What I saw that worried me:

What the resident told me:

---

7. Warning Signs

Most houses are run by people trying to do something decent on very little money. A minority are run as a business built on the people inside them. These are the signs.

Money signs

- A large fee up front with nothing in writing saying what it is for.
- Cash only, no receipt.
- A promise to take your insurance card and handle everything.
- Rent that goes up when your benefits land.
- Anybody asking for your Social Security number or your benefits card before you have a signed agreement.

The treatment tie

A house that requires you to attend one particular treatment program, use one particular lab for testing, or see one particular provider is the clearest warning sign on this list.

There is a federal law about this. It is a crime to pay or receive anything in exchange for referring a patient to a recovery home, a clinical treatment facility, or a laboratory, and that law covers private insurance and cash, not only government programs. When a house

insists you go to one named program, the reason is often that somebody is being paid for sending you.

You are allowed to choose your own treatment, your own counselor, and your own doctor. A house can require that you attend something. A house requiring that you attend one named business is different.

House signs

- No written rules, or rules that change depending on who is asking.
- More people than beds, or beds in a garage or a basement with no second way out.
- No sober person in charge at any hour.
- Residents who seem afraid of the manager.
- People using in the house, with everyone acting as though you did not see it.
- The manager cannot tell you who owns the house.
- You are told to sign something now and read it later.

What to do

- Leave. You are not obligated to anybody you have not signed with.
- Tell whoever referred you.
- If the house is certified, complain to the body that certified it.
- Call 211 and ask whether your state licenses or certifies recovery residences and who takes complaints.

- If money or insurance is involved, report it at oig.hhs.gov or by calling 1-800-447-8477.
- If somebody is being held or threatened, call 911.

What I saw or was told:

Who I reported it to, and when:

Where I went instead:

---

8. What It Costs

Work out the real number before you commit, because the move-in cost is where most plans break.

What you pay to get in

- First week or first month of rent.
- A deposit, if there is one.
- An application or intake fee, if there is one.
- A drug test at intake, sometimes.
- Bedding, towels, and a padlock, which most houses do not supply.

What you pay every week

- Rent.
- Your share of food, if the house shares food.
- Transportation to work and meetings.
- Drug tests, where the house charges for them.
- Laundry.

The question that matters

Can you pay it in your worst week, not your best one? The money book in this library works out how to find that number. If the honest answer is no, say so now and ask the house what they do about it, rather than finding out in week three.

Help with the cost

- Ask 211 about rental assistance and deposit assistance in your area.
- Ask the house whether they have scholarship beds or a sliding scale. Many do and do not advertise it.
- Ask your treatment program, drug court, or probation officer whether they have housing funds.
- Ask a recovery community organization. Some pay first month's rent for people leaving treatment.
- Veterans: ask about HUD-VASH and the VA's supportive services for veteran families programs.

What Each Place Costs Me

Fill this in for each place you are considering, and compare the bottom line.

Line	Place A	Place B	Place C
Rent, and how often			
Deposit			
Any fee to move in			
Total to get in the door			
Utilities included?			
Food included?			
Cost of drug tests			
Getting to work from here			
Getting to meetings from here			
What it costs me a month, all in			
Can I pay this in a bad week?			

9. The House Agreement

Get it in writing and read it before you sign. This is the one document that decides what happens to you when something goes wrong, and it is also the moment you have the most leverage you will ever have with that house.

What it should say

- What you pay, how often, and when it is due.
- What the deposit is and what you have to do to get it back.
- What the rules are, including curfew, testing, meetings, and visitors.
- What gets somebody asked to leave.
- How much notice you get if you are asked to leave.
- How much notice you have to give if you leave.
- What happens to your belongings.
- Who to go to with a complaint.

Before you sign

- Read all of it. Take it outside and read it if you need to.
- Ask about anything you do not understand, and write the answer in the margin.
- If somebody tells you not to worry about a clause, worry about that clause.
- Do not sign a blank or partly blank form.

- Get a copy, with signatures, the same day. A copy you were promised later is a copy you will not get.
- Photograph it on your phone.

If you cannot get it in writing

Some decent houses operate on a handshake. If that is where you are, write down the terms yourself the day you move in: what you pay, when, and what the rules are. Date it, and text a copy to somebody. It is not a contract, and it is still better than two memories.

What the agreement does not change

Whether a recovery residence agreement makes you a tenant with eviction rights, or a program participant who can be asked to leave immediately, depends on your state, on what the paper says, and sometimes on how a court looks at it. This book cannot tell you which you are. Legal aid can, and Chapter 22 is about what to do when you are told to go.

The date I signed, and with whom:

Where my copy is:

The parts I asked about, and what I was told:

10. If You Are Leaving Treatment

The days around discharge are high risk, and where you go is most of the reason why. Start on housing in the first week of a program, not the last.

Ask early

- Who here does discharge planning, and when do we start?
- What housing do you refer people to, and do you have any financial relationship with it?
- Can I see a list of more than one option?
- Will somebody call the house with me?
- What happens if the bed is not ready on my discharge date?
- What do I leave here with: medication, prescriptions, records, my ID?

That second question is the one worth asking plainly. A program referring you somewhere it is connected to is not automatically wrong, and you are entitled to know about it and to ask for other options.

The gap

The dangerous version is leaving on a Friday with a bed available Monday. If the dates do not line up, say so before your discharge date and ask the program what they do about it. Three nights is enough to undo a month.

What to have in hand when you walk out

- Your ID and your papers.
- Your medication, and enough of it to reach your next appointment.
- Your next appointment, already made, with the date and address written down.
- The address and phone number of where you are going.
- Two phone numbers of people who will pick up.
- Bus fare or a ride, arranged, not assumed.

My discharge date:

Where I am going, and the address:

My first appointment after discharge, and when:

Who is picking me up:

11. If You Are Leaving Jail or Prison

Housing on release is harder and the rules are stricter, and most of what makes it work happens before the release date.

Start inside

- Ask for the reentry coordinator, the case manager, or whoever does release planning, and ask in writing if you have to.
- Ask whether the facility has a housing list and whether any beds are reserved for people being released.
- Ask what documents you will leave with, and get your ID started now if you do not have one.
- Ask whether you are eligible for a bed through drug court, a reentry program, or a transitional housing contract.

If you are on probation or parole

Your address usually has to be approved before you move in, and sometimes there are rules about who else can live there and how far it has to be from certain places. Get the address approved before you commit money to it.

- Ask your officer what the address requirements are, in writing if you can.
- Ask whether a recovery residence counts as an approved address.
- Ask what happens if you need to move, and how much notice they need.

- Tell the house that you are on supervision before you move in. A house that handles this routinely will say so.

What a record does to your options

A private landlord can consider a conviction. Subsidized housing has its own rules, and Chapter 17 covers them, including the two denials that are mandatory and the many that are not. Recovery residences vary: some take anyone, some will not take certain offenses, and the only way to know is to ask the question directly and early.

Free help with this

- Call 211 and ask for reentry programs.
- Ask legal aid at lsc.gov about sealing or expunging your record, which Book 8 in this library also covers.
- Ask a recovery community organization. Many run reentry housing and will meet you at the gate.

My release date:

Where I am going, and whether it is approved:

My officer's name and number:

What I still have to arrange:

12. Living With Family

Moving in with family is the most common arrangement in early recovery and the one most likely to end badly without a conversation nobody wants to have.

Have the conversation before you move in

Say the quiet parts out loud while everyone is calm. What you are agreeing to is easier to keep than what everyone assumed.

- How long is this for, roughly?
- What do I pay, or what do I do instead if I cannot pay yet?
- What are the house rules about hours, visitors, and the kitchen?
- What are the rules about alcohol in the house?
- What happens if I use again? Say the answer now, both of you.
- Who else gets told about my recovery, and who does not?
- What is mine to decide, and what is theirs?

Write it down

One page, both of you sign it, each keeps a copy. It feels formal between family, and it is exactly what stops the argument in week six about what was agreed in week one.

The things that go wrong

- Money that was a gift becomes a debt, or the other way round, and nobody says so.
- Old roles come back. You are a grown adult and the house treats you as who you were at nineteen.
- Somebody in the house drinks, and nobody planned for it.
- You are watched, and it is intended as care, and it does not feel like care.
- Nobody set an end date, so every week is a question.

What you owe them, and what you do not

You owe them the rules of their house, the money you agreed to, and the truth about where you are. You do not owe them a daily account of your inner life, access to your phone, or an argument about the past every evening. Those are reasonable things to say out loud.

If it stops working

Have somewhere else lined up before it reaches a crisis, even if it is only a phone number. The family relationship is likelier to survive a planned move than an argument at midnight.

What we agreed: how long, and what I pay:

What happens if I use again:

Who I call if I need to leave:

The date we will talk about this again:

13. Renting a Room

A room in somebody's house or apartment is cheap, available, and almost entirely unregulated. Most of these work out. The ones that do not go wrong fast.

Check before you pay

- Who actually holds the lease or owns the place? If the person renting to you is a tenant, the landlord may not know you exist.
- Is there anything in writing? Get at least a note with the rent, the date, and what is included.
- What is shared and what is yours? Bathroom, kitchen, laundry, parking.
- Does your room have a door that locks?
- Who else lives there, and does anybody drink or use in the house?
- What are the rules about guests, hours, and noise?
- How much notice do you get if they want you out?

Pay in a way you can prove

Get a receipt every time, or pay by an app or a check that leaves a record. If you pay cash with no record, you have no proof you ever lived there, and that becomes a problem the day they say you did not pay.

The listing scams

- Nobody will show you the place.

- They want a deposit before you have seen it or met them.
- They want a gift card, a wire, or cash through an app that cannot be reversed.
- The price is far below everything else nearby.
- The story involves them being out of the country.
- The photos appear on other listings. Search for them.

Never send money for a place you have not stood inside.

The recovery question

You do not have to tell a roommate you are in recovery. You do have to decide what you are going to do when they offer you a drink in their own kitchen, because they are allowed to drink in their own kitchen. If the house drinks, be honest with yourself about whether you can live there.

The address, and who I am renting from:

What is in writing:

How I pay, and how I prove it:

What I decided about alcohol in the house:

14. Getting Your Own Place

A lease in your name costs the most to start and is the most stable thing on this list. It is worth working toward even if it is months away.

What it takes to get in

- First month's rent, usually, and often a security deposit equal to a month.
- An application fee, often non-refundable, and often per adult.
- Proof of income, commonly two to three times the rent, which is the barrier most people hit.
- Identification.
- A rental history or references, which you may not have.
- A credit and background check.

What landlords check

Credit, eviction records, criminal records, income, and prior landlords. An eviction filing shows up even when the case was dismissed, and it is the hardest single thing to get past. If you have one, know about it before you apply, and read Chapter 23.

If your history is thin

- Offer a larger deposit if you can, or a co-signer if somebody will.
- Bring letters: an employer, a program, a prior landlord, a probation officer.

- Apply to small landlords rather than management companies. A person can decide; a screening algorithm cannot.
- Ask about rooms, duplexes, and houses rented by owners rather than agencies.
- Ask 211 about programs that pay deposits or guarantee the rent for the first months.

Before you sign a lease

- Read it. All of it.
- Check what the deposit covers and what the move-out conditions are.
- Check whether utilities are included and which ones.
- Walk through and photograph every room before you move anything in, including every mark on the wall. Send the photos to yourself so they carry a date.
- Ask for a written move-in condition form, and keep your copy.

What I need saved to move in:

What is on my record that a landlord will see:

Who will write me a reference:

What I am applying for this month:

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15. What a Landlord Can and Cannot Hold Against You

Federal fair housing law treats a disability as a protected characteristic, and addiction can be a disability under it. What follows is the federal floor. Some states give you more. None give you less.

The line the law draws

A person who is currently using illegal drugs is not protected. A person who has a past addiction, or who is in recovery and no longer using, generally is. That distinction is the whole architecture of this area of law.

So a landlord refusing you because of a history of addiction, or because you are in recovery, or because you live in or came from a recovery residence, is on the wrong side of that line. A landlord acting on current illegal drug use is not.

Reasonable accommodation

A person with a disability can ask for a change to a rule or a practice where the change is needed for equal use of the housing. Examples that come up in recovery: a schedule change for a program requirement, permission for a support animal where pets are otherwise barred, or a different payment date to line up with a benefits deposit.

- Ask in writing, and keep a copy.

- Say what you need and why it is needed, in terms of the housing. You do not have to hand over your whole medical history.
- You may be asked for documentation of the need from a provider. A note stating the need, without the diagnosis, is often enough. Ask your provider to write it that way.
- The landlord can offer a different accommodation that works, rather than the exact one you asked for.
- It has to be reasonable. A landlord does not have to take on a large cost or fundamentally change what the housing is.

Group homes and local rules

Towns sometimes try to keep recovery residences out through zoning. Federal law bars a local government from treating a group of people with disabilities worse than it treats a comparable group of unrelated people living together. This is a live area of litigation, and if your house is being pushed out, that is a matter for a lawyer rather than for you alone.

Medication

If a recovery residence or a landlord turns you away because you take prescribed medication for addiction, write down what was said, by whom, and when, on the day it happens. That may be unlawful, and it is a complaint worth filing.

Where to complain

- HUD takes fair housing complaints at 1-800-669-9777, and at hud.gov. It is free and you do not need a lawyer.
- The deadline for a HUD complaint is generally one year from the act. Do not wait to be certain. File and let them decide whether it qualifies.
- Your state or city fair housing agency, which 211 can name.
- Legal aid at lsc.gov. Fair housing cases are commonly taken at no cost to you.
- Retaliating against you for filing is itself unlawful.

What happened, and the date:

Exactly what was said, and by whom:

Who else was there:

Who I called, and when:

16. Housing Help You May Qualify For

These programs have long waits in most places. The move that matters is getting on the lists now, while you are living somewhere else, rather than waiting until you need them.

The main ones

- Housing choice vouchers, often called Section 8. You pay a share of your income toward rent and the program pays the rest to a private landlord. Apply through your local public housing authority.
- Public housing. Apartments owned by the housing authority, with rent set by your income.
- Project-based rental assistance, where the subsidy is attached to a particular building rather than to you.
- Continuum of Care programs, including permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing, which you reach through coordinated entry. Ask 211.
- Veterans: HUD-VASH pairs a voucher with VA case management. Call 1-877-424-3838.
- State and county programs, which vary enormously. 211 knows what yours are.

How to do this well

- Apply to more than one housing authority. You can usually apply outside the one where you live now, and the waits differ.

- Get on the coordinated entry list even if you are not homeless tonight. Your date on the list matters.
- Keep your address and phone current with every list you are on. People lose their place on a two-year waiting list because a letter went to an old address.
- Open and answer every letter. A missed deadline usually means starting over.
- Ask about preferences. Many authorities move people up the list for being a veteran, homeless, disabled, or working.

What you will need

- Identification for everyone in the household.
- Social Security numbers.
- Proof of income, or a statement that you have none.
- Birth certificates for children.
- Sometimes a reference or a prior address history.

My Documents

Housing applications stall on paperwork more than on anything else. Fill this in once and keep it with the papers.

Document	Do I have it	Where it is	How to replace it
Photo ID or driver's license			
Social Security card			
Birth certificate			
Proof of income or no income			
Bank statements			
Lease or letter from where I live now			
Benefits award letters			
Court or probation papers			
Discharge papers			
DD-214, if a veteran			
Children's documents			

17. Applying With a Record

A criminal record narrows subsidized housing without closing it. The rules are more specific than most people are told, and the specifics are worth knowing because they are what you argue with.

The two denials that are mandatory

A housing authority must deny assistance in two cases, and has no discretion in either.

1. Any household member is subject to a lifetime sex offender registration requirement.
2. Any household member has been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing.

Everything else is discretion

Outside those two, a housing authority may deny, and may also decide not to. That word matters, because the policies are written locally and the authority is permitted to consider that somebody has turned things around.

- Eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity can be grounds for denial for three years. The authority may still admit the family if it finds the person has been successfully rehabilitated.
- Current illegal drug use, or alcohol use that threatens other residents, can be grounds for denial, and here too the authority may consider whether the person has taken steps toward rehabilitation.

- Other criminal activity is governed by the authority's own written policy, including how far back it looks.

What to do about it

- Ask the housing authority for its written admissions policy. It is a public document and it tells you exactly what they look at and for how long.
- If you are denied, ask for the reason in writing and ask for an informal review or hearing. There is a deadline, usually short, and it is in the denial letter.
- Bring evidence to that hearing: time in recovery, treatment completion, employment, letters from a counselor, a sponsor, an employer, a probation officer.
- Get legal aid involved at lsc.gov. They do these hearings and they win a fair number of them.
- Check your own record first, because denials sometimes rest on a record that is wrong.

What is on my record, and the year:

The authority's policy on it:

The date I was denied, and my deadline to ask for a review:

Who is writing a letter for me:

18. Your Deposit and Your Money

Deposits are where people lose the money they need for the next place. Protecting it starts the day you move in.

On the day you move in

- Photograph every room, including every mark, stain, and broken thing, before you put anything down.
- Send the photos to yourself or to somebody else so they carry a date.
- Fill out the move-in condition form if there is one, and keep your copy. If there is not one, write your own list and give a copy to the landlord.
- Get a receipt for the deposit that says it is a deposit.

While you live there

- Keep every receipt and every text about the place.
- Put repair requests in writing, even if you also ask in person. A text counts.
- Never pay cash without a receipt.

When you leave

- Give notice the way the agreement requires, in writing, and keep proof you gave it.
- Clean it and take the photographs again.
- Give a forwarding address in writing. In many states the deposit clock does not start without one.
- Ask in writing for the deposit back and for an itemized list of anything withheld.

If they keep it

Most states require a landlord to return the deposit or account for it within a set number of days, and many allow extra damages when a landlord keeps it without cause. The number of days and the penalty are state law and they vary a lot. Call legal aid at lsc.gov, or your state attorney general's consumer line, and ask what your state's rule is. Small claims court is built for exactly this and does not require a lawyer.

The amount of the deposit, and the date I paid it:

Where my photographs and receipts are:

The date I gave notice, and how:

What they said about the deposit:

19. The First Thirty Days

The first month in a new place decides whether it lasts. Most of what ends it early is small.

Week one

- Learn the names of everybody in the house. Use them.
- Learn the rules you were given, and ask about the ones you were not.
- Work out how you get to work and to meetings from here, and do the trip once before you have to.
- Put the rent date in your phone with an alarm two days before.
- Find out who to tell if something breaks.
- Pick one person in the house you can ask a question without it becoming a conversation.

Money

Pay the rent first and early, every time. In a recovery residence, rent paid late is the most common reason people are asked to leave, ahead of using. Chapter 8 and the money book both work this out.

The things that get people thrown out in month one

- Missing curfew without calling.
- A guest who should not have been there.
- Taking food or money that was not theirs.
- A fight that would have been nothing anywhere else.
- Not paying.

- Using.

Five of those six are avoidable by calling somebody before you do the thing.

Protect the recovery while you settle

- Keep the meetings you already had. A new address is not a reason to drop them.
- Tell one person outside the house how the first weeks are going.
- Do not reorganize your whole life in the first month. Sleep, eat, pay, show up.

My rent day, and what I pay:

How I get to work and to meetings from here:

One person in the house I can ask:

Who I check in with outside the house:

20. Keeping It

Housing is kept or lost mostly through the ordinary business of living with other people.

The two things that matter most

Pay on time. Follow the written rules. Almost everything else is negotiable with somebody who sees you doing those two.

When you cannot pay

- Say so before the due date, not after. A manager told in advance has options a manager told afterward does not.
- Ask for a partial payment and a date for the rest, and put it in writing.
- Call 211 the same day and ask about emergency rental assistance.
- Ask your employer about an advance, and a recovery community organization about a one-time fund.
- Do not disappear. Disappearing turns a late payment into an eviction.

Housemates

- Deal with the small thing while it is small. The dish, the noise, the borrowed charger.
- Say it to the person, once, plainly, not to the room.
- If it is bigger than that, go to whoever runs the house rather than organizing the other residents.

- Write down anything involving money, threats, or property.
- Nobody is required to be your friend. You are required to live alongside them.

When the house is the problem

Sometimes the house itself is going wrong: people using, a manager who is not around, money that does not add up. You are allowed to leave a place that is not working, and leaving early is not a failure. Line up where you are going first if you can, and read Chapter 7 again.

What I pay, and the day it is due:

Who I tell if I am going to be short:

A housemate problem I need to deal with, and when:

My plan if this house stops working:

21. If You Use Again While Housed

Get safe first. The first hours are covered in other books in this library. What follows is the housing part, and it is worth reading before you need it.

What usually happens

In most recovery residences, using means leaving, often the same day. That is the deal the house is built on and it is the reason the house is safe for everyone else in it. Knowing it in advance is better than discovering it.

What to ask for

- Where do I go tonight? Ask the house to make the call with you.
- Can I come back, and what would I have to do? Many houses have a route back and do not volunteer it.
- Can I get my things, and when?
- What happens to the rent I have already paid?

What to do in the first hour

- Call somebody. Not to confess. So that a person knows where you are.
- Call 211 for a bed tonight.
- Call your treatment program or counselor if you have one. Same-day help exists and most people do not ask for it.
- If opioids were involved, read the warning at the back of this book before anything else.

If you are on probation or parole

Changing address has reporting requirements and a positive test has consequences. Ask legal aid at lsc.gov before you decide what to say and when, rather than deciding it alone at two in the morning.

The thing to avoid

Leaving without telling anyone and sleeping somewhere nobody knows about. That is the sequence that turns one night into a month.

Who I call first:

Where I go tonight:

What I ask the house about coming back:

My first appointment, and when:

22. If You Are Asked to Leave

Whether you can be put out immediately or have to be taken to court depends on your state and on what you signed. It is worth finding out which you are, quickly.

The first question

Ask the person telling you to go: am I being evicted, or am I being discharged from a program? Then call legal aid at lsc.gov and ask the same question about your situation. In many states a person renting a room is a tenant with rights to notice and a court process, and a resident of a program may not be. Which one you are changes everything about what happens next.

What to do in the first hour

- Ask for it in writing, with the reason and the date.
- Ask how long you have.
- Get your identification, your medication, and your papers on your person now, before anything else.
- Photograph your belongings where they are.
- Do not sign anything giving up a claim to your deposit or your things while you are upset.
- Call 211 for a bed tonight.

Your belongings

Most states have rules about what a landlord has to do with property left behind, including notice and a period to collect it. Throwing somebody's things out on the spot

is unlawful in many places. If your things are being held or have been dumped, call legal aid the same day.

If you are being put out illegally

Locking you out, removing your door, shutting off the water or the power, or threatening you to make you go are unlawful in most states, whatever the reason. These have names in the law and there are remedies. Call legal aid. If you are being threatened, call 911.

What not to do

Do not refuse to leave and let it become a police matter if you can avoid it. Leave with your things, then make the call. You preserve far more by arguing it from outside with a lawyer than from inside at midnight.

What I was told, by whom, and when:

Whether I got it in writing:

What I still have at that address:

Who I called for advice, and what they said:

23. Court Papers and Eviction

If you get court papers about where you live, the single most important thing in this chapter is this: do not ignore them. Most evictions are won by default, which means the tenant did not show up.

The day you get them

1. Read the date on the paper. There is a deadline and it is short, often a matter of days.
2. Call legal aid at lsc.gov the same day. Say the words: I have been served with an eviction case and my court date is on this date. That sentence moves you up a queue.
3. Ask the court clerk whether there is a tenant help desk or a duty lawyer. Many courts have one and almost nobody asks.
4. Write down everything: what you paid, when, what you asked for, what was promised.
5. Go to court on the date, even if you have no defense and no lawyer. Showing up is what gives you a chance to agree terms rather than have them imposed.

Why showing up matters even when you owe the money

A judge who sees you may approve a payment plan or more time to move. A judgment entered because you did not appear is a judgment, and it follows you into every future rental application, which Chapter 14 covers.

Help with the money

- Call 211 and ask about emergency rental assistance. Some programs pay arrears directly to a landlord and can stop a case.
- Ask the landlord in writing for a payment plan. Get any agreement in writing before you rely on it.
- Ask legal aid whether your state has a right to pay and stay, which many do.

If you have already been evicted

An eviction on your record is the hardest single thing to get past with a landlord. Ask legal aid whether your state allows the record to be sealed or expunged, because a growing number do. Chapter 14 covers how to rent with one in the meantime.

My court date, and the address of the court:

Who I called for legal help, and when:

What I am asking the court for:

What I owe, and what I can pay:

24. If Where You Live Now Is Not Safe

Sometimes the problem is not finding a place. It is that the place you have is the thing hurting you.

If people are using in the house

Living where people use is the single hardest thing to stay sober through, and it is not a failure of willpower to say so. Treat it as a housing problem rather than a character problem, which means it has a housing solution.

- Call 211 and say plainly: I am in recovery and there is active use in my house. That sentence opens doors that a general request does not.
- Tell your counselor or program. Many have emergency placement they do not advertise.
- Ask about a recovery residence bed, which Chapters 3 and 4 cover.
- In the meantime: a lock on your door, your medication and papers on your person, and one person who knows what is happening.

If someone is hurting you

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788. They have beds that are not public, they will plan a safe exit with you, and they take calls from anyone.

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- Many states let a survivor break a lease early without penalty, and some bar a landlord from evicting

somebody for being a victim. Ask legal aid at lsc.gov what yours does.

- Keep identification, medication, money, and papers somewhere you can reach them fast, or with somebody you trust.
- Being in recovery does not make you a less credible victim, whatever anybody tells you.

If the housing itself is dangerous

No heat, no water, no working smoke detector, exposed wiring, rats. Report it to the city's code enforcement or health department, which 211 can connect you to. Put the request to the landlord in writing first and keep a copy, because the written request is what makes the next step possible. Retaliating against a tenant for making a code complaint is unlawful in most states.

If you are being exploited

Somebody taking your benefits card, your paycheck, or your medication, or holding your documents, or making you work or stay in exchange for a bed. This has names in the law and there is help. Call 211, call legal aid, and if you are being held or threatened call 911. The National Human Trafficking Hotline is 1-888-373-7888.

What is happening, and how long it has been going on:

Who I have told:

What I need to take with me if I leave:

Where I would go:

---

25. My Housing Plan

Pull the pages together. Update it when something changes.

Where I am living right now, and until when:

What I can pay a week, honestly:

The three places I am calling this week:

What I need in writing before I move anywhere:

My documents: what I have and what is missing:

The waiting lists I am on, and the date I got on each:

Who I call for free help: 211, legal aid, my program:

What I will do if I am told to leave:

What I will do if I use again:

Who knows where I am living:

One housing thing I will do this week:

If I Use Again

If you use again, this book is still yours. Get safe first, then use this plan. Fill it in now, while you are steady.

If you return to opioids after a period of not using or using less, your tolerance may be lower than it was before. Do not use alone. Keep naloxone (Narcan) nearby, and make sure someone with you knows how to use it.

The first person I will call:

If they do not answer, I will call:

A safe place I can go:

What I will do in the next hour:

Who else needs to know (doctor, counselor, group):

What I will do tomorrow morning:

If you are in danger, call 911. For crisis support, call or text 988.

People and Resources

Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number
Name	Number

Crisis: call or text 988
988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 24/7. Chat at 988lifeline.org.

Emergency: 911

Treatment referrals: 1-800-662-4357
SAMHSA National Helpline, free and confidential, 24/7, English and Spanish. Text your ZIP code to 435748 or search FindTreatment.gov.

Free Support Groups

These groups are free to attend. Most meet in person and online. Try more than one until you find a room that fits.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) aa.org
12-step groups for people with a drinking problem.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) na.org
12-step groups for recovery from any drug.

SMART Recovery smartrecovery.org
Skills-based groups with no religious content, for any addiction.

LifeRing Secular Recovery lifering.org
Secular peer support, in person, online, and by email.

Recovery Dharma recoverydharma.org
Peer-led groups based on Buddhist practices.

Celebrate Recovery celebraterecovery.com
Christ-centered 12-step groups, usually hosted by churches.

Women for Sobriety womenforsobriety.org
Support groups for women.

For family and friends al-anon.org
Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, and SMART Recovery Family & Friends.

Online Meetings

Online meetings run at every hour of the day and night. You can use a first name only and keep your camera off. Many also have a phone number you can dial in to with no internet at all.

In The Rooms intherooms.com
Free live video meetings every week for many recovery paths, 12-step and others. A free account with a username is all you need.

AA Online Intergroup aa-intergroup.org
AA meetings by video, phone, chat, and email, around the clock.

Meeting Guide app aa.org
AA's free app lists in-person, online, and phone meetings.

Virtual NA virtual-na.org
Narcotics Anonymous meetings online and by phone.

SMART Recovery Online smartrecovery.org
Online meetings, chat, and message boards.

LifeRing Online lifering.org
Video meetings, chat, forums, and email groups.

Some recovery websites show phone numbers that connect to treatment centers selling their services. For free, neutral referrals, call the SAMHSA National Helpline:

1-800-662-4357

Alder Creek Editions is not connected to any group or website listed in this book. Websites change. If one stops working, the SAMHSA helpline can point you to current options.

About the Author

Stephen Deason has been in Recovery for more than eleven years and still begins and ends each day with meditation and gratitude. He writes The Mile Marker Library for people getting into recovery on their own, including people who cannot attend or afford a treatment program. He writes as a peer, from his own experience, and is not a physician, counselor, lawyer, or financial adviser.

He has spent more than thirty years building teams and companies in healthcare and technology, holds graduate degrees in business and accounting, and writes about recovery, economics, business, and social enterprise. You can find more of his work at aldercreekeditions.com and stephendeason.com.

Alder Creek EDITIONS

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Standalone books and tools for people getting into recovery on their own, and for the people around them. Free printable editions are at aldercreekeditions.com.

1. *Don't Panic: The First Hours After You Stop*
2. *Wallet Crisis Card*
3. *Free Help Directory*
4. *Medications for Addiction, Explained*
5. *Tools You Can Use on Your Own*
6. *Cravings and Hard Hours Workbook*
7. *One Day at a Time, Written Down*
8. *Daily Reader, 365 Days*
9. *Worksheet Library*
10. *Money in Early Recovery*
11. *Work and Recovery*
12. *Finding a Safe Place to Live*
13. *Court, Probation, and Recovery*
14. *For Families*
15. *Group Facilitator Guide*
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The Paid Last Series

Residual Claimants **Forthcoming**

The Owner's Arithmetic **In development**

Capital and Governance **Planned**

Standalone Titles

Valued: How Purpose-Driven Businesses Can Conquer Addiction and Marginalization in America **Forthcoming**

Case studies of companies that hire people in recovery and others shut out of work. Each one earns its place in the market by serving customers first, then carries its social mission alongside.

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