

Activity Page for Group Leaders

Finding and Keeping a Home

Topic: How to find and keep an apartment.

Goal: To help teens understand what they need to do to find an apartment.

Total time of all discussions and activities: 1 hour

What you'll need: pencils, 3x5 cards or sheets of paper, flip chart or blackboard.

Warm-up activity: 10 minutes

■ **Freewrite:** Read the following prompts out loud and give teens 2 minutes to respond. Tell teens that grammar and spelling don't count. The important thing is to get their ideas on paper. The only rule is that they have to keep their pencils moving, even if they're writing "I don't know what to write."

"Describe the ideal home where you would live after care. For instance, what would it look like? How would it be furnished? Where would it be located—close to school, your job, or your family? Who would you live with, if anyone? How would it feel to be in your home?"

■ **Discuss freewrite (optional):** Ask for volunteers to read their freewrite.

Lesson: 50 minutes

■ **Set up the activity:** Divide your class into teams. Tell the students that Scott Burke, the writer, is 19 and has lived everywhere from psychiatric lockdowns to an independent living apartment. He knows what it takes to get and keep an apartment, and in this story he shares his hard-earned knowledge.

■ **Read and make lists:** Scott's "crib sheet" on page 111 is divided into 9 sections. In most of the sections, he gives several pieces of advice. Assign each team to read one or more sections and make a list of each piece of advice he gives (For example, if you have 3 teams, assign each of them 3 sections.) Many youth may have trouble picking out the specific suggestions. As they're working on this, walk around the room and give them suggestions.

■ **Discuss for 30 minutes:** On the board or flip chart write the first heading, "Plan Ahead." Ask the team that had that section to give you their list of Scott's suggestions. Write them on the flip chart. If they've missed some, you can ask if they'd like to include them. (It's OK for the teens to debate whether something should be included, and it's OK not to include everything.)



Scott's Crib Sheet

1. Plan Ahead

- Find out what benefits you can get
- Find out how old you have to be to get benefits
- Get information about other options
- Apply 6 months ahead of time for housing vouchers

2. Know Your Options

- Where do you want to live?
- What kind of apartment do you want?
- Do you want a roommate?
- Are there relatives you could live with?
- Make a list of your priorities

3. Save Money

- Open a bank account
- Start saving money
- Save enough money to move into an apartment, including last month's rent and damage deposit

4. Get References

- Ask someone if you can use them as a reference
- List several people who you could use as references with their contact info

5. Start Searching

- Start looking 6-7 months before you leave
- Look in newspapers and online
- Ask your agency
- Ask everyone you know

6. Dress for Success

- Wear professional clothes
- Use your best speaking voice
- Be on time
- Have positive attitude
- Have ID and other information handy

7. Ask Questions

- Does the rent include heat and hot water?
- Is there anything in the apartment that should be repaired?
- Does the neighborhood feel safe?
- Do you want to bring someone with you to look at the apartment?

8. Read the Lease

- Find an adult you trust to read the lease and explain it to you
- Pay special attention to things that concern you, such as a ban on pets

9. Keep It Down

- Don't make too much noise



When the list is done, ask the teens if they agree with Scott: Are these things that people should do? Would they add anything? Which item do they think is most important? Are any of the items too hard or unrealistic?

Proceed through the story, putting each heading on the flip chart, getting the list from the teens, and discussing or debating the items on the list. Remember: Your goal is not to get a complete list or to have the teens give the “right” answers. You just want to spark a discussion.

For example, when you cover the “get references” section, you might go around the room and ask each teen to name one person they could use as a reference. This gets them thinking about who their potential resources are, and also lets them know that it’s important to have those people in their lives.

At the end, ask whether they think Scott likes to play his music loud or act rowdy (he does).

So why does he say you shouldn’t do that in your first apartment? (Scott has learned to curb some of his desires for his own long-term good.)

By the time you’re done, the teens themselves will have raised and discussed a lot of the main issues involved in getting an apartment. Type the list below and give it to them at the next meeting as their own crib sheet.

■ **Freewrite:** Tell teens to freewrite to the following prompt: “Thinking about an apartment, what makes you anxious? Does Scott offer any helpful suggestions about what you can do to feel less anxious? If not, what do you think you can do?” **(Discuss this freewrite if you have time.)**

On the next page is a summary of Scott’s advice. You can copy it for your teens so they have their own “crib sheet.”



My First Apartment

PLAN AHEAD: Ask your social worker or independent living coordinator about resources or money you'll get when you leave care.

What benefits will you get when you leave foster care? These can include discharge grants and housing vouchers.



1. _____ 4. _____
2. _____ 5. _____
3. _____ 6. _____

For each benefit, when do you need to apply?

1. _____ 4. _____
2. _____ 5. _____
3. _____ 6. _____

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS:

Where do you want to live—close to school, your job, or your family? Why?

ALWAYS VIEW THE APARTMENT BEFORE RENTING:

What will you wear? (Dress for success!) _____

What questions will you ask? (For instance, "Are heat and hot water included in the rent?") _____

SIGN THE LEASE:

What adult do you trust to read the lease and explain it to you?



GET REFERENCES:

Who can you use as a reference for renting an apartment? (List all the people—social workers, teachers, employers, or other adults in your life who will put in a good word for you and any contact info you have for them.)



START SEARCHING:

What newspapers or online sites can you look for to find an apartment?

1. _____ 4. _____
2. _____ 5. _____
3. _____ 6. _____

Who in your agency can you ask for help? _____

Who else could help you find an apartment? _____

What would be your ideal living situation? How would your apartment be furnished? _____



Do you want a roommate to save money? Why or why not? _____

Are there relatives you could live with? If so, who? _____

SAVE MONEY:

Have you opened a bank account and started to save money for your apartment including last month's rent and deposit? If not, why not? If so, good for you! How much money have you saved?
