



PERSONAL REFERENCE QUESTIONS

Use these questions when you are calling a personal reference provided by a tenant applicant on their application. Start the conversation by introducing yourself and explaining the purpose for your call.

1. [Applicant's name] has identified you as a personal reference on the rental application, can you explain to me how you know him/her?

Asking an open-ended question allows you to learn more about the reference than if you just asked, "Are you a friend of [applicant name]?" Be wary of references who seem overly enthusiastic and can't stop talking about the tenant applicant. A standard answer should just define their relationship and hopefully how long they have known each other.

2. If you were to describe [applicant's name] living space/office space in three words, which would you use?

If the reference knows your applicant well, they should be able to answer this question quickly. If there is a lot of hesitation around this question, be wary of how long they have known each other or whether they are trying to specifically tailor their answer to what they think you will want to hear.

3. If you were a landlord, would you rent to them?

Some people may make great friends, family members, or co-workers but that doesn't make them a great tenant. Because this question isn't a standard reference question, it will catch some off guard. If their answer isn't automatically "yes," then wonder why.

4. Can you tell me about [applicant's name] pets? Are they well-behaved?

Asking the question in this format can sometimes reveal tenants who have pets but didn't specify this on the application. If the tenant doesn't have pets, the reference you are speaking with should correct you. If the tenant does have pets, this open-ended question will reveal more than if you just asked, "Do they have pets?"

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely clean, how neat and clean would you say [applicant's name] is? Why did you choose this number?

Obviously, this question is subjective to what the reference considers clean or neat. Most people are not an absolute 10 on the cleanliness scale but be cautious of people who are ranked less than 5 or 6. Asking references to justify their response can also be informative and provide you with more information about the tenant.

6. Does [applicant's name] smoke in the unit or just outside?

Asking the question in this format can sometimes reveal tenants who smoke but didn't specify this on their application. If the tenant doesn't smoke, the reference should correct you. If the tenant does smoke, the format of this question may lead the reference to believe you already know this and are just looking to understand the tenant's smoking habits.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about this tenant?

The reference may not volunteer any more information and that's okay, but this does give you an opportunity to learn more than you would have if you just ended the conversation without this open-ended question.