

ARE ROOMMATE LOCATING SERVICES SAFE?

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By dan the roommate man

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Looking for a roommate?

Roommate locating services make it easy to find someone who shares the same interests and goals as you do. You no longer need to put expensive ads in the paper because most roommate locating services are free. These services are guaranteed to be fast, easy, and convenient... but are they guaranteed to be safe?

In order to increase your security, you should avoid using any locator service which asks you to display your phone number or your current address in your profile. It might seem more convenient to provide potential roommates with every possible way to contact you. However, putting your phone number or current address on the internet is just an open invitation for unwanted phone calls, drive bys and danger. The number of people using the internet is unfathomable, and, unfortunately, there's a chance some weirdo might use a locator service for evil purposes. If you have access to the internet, you have access to some sort of email account, and this is the only real contact information you need to provide for potential roommates.

Due to the mass of subscribers some of these sites have, free roommate locator services do not perform background checks on their members. Every Roommate Locator service I browsed through (about 15) had a section in their disclaimers rejecting any representation of their subscribers' character, credit worthiness, rental history or ability to pay rent. This, then, becomes your responsibility.

You will want a credit report done on the candidate. A credit report will show you how responsible potential roommates are when it comes to finances. Since your name will be on the lease with them, it is important that they have a good history. Some good locator services such as Roommateexpress.com, provide a section for comments. In this section, you should request that people bring a credit history report to the interview. This saves you the trouble and cost of having to get one made for them. They can get a credit report from RPS on line in thirty seconds for just eight dollars.

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You will also want to perform a background check on their criminal history. This process is about forty dollars, which may seem like a lot of money, but not when that's all you have to pay to protect yourself from danger. A friend of mine did not to perform a criminal history check on their new roommate. They moved in, and things were going beautifully. One night, my friend came home to an apartment full of dirty laundry, old newspapers and police officers. His "wonderful" roommate had been busted for possession of marijuana. Even though he was not directly involved, and didn't even know his roommate had marijuana in the apartment, both he and his roommate were evicted. If my friend had done a criminal history check on his new roommate, he would've discovered that he had been convicted before for possession two different times. Suddenly the forty dollars for the report doesn't seem so steep, does it?

Although roommate locator services are convenient, easy and usually free, you need to be careful when deciding on which one to sign up with. Avoid giving out too much information, and once you find a good candidate for your new roommate, make sure they have a good history. You should take all precautions to insure your safety.

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CAN MY CURRENT ROOMMATE JUST THROW ME OUT?

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QUESTION:

I feel that I am being wrongly evicted from our apartment by another roommate who claims to be the only one on the lease. I'm pretty sure I signed it, too, but I can't remember.

ANSWER:

The first thing to do is to get a copy of that lease. Start with the landlord, who probably has a copy (and state law may require him to give you a copy if you request it). If you're on the lease, your roommate cannot get you out — only landlords can evict tenants.

Now, suppose you're not on the lease. All is not lost. If the landlord has treated you as a tenant — by accepting rent directly, for example, or putting your name on the mailbox or doorbell — you may have attained the status of a tenant. Surely, if you and the roommate rented the place together and it was clear that you were on equal footing, you should be given the status of a tenant.

Once you are a tenant, a co-tenant such as your roommate cannot evict you. Only the landlord can do that.

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