

## 10 Critical Questions to Consider About Shelter Rules\*

1. What problem are we trying to solve with this rule? Is this the least burdensome way to address this issue?
2. Is this rule consistent with our mission and core values regarding our shelter work?
3. Are we asking/requiring residents to make up for a shortcoming in our building, funding or staff? Is there a way the organization can take responsibility for making things go well rather than putting that burden on residents?
4. If the rule is related to funder's requirement, what is the exact wording of that requirement? Does the rule satisfy that requirement with the least impact possible on residents?
5. Are the concerns this rule reflects still relevant?
6. Can we address this issue less punitively or without a rule?
7. Do these rules (and the need to enforce them) create the kind of environment we want to create?
8. Is it possible to enforce the rule? If not, what purpose does it serve?
9. Does this rule actually accomplish its purpose? For example, does it actually create safety or does it just create an illusion of safety?
10. Would we really make a resident leave over violation(s) of this rule? (if not, it probably should be treated as guideline for communal living, not as a rule.)



## General Recommendations Regarding Shelter Rules Expectations and Policies

- Expectations/policies/guidelines should positively reflect your agency's mission and values.
- All the written material a program gives residents, including expectations/guidelines/program policies should invite cooperation, collaboration and mutual accountability in their tone and wording.
- Expectations/guidelines/program policies should make a distinction between behaviors that facilitate communal living and behaviors that threaten a resident's ability to stay at the shelter.

**Example:** Whether someone cleans the kitchen on time is not a threat to safety or harmonious communal living on the same level as whether they bring a gun into the building. Our approach and policies should reflect that. In general, expectations and policies should not result in requiring residents to leave the program because they didn't do chores consistently, slept in the "living" room or other behaviors that would be acceptable in one's own home.

- Best practices separate out information and expectations about communal living (detailed information about cleaning, chores, bathroom use, etc.) from the sorts of things that threaten safety (guns, drugs, threats of violence). Whenever possible, give information about communal living outside the context of rules (i.e., during shelter tours, through modeling, house meetings, etc.) **As a general rule, if you would not make a resident leave over it, it should not be in the rules.**
- Control the environment, not the residents:  
Create a physical environment that supports following the rules. If multiple residents repeatedly have difficulty with a particular rule over time, ask yourself if it is possible that a physical fix could alleviate the problem. For example, instead of emphasizing "no stealing" instead provide residents a safe place to lock up their valuables.

\*This list was adapted from "Critical Questions to ask about Shelter Rules and Making Minimal Rules Work" Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence