

## **Apologies guidance**

An apology is an opportunity to restore trust and begin to mend a resident and landlord relationship. A well-made apology is an important and powerful tool in resolving a complaint early. This guide will help you decide what to include in your apology, whether it should be written or in person, and who should give it.

### **What makes a good apology?**

#### **Timely**

A timely apology given as soon as the problem is understood is most effective. The sooner an apology is given, the sooner the trust and relationship between the landlord and resident can begin to mend.

#### **Personal and sincere**

Make sure the apology is personal and written for the specific occasion. Address the recipient directly and use language that makes clear the apology has been written specifically for them. Standard words and phrases can appear impersonal and lack empathy.

Apologies should be sincere and considered. An apology should not give the impression that we are only apologising because we have been told to do so.

"The Housing Ombudsman ordered us to apologise."

An example of a forced apology.

Try instead:

"I am so sorry to read about the difficulties you experienced as a result to the delayed repairs."

This example shows that the apology has been written for the specific occasion and does not give the impression that it has been forced.

#### **Empathetic**

Empathy shows the resident that you have listened to them. An expression of empathy is sensitive to the context of the complaint and recognises a resident's problems. Empathetic apologies are meaningful and use active language.

An empathetic apology does not trivialise the problem or suggest that the resident has not really suffered because of it.

"You were the only resident to bring the problem to our attention, but I am sorry if it has impacted your mental health."

An example of trivialising the issue and suggesting that the resident has not really suffered.

Try instead:

"I am so sorry to hear about your experience and how the delayed repairs have impacted your mental health."

This example expresses empathy and shows the resident that the impact of the problem is understood.

### **Responsibility and regret**

A good apology acknowledges the impact on the resident and includes an explanation of why the problem happened. The organisation should take responsibility for what has gone wrong and should do this by expressing regret.

An apology should include the reason the apology is needed to show a clear understanding of what went wrong.

Apologies should not try to shift the blame or use language that is passive, ambiguous or dismissive about what happened. Avoid using words such as 'if', 'but', 'however' and 'any'.

"We are sorry for any faults that you feel may have happened, but we were waiting for a response from our contractors".

An example of shifting the blame using passive, ambiguous and dismissive language.

Try instead:

"I am sorry that we did not contact you about the delays to your repairs. We should have recorded your contact preferences, and we did not. This meant that you experienced significant delays with no indication of when the problem would be resolved."

This example expresses regret and includes an acceptance of responsibility.

### **What you have learned**

An apology should include evidence of what has been learned from the complaint. The resident should be informed of anything being done to put things right and help prevent the problem from happening again.

"Our records were not adequately kept up to date which meant you experienced significant delays. We have updated our process, so we accurately record residents' contact details in the future. Staff will attend training to familiarise themselves with the new process to ensure residents are notified when we need to change an appointment."

This example explains what has been learned and the steps being taken to prevent the problem from happening again.

### **Remedy**

An apology should explain the remedy being offered to the resident. Remedies could include:

- correcting a mistake
- reimbursement of a charge
- revising a policy or procedure
- training staff
- financial compensation for direct or indirect loss, inconvenience and/or distress

### **How should you apologise?**

#### **In writing**

The Housing Ombudsman usually order apologies in writing. A relevant and suitably senior member of staff should make an apology on behalf of the

organisation when a complaint has been escalated to stage 2 and an apology is warranted or has been ordered.

### **In person**

The resident should be given the choice of whether the apology is in writing or in person when there has been significant detriment.

It is much easier to express and hear empathy and sincerity when an apology is given verbally. We are more likely to recognise if an apology is being well received when we speak to someone. This provides an opportunity to avoid misunderstanding and we can use language and our tone of voice to support what we are saying.

### **Apology checklist**

Use the checklist below to make sure your apology has considered all the points included in this guide.

- Is the apology timely?
- Is it personal?
- Does it avoid the use of standard words and phrases to make sure the apology is written for the specific occasion?
- Does the apology express empathy and show the resident that you have listened to them?
- Have you used meaningful and active language?
- Have you avoided the use of words 'if', 'but', 'however' and 'any' where possible?
- Does the apology acknowledge the impact on the resident and include an explanation of why the problem happened?
- Where it is appropriate to do so, has the organisation taken responsibility for the problem and expressed regret?
- Have you explained what is being done to put things right and offered the resident remedy?

- Does the apology include what the organisation has learned from the complaint?
- Have you explained whether there is anything being done to help prevent the problem from happening again?