# How to

# Deal with a section 21 eviction notice





#### Introduction

Has your private landlord or their agent, or your housing association sent you an eviction notice telling you to leave your home? If this happens to you and you rent from a private landlord and the property you rent is in England, then this guide is for you.

#### This guide:

- explains what the section 21 notice really means,
- explains when and why you may be able to challenge the notice,
- and your landlord's claim for a possession order, and
- helps you work out your options and decide what to do next.

First off – you may be feeling stressed or anxious, but try not to panic. Perhaps a friend, neighbour or family member can sit and read this guide with you. You may want to read it through more than once as you think about your options and decide what to do.

This is just one of our resources on housing and homelessness law. You may find these other guides helpful too:

A survival guide to what to do if you are threatened with homelessness

A survival guide to what to do if you are homeless

How to challenge the decision about your homelessness application

How to fix problems with your privately rented home

#### How to use the links in this guide

If you are reading a digital version of this guide you can simply click on the links in the text to get to other useful websites. These links are underlined and coloured light blue. If you are reading a printed version of the guide, we tell you which words you need to search for online so that the website should be the first one to come up in the list of results. If the link is just to a name of an organisation for example, 'Shelter' you just need to use the name to search online.

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**Tenancies** 

## **Tenancies**

A 'tenancy' or a 'tenancy agreement' is the same thing – a contract between you and your landlord which sets out the basis on which you are allowed to live in the property you rent. A contract doesn't always have to be in writing to count as a contract – but a tenancy or tenancy agreement usually will be. If you are living somewhere and paying rent you definitely have an agreement whether or not there is anything in writing, and the agreement is probably a tenancy agreement.

If you rent from a private landlord (not the council) you will probably have a particular kind of tenancy called an assured shorthold tenancy. Sometimes you may have this type of tenancy with a housing association landlord too. The information in this guide **only** applies to you if your tenancy is an assured shorthold tenancy. If you're not sure what type of tenancy you have, you can search online for 'Shelter's Tenancy Rights Checker' to find out.



### What is a section 21 notice?



What is a section 21 notice?

If you have an assured shorthold tenancy, then a section 21 notice is the most common way of starting the eviction process. Giving you notice is how your landlord tells you that they want you to leave their property and the date they want you to leave by. A section 21 notice gets its name from the section of the Act of Parliament that created it. You may also hear it called an 'eviction notice', a 'notice to quit' or a 'notice seeking possession'.

Using a section 21 notice means a landlord doesn't have to give any reason for asking you to leave. And they can use a speedy route (lawyers and courts call it the 'accelerated possession procedure') to get a possession order that won't normally involve a court hearing, if you don't leave their property by the date given in the section 21 notice.

A possession order is an order made by a court ordering a tenant to leave their landlord's property on a particular date.

# What a section 21 notice looks like

What a section 21 notice looks like

The section 21 notice you get may look different depending on when your tenancy started.

If your tenancy began or was renewed on or after 1st October 2015, the section 21 notice you get must look like this one:

Form 6A Notice seeking possession of a property let on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy.

If it doesn't, then your landlord hasn't used the correct notice and you can challenge their right to get a possession order.

Even if your tenancy began before 1st October 2015, it is likely that your landlord has to use this form.



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Form 6A has been changed to reflect new regulations which came into force on 1 June 2021.

Notice seeking possession of a property let on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (Form 6a)

We would strongly advise landlords not to commence or continue eviction proceedings without a very good reason to do so.

This form should be used where possession of accommodation let under an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) is sought under section 21(1) or (4) of the Housing Act 1988.

From 1 June 2021 this form must be used for all ASTs created on or after 1 October 2015 except for statutory periodic tenancies which have come into being on or after 1 October 2015 with pear of the found type ASTS created by the pear 1 October 2015.

# What getting a section 21 notice means for you

1

Giving or sending you a section 21 notice means that your landlord has the right to go to court and ask for a possession order if you don't leave their property by the date given in the notice.

2

Getting a section 21 notice doesn't mean you have to move out straight away.

Nearly everyone has a right to some help from the council, either to keep your own home or to find somewhere else. A smaller number of people have a right to be found somewhere to live by the council. If you are one of those, and you wish to approach the council, you must **not** move out before you are evicted or until the council offers you housing. If you think this applies to you, tell your council that you've had a section 21 notice straight away. Ask to speak to someone in the housing department who deals with homelessness. Go to A survival guide to what to do if you are threatened with homelessness for more help.

In practice most tenants who can't get help from their council make arrangements to leave by the date given in the notice. If you don't and your landlord has to go to court to get you out, the court will order you to pay your landlord's legal costs.

3

Getting a section 21 notice doesn't mean you have done anything wrong.

You may have been the perfect tenant and paid your rent on time but section 21 allows your landlord to evict you without having to give a reason.

4

Getting a section 21 notice doesn't end your tenancy.

Your tenancy carries on until you leave voluntarily or you are evicted by the court.

5

Getting a section 21 notice doesn't mean you can stop paying your rent.

Your landlord is still entitled to the rent and you should carry on paying it until the day you leave the property. If you don't, your landlord is unlikely to give you a positive reference and you might need this in the future to get another home. Your landlord can also take court action against you to get back any rent you owe them.



What getting a section 21 notice means for you

# What do you want to do?

- Do you want to leave or would you like to stay on in the property if you can? If you'd like to stay on, talk to your landlord calmly and politely. Do they actually want you to leave? Sometimes landlords send a section 21 notice just in case, so that they can go to court straight away at the end of a fixed term tenancy without having to wait, if they decide that is what they want then. They may not have decided that they will definitely do that when the time comes.
- Confirm what you are told or agree with your landlord or their agent in writing – by email or letter and keep a copy.
- Do you just want to look for somewhere else to live and move out by the deadline? If so, there's no need to panic because you have 2 months before you need to leave and even then you don't actually have to leave until your landlord gets a possession order and you are evicted by the court bailiffs. If there is any chance that your local council will find you somewhere to live you must not move out until eviction or the council re-houses you. Talk to your local council - ask to speak to someone in the housing department who deals with homelessness and find out if you are eligible for rehousing by them. For more help go to A survival guide to what to do if you are threatened with homelessness.
- If you find somewhere to live but can't move in until sometime after the section 21 notice date runs out, ask your landlord if you can stay on for a bit. Occasionally a landlord may agree to this. Confirm anything you agree with your landlord or their agent in writing – by email or letter and keep a copy.



- Do you want to challenge the section 21 notice? If you think you want to do this:
  - Weigh up the pros and cons of challenging your landlord's claim for a possession order.
     See Pros and cons of challenging a claim for a possession order.
  - Read the section 21 notice
     carefully to check for mistakes
     (the law calls these 'defects').
     Are they serious enough to mean
     that you may be able to challenge
     the notice if your landlord applies
     for a possession order? See
     Reasons you may be able to
     challenge your landlord's claim
     for a possession order.
  - Get some legal advice to help you decide whether or not to challenge your section 21 notice and your landlord's claim for a possession order. See Getting legal advice.

What do you want to do?

# Pros and cons of challenging a claim for a possession order

#### Cons **Pros** You may be able to delay the Unless you are successful, eviction and stay in the property the court will order you to pay for a few months longer. This the landlord's costs and you will will buy you some time. How still have to leave the property. desperate are you to stay in the property for as long as possible? If there is any chance that your Even if you are successful this local council will accept you as time, your landlord only has to start the process all over again homeless and find you somewhere to live, they may ask you to and if they comply with all the challenge your landlord's claim rules next time round, you will if they are aware that there is still end up having to leave a reason you can do this. their property. You may not get a positive or any reference from your landlord.

Pros and cons of challenging a claim for a possession order

# Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

It's easy to assume your landlord knows the law and the section 21 notice you've had is correct. But in fact landlords and their agents make lots of mistakes. It's possible something is so wrong with the notice that a judge wouldn't grant a possession order if you challenge it when or if your landlord goes to court. So it's worth checking your notice very carefully to see if you've got one or more reasons to challenge it. You should also think about getting some legal advice at this point. See Getting legal advice.

Use our list of reasons to work out if you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order.

In the list of reasons, we often talk about the date you receive a notice. By that we mean the date that the law says you have received it, which may not be the same day you actually see it – it might be before or after that date. Your tenancy agreement will probably say how your landlord can get the notice to you, for example by leaving it at the property you rent or by posting it. It will probably also say when you will be taken to have received the notice.

We also talk about you receiving a notice between certain dates, for example between 1st January and 31st January. By that we mean that the law says that you have received it on or after 1st January up to and including 31st January.

Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order





#### Reason

#### You've been sent the wrong section 21 notice.

If your tenancy began or was renewed on or after 1st October 2015, the section 21 notice you get must look like this: Form 6A Notice seeking possession of a property let on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. There have been different versions of this form – check that the one the landlord has used is exactly the same as the one on the website.

Even if your tenancy began before 1st October 2015, it is likely that the notice has to be in this form.

(continued)

#### Reason

2

### You receive a section 21 notice before you've had your first tenancy of that property for 4 months.

If your landlord sends you a section 21 notice, for example, 3 months after your original tenancy starts, you can challenge their application for a possession order.

#### Reason

3

#### You haven't been given enough notice.

The notice must give you at least 2 months' notice. The 2 months' notice period starts on the date the law says you received it and ends on the date when the notice says you have to leave the property.

#### **Example:**

Trudy's tenancy agreement says that notices can be sent by first class post and will be assumed to arrive the following day. Trudy's landlord posts the section 21 notice to her on April 1st 2024 telling her that she has to leave on May 30th. The notice will be treated as arriving on April 2nd (even if it arrives later than that). Trudy's landlord has not given her enough notice. It is three days short of the required 2 months and so the notice is incorrect.



Reason

4

You have a fixed term tenancy, and in the section 21 notice your landlord asks you to leave before the end of the fixed term.

A fixed term tenancy is a tenancy that only lasts a set amount of time, usually 6 months or 1 year. So if your tenancy lasts for 1 year and runs out in December, but the section 21 notice tells you to leave on a date in November, you can challenge your landlord's claim for possession.

But if your fixed term is longer than 6 months, check your tenancy agreement. Sometimes it may allow notice to be given after 6 months even if the term has not run out.

Reason

5

#### The section 21 notice has expired

You received the notice more than 6 months ago.

(continued)

Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

#### Reason

6

You've received a section 21 notice after:

- a) you complained about disrepair to your landlord in writing, and
- b) your landlord failed to reply positively in writing within 14 days setting out the steps they would take to fix the property.

So long as your local council sends your landlord a notice telling them that they must carry out repairs or improvements before the court deals with your landlord's claim for a possession order, then you can challenge the section 21 notice and your landlord won't be able to send you a new notice for 6 months.

The rules around this reason are complicated. If you think you may be in this situation, try getting some legal advice. See <u>More help</u>.

#### Reason

7

Sometime in the last six months, the council has sent your landlord a notice telling them that they must carry out repairs or improvements to the property you rent from them.

#### Reason

8

Your deposit has not been put in a recognised tenancy deposit protection scheme.

A recognised tenancy deposit protection scheme is a government backed scheme set up to keep your deposit safe so that you get back what you're entitled to when your tenancy ends. If you are an assured shorthold tenant your landlord must have put your deposit in one of these schemes within 30 days of getting your money. You can check if your deposit is in a tenancy deposit protection scheme by searching online for 'check if your tenancy deposit is protected'.

#### Reason

9

At the time you receive the section 21 notice, you've not been given the information the law requires you to have about the protection of your deposit.

There are detailed rules about what information you should get. So for example, you must have:

- the name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and any fax number of the scheme looking after your deposit,
- information about how to get your deposit back when you leave,
- information about what happens if you or the landlord can't agree how much money you're going to be repaid at the end of the tenancy,
- information about how you can resolve this kind of dispute without going to court, and
- a deposit protection certificate signed by the landlord recording the amount paid, the address of the property, both your and the landlord's contact details, and information about how to contact you at the end of the tenancy.

(continued)

Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

#### Reason

10

### You live in a 'house in multiple occupation' and your landlord doesn't meet any necessary licensing requirements.

Your landlord must have a licence, or be in the process of applying for one, if the property you rent counts as a large 'house in multiple occupation' (HMO) needing a licence. The property will be a large house in multiple occupation if:

- It is rented to 5 or more people who form more than
   1 household (so, for example, if you are single and live in a house-share with two couples, that is a total of 5 people who between them form 3 separate households), and
- The tenants share toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities.

Sometimes smaller HMOs also need a licence. Whether the HMO you live in needs a licence varies because different councils are allowed to set their own rules on this.

This means you need to check with your council or on their website. You can also ask the HMO licensing team at your local council to check if the property is registered as a 'house in multiple occupation'. The register may also be available on your council's website.

#### Reason

11

# Your landlord has not given you a valid energy performance certificate or a gas safety certificate dated within the last 12 months, for the property.

(This reason only applies if your tenancy began or was renewed after 1st October 2015)

Your landlord is supposed to carry out a gas safety check before your tenancy starts, and every year after that, and should give you a copy of the record of that check (a gas safety certificate). If you have not been given a copy of the certificate, dated within the last 12 months, any section 21 notice is invalid.

If your landlord failed to carry out a gas safety check before you first moved in, they may never be able to serve a valid section 21 notice. However, this is an area of law that is not clear, and it would be best to seek legal advice if you want to use this reason.

Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

#### Reason

12

Your landlord has not given you the latest copy of the government publication 'How to rent: the checklist for renting in England'. (This only applies if your tenancy began or was renewed after 1st October 2015)

This publication must be the one that was current when your tenancy started or must be the one that is current now for the section 21 notice to be valid.

(continued)

Reason 13	You live in a local authority area where the council runs a landlord licensing scheme and your landlord doesn't meet the licensing requirements.  You can ask your council if they run a landlord licensing scheme. If they do, check if your landlord is licensed.
Reason 4	Your landlord has made a mistake in the section 21 notice that makes the meaning unclear (for example, given the wrong name or address).  Minor slips generally won't be enough to allow you to challenge your landlord's claim for possession.
Reason 15	Your landlord or their agent has charged you any fee except the few specific fees they are allowed to charge you, and either your tenancy began on or after 01/06/19 or the fee was charged after 01/06/20.
	For the full list of fees they can charge look at: gov.uk/government/collections/tenant-fees-act.
	They include:
	• rent,
	<ul> <li>a deposit of no more than 5 weeks rent,</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>a holding deposit of no more than 1 week (that must be repaid to you or can be taken off the rent you owe if you agree),</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>a charge for replacing a key,</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>limited fees if you ask to change or end the tenancy early</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Interest on rent that you pay late.</li> </ul>
	Nearly Legal's section 21 eviction flow chart can also help you to work out if your section 21 notice is valid or not –

Reasons you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

If any of these reasons apply to you, you may be able to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order. If in doubt or to check that you're right, get some legal advice, see <a href="More help">More help</a>.

nearlylegal.co.uk/section-21-flowchart/

# How to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

If you find you have one or more reasons to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order, what you do next depends on what's important to you in your particular situation. If you are planning to leave at the end of your tenancy anyway, there may be no point in contacting your landlord or their agent to tell them what you think is wrong. You will probably want to focus on finding somewhere else to live and making sure you get your deposit back.

If you're desperate to stay where you are for as long as possible, then you probably want to sit tight when you get

the section 21 notice and wait for your landlord to start possession proceedings. Don't tell them in advance about the mistake you have found – save it up until you receive the court papers. But get some legal advice when you first get the notice (see More help) and ask if you are eligible for legal aid (see Getting legal advice).

You also need to know a little bit about the court process so you understand when you need to do something if you're going to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order.

What usually happens is this:

#### Step 1

The landlord or their agent completes court form N5B: Claim for possession of property.

#### Step 2

The landlord or their agent sends the completed claim form, together with a copy of your tenancy agreement and the section 21 notice and the fee, to the court. They must also enclose a lot of other documents relating to your tenancy. It is by reading these closely that you will usually discover the landlord's mistakes.

#### Step 3

The court sends you a copy of the claim form, your tenancy agreement and the section 21 notice together with court form N11B: Defence form.

#### Step 4

If you do nothing when you get the landlord's claim, the court will just go ahead and make the possession order. There will be no court hearing unless you complete and return the Defence form. The possession order will probably arrive about 6-8 weeks later, or more if your local county court is very busy.

How to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

#### How to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order

#### Step 5

If you want to challenge your landlord's claim, you or your lawyer must complete and return the Defence form. Explain what you disagree with in the claim.

#### Step 6

If you want the court to allow you longer than 14 days to leave the property, you must complete and return the Defence form. Courts can grant extensions up to a maximum of 42 days/6 weeks. You can ask for more time in which to leave whether or not you are challenging your landlord's claim for a possession order. The court will only give you longer than 14 days if you can show you will suffer exceptional hardship otherwise. But don't be put off by the words 'exceptional hardship'. Courts are generally willing to give you more time if you give them a reason. For example, perhaps you're expecting a baby any day or you are a wheelchair user who needs a ground floor property and it will be harder and take you longer to find alternative accommodation.

#### Step 7

If you decide to complete and return the Defence form to the court, you must do this by the date set. The front page of the claim form sets this out – it will be about 2 weeks from when you receive it. If you miss this deadline, the court will make a possession order. If you are in this position and want to challenge the possession order, get legal advice urgently.

#### Step 8

If the court gets the Defence form in time, it will fix a hearing date. The court will send you a notice telling you when and where the hearing will take place. It is likely to be at least six weeks away or longer.

#### Step 9

At the hearing the judge will listen to what you or your lawyer say and decide whether or not to grant your landlord a possession order and an order that you pay their costs.

#### Step 10

If your challenge is successful and your landlord fails to get a possession order, you can stay in the property and must go on paying the rent. But there is nothing to stop your landlord sending you another section 21 notice immediately or as soon as they have corrected any mistakes. If they get the process right this time, they will get their possession order – it's only a matter of time. But that may give you what you want – more time.

So – if you can challenge the section 21 notice and your landlord's claim for a possession order, you or your lawyer must complete a Defence form and send it to the court within the deadline.

# **Getting legal advice**

Don't be put off getting legal advice about what you can do if you get a section 21 notice because you think you can't afford it. Legal aid is a government scheme to help people who live on a low income, have few savings and meet specific other criteria, pay for legal advice, representation and other help.

Legal aid is still available to pay for a lawyer to help you if you face being evicted from your home and to advise you about your section 21 notice – depending on your financial circumstances. You can check if you are financially eligible for legal aid by searching online for 'check legal aid'.

You can find solicitors that do legal aid housing law by searching online for 'find a legal aid adviser'. This takes you to a GOV.UK page with a search option.

You may also find a solicitor that does housing law at your local law centre. See More help.

Getting legal advice will help you decide what to do next and whether or not to challenge your landlord's claim for a possession order.



It is best not to deal with an eviction notice on your own, so if possible get some help. If you can't find a housing lawyer to help you, there are lots of other places to get housing advice. For more information about where to go for advice, see <a href="More help">More help</a>.

Try not to leave it to the last minute before getting advice. Many advice centres have waiting lists so you may have to wait a while before you get to see an adviser.

Getting legal advice

# More help

**Tenancy Relations Service** – contact your local council to find out if they run a tenancy relations service. Many do. If so, ask to speak to a tenancy relations officer and they should be able to advise you about your eviction notice, for free. They can also help if it seems you are being asked to leave your home unlawfully and with illegal eviction or harassment. In some councils the tenancy relations service operates via a Housing Advice Centre or the Housing Options Team. If your local council says they don't have a tenancy relations service, ask them if they have a housing advice centre or housing options team instead.

Shelter has lots of useful information on their website and a webchat service. Call their helpline if you:

- are homeless,
- have nowhere to stay tonight,
- are worried about losing your home in the next two months, or
- are at risk of harm or abuse.

Free housing advice helpline – **0808 800 4444**. The line is open from 8am-6pm Mondays – Fridays. Closed Bank Holidays. Calls are free from UK landlines and all major UK mobile operators. There's also a 'chat with us' service on their website.

Shelter also has some advice centres in England where you can go to get personal, face-to-face advice from a housing specialist. To find your nearest centre search online for <a href="Shelter - get help">Shelter - get help</a>, click on Find local services, and then search for an adviser using your postcode.

**Citizens Advice** is the national body for Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB). Search online for Citizens Advice and then scroll down their homepage to search for a <u>CAB</u> near you.

Community organisations – some local community organisations offer housing advice, and sometimes in languages other than English. If there's a community organisation near where you live, it's worth asking them if they can help. If you don't know whether there is one, ask your local council if they know of any.

Law Centres employ solicitors and other workers who specialise in helping people with housing, employment, immigration, education, community care, and benefit problems. Search online for <a href="Law Centres network">Law Centres network</a> advice and use your postcode to find a local centre.

LawWorks connects people in need of legal advice and assistance with lawyers willing to meet those needs for free. It supports 170 legal advice clinics across England and Wales. The majority of these law clinics take place in the evening and provide free initial advice to individuals with a particular focus on social welfare issues, employment law, housing matters and consumer disputes. Search online for <a href="LawWorks">LawWorks</a> legal advice to find a clinic near you.

More help

# What does it mean?



**Accelerated possession procedure** – a special process that landlords can use to get a possession order if a tenant has an assured shorthold tenancy. The process is not always that quick but most orders are made without a court hearing taking place.

**Claim** – a formal request that starts court proceedings.

**Defect** – a mistake in the section 21 notice.

**Possession order** – an order made by a court ordering a tenant to leave their landlord's property on a particular date.

What does it mean?

The information in this guide applies to England and Wales and is for general purposes only. The law is different in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

The law is complicated. We have simplified things in the guide. Please don't rely on this guide as a complete statement of the law or as a substitute for getting legal advice about what to do in the specific circumstances of your case.

The cases we refer to are not always real but show a typical situation. We have included them to help you think about how to deal with your own situation.

# advicenow.org.uk

Making sense of the law and your rights

If you would like this guide in another format please email guides@lawforlife.org.uk

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