Locked out of your condo when the shared entrance won't open?

Getting back into your condo when the shared entrance is locked

If you find yourself standing outside your condo building with the shared entrance locked and no key in hand, the first thing to do is check whether you can reach someone inside. Call a neighbor or the property manager if you have their number. If not, and if the door has an intercom system, try buzzing a unit whose occupant might let you in. But when no one answers, or when the intercom is broken, you need another plan.

For a standard locked door that uses a key cylinder, your options depend on what kind of lock it is. Many shared entrances use a deadbolt or a latch that requires a key from the outside. If the mechanism is a simple spring latch, sometimes a thin, flexible tool can push it back, but that is a technique best left to someone who knows what they are doing. Trying it yourself may damage the door or the lock and leave you with a bigger problem. In that situation, calling an **emergency locksmith service** is the most direct way to get back inside without causing harm to the building's entry system.

Before you call, though, there are a few things to think about. First, confirm that you have no other way in. Check all the other exterior doors, sometimes a side or rear door is unlocked, or a garage entrance opens with a code. If you left a window open on a lower floor, that might be an option, but climbing through windows is risky and could damage screens or frames. Better to exhaust all safe alternatives before reaching for the phone.

What to do when the lock has a broken key inside

One common reason the shared entrance is locked and won't open is that a broken key is stuck in the cylinder. A **broken key** can jam the mechanism so that even a properly working key cannot turn the lock. The key fragment might be lodged deep inside, preventing the pins from moving. In that case, simply trying to turn the lock with another key will not work. You might feel the key go in partway and then stop, or it may go in fully but refuse to turn.

If you suspect a broken key is the issue, do not force the lock. Forcing it can push the fragment deeper, making **broken key extraction** more difficult. Instead, if you have a pair of fine-tipped tweezers or a small pick, you might try to pull the fragment out gently. This works only if part of the key is sticking out enough to grip. If the break is flush with the face of the cylinder, you will likely need a professional tool that hooks the fragment and pulls it straight out. Many locksmiths carry a broken key extractor set that does exactly that.

However, if you are not comfortable working with tiny tools and delicate lock parts, it is wise to leave the job to someone who does this daily. A locksmith can remove the fragment, check whether the cylinder was damaged, and rekey or replace it if needed. That is especially important for a shared entrance, because the lock serves many residents and needs to work reliably for everyone.

Verifying your right to enter

Before any locksmith can open a shared entrance, they must confirm that you have a right to be inside. This is a standard security measure. You will be asked to show **photo identification** and some form of **proof of residence**, a lease, a utility bill, or a piece of mail with your name and the building's address. If you do not have those documents on you, the property manager or a neighbor might vouch for you. The locksmith cannot and should not open a door for someone who cannot demonstrate that they live there or have permission from someone who does.

If you arrive late at night and cannot produce proof, the locksmith may need to contact the property manager or the building's security company to verify your identity. That can add time, so it helps to have your ID and a piece of mail ready in advance. Some buildings also keep a list of authorized residents with the management office; if the locksmith can reach that office, the process goes faster.



Mobile service and what to expect

A **mobile service** locksmith typically arrives in a van equipped with the tools and parts needed for most lock and key problems. For a shared entrance, they might need to pick the lock,

perform a broken key extraction, or drill out the cylinder if the lock is beyond repair. Drilling is a last resort because it destroys the cylinder, and the property manager will need to replace it afterward. Most of the time, the locksmith can open the door without damaging the lock, using a set of picks or a bypass tool.

Once the door is open, the locksmith can also advise on upgrades. For instance, if the lock is old and prone to jamming, or if the cylinder is worn, replacing it with a newer model might prevent future lockouts. That is a decision for the property manager or the condo board, but it is worth mentioning to them so they can consider it.

After you are inside, take a moment to think about how to avoid this situation again. If the lock on the shared entrance is hard to turn or feels sticky, tell the property manager. A little maintenance, lubrication, adjustment of the strike plate, or replacement of a worn spring, can keep the lock working smoothly. Carry a spare key in your wallet or leave one with a trusted neighbor. Some buildings also install keyless entry systems with a keypad or a fob, which eliminates the problem of lost keys altogether. But for those that still use a traditional lock and key, being prepared is the best defense against a lockout.

When you call for help, an emergency locksmith service can respond quickly, but the time it takes depends on how busy they are and how far they have to travel. Having your identification ready, knowing the building's address, and being able to describe the lock type (deadbolt, latch, or electronic) will help the locksmith come prepared. If the broken key extraction requires special tools, the locksmith will bring them. If the lock needs to be drilled out, they will have a replacement cylinder on hand. The goal is to get you inside safely and with minimal damage to the door.

In the end, a locked shared entrance is an inconvenience, but it is a solvable one. Whether the problem is a lost key, a broken key stuck in the cylinder, or a lock that simply will not turn, the fix usually involves a clear head, a phone call, and a few minutes of patience. And once you are back inside, you can take steps to make sure it does not happen again.