

RV Dead Outlet & GFCI Troubleshooting Checklist

For the Smart RVer Podcast episode: RV Outlets Not Working? It Might Be One GFCI

Use this checklist when RV outlets stop working, a GFCI keeps tripping, or you need to figure out whether the problem is a simple reset, moisture, an appliance, an adapter, or something that needs professional help.

Safety reminder: 120-volt AC power can hurt you. If anything smells burnt, feels hot, sparks, trips repeatedly, or you are unsure what you are doing, stop and get qualified help.

1. Confirm It Is a 120-Volt Outlet Issue

A GFCI protects the 120-volt outlet circuit. It usually does not explain dead 12-volt lights, pump, furnace controls, or slide-outs.

- ☐ The problem is with wall outlets or plug-in appliances, not lights, water pump, furnace, slides, or awnings.
- ☐ Other 120-volt items are checked: microwave, air conditioner, electric water heater side, or other outlets.
- ☐ RV is connected to shore power or generator power, or the inverter is turned on if outlets are inverter-fed.
- ☐ You are not mixing a 12-volt DC problem with a 120-volt AC outlet problem.

2. Check the Breaker Panel First

- ☐ Locate the RV 120-volt breaker panel.
- ☐ Look for a breaker that is tripped or sitting between ON and OFF.
- ☐ Reset by turning the breaker fully OFF, then back ON.
- ☐ If the breaker trips again immediately, stop and diagnose before resetting repeatedly.
- ☐ Check for signs of heat, burning smell, discoloration, or loose panel cover.

3. Find All GFCI Outlets

The dead outlet may not be the outlet with the reset button. One GFCI can protect several downstream outlets.

- ☐ Bathroom GFCI outlet checked.
- ☐ Kitchen / galley GFCI outlet checked.
- ☐ Outside receptacle checked.
- ☐ Basement or storage compartment outlet checked.
- ☐ Entertainment center, under-cabinet, or hidden outlet checked.
- ☐ Any outlet with TEST and RESET buttons checked.

4. Reset the GFCI Correctly

- ☐ Press RESET firmly on each GFCI outlet found.
- ☐ Press TEST, then RESET to confirm the GFCI responds if it has power and is safe to test.
- ☐ If RESET will not hold, unplug devices from the circuit and try again.
- ☐ If it still will not reset, the fault may still be present or the GFCI may have failed.
- ☐ Do not bypass, remove, or defeat GFCI protection.

5. Unplug All Devices

- ☐ Unplug everything from the dead outlet and any outlets that may be on the same GFCI circuit.
- ☐ Unplug coffee maker, toaster, hair dryer, space heater, dehumidifier, portable fridge, chargers, outdoor lights, and battery chargers.
- ☐ Reset the GFCI with everything unplugged.
- ☐ If it resets with everything unplugged, one of the devices or cords may be the problem.
- ☐ If it trips with nothing plugged in, suspect moisture, wiring, outlet failure, or another downstream fault.

6. Check Outside Outlets for Moisture

If the GFCI trips after rain or washing the RV, moisture should move to the top of the suspect list.

- ☐ Inspect outside outlet covers for cracks, missing seals, or loose covers.
- ☐ Look for water inside the receptacle box or around the cover.
- ☐ Think about recent rain, RV washing, pressure washing, snow, or damp storage compartments.
- ☐ Check basement outlets and compartment outlets for dampness.
- ☐ Allow damp areas to dry before retesting, and replace damaged covers or outlets as needed.

7. Test One Appliance at a Time

- ☐ With the GFCI reset, plug in one device and test.
- ☐ Unplug that device, then test the next one.
- ☐ If the GFCI trips when one specific device is plugged in, remove that device from service until inspected.
- ☐ Inspect appliance cords and plugs for cuts, melted spots, looseness, or moisture.
- ☐ Avoid using high-draw appliances together on the same circuit.

8. Inspect Extension Cords, Adapters, and Pedestal Power

Sometimes the problem starts outside the RV at the cord, adapter, or campground pedestal.

- ☐ Inspect extension cords for damage, heat marks, loose ends, or cuts.
- ☐ Inspect 15/30/50-amp adapters and dogbones for looseness, heat, or discoloration.
- ☐ Make sure cord ends are dry and fully seated.
- ☐ Check the campground pedestal for worn receptacles, moisture, or a breaker that trips repeatedly.
- ☐ Use a quality surge protector or electrical management system when possible.

9. Know When to Call a Pro

- ☐ GFCI trips immediately with nothing plugged in.
- ☐ Breaker trips repeatedly.
- ☐ Outlet, cord, or adapter feels hot.
- ☐ You smell burning or see sparks, melting, or discoloration.
- ☐ There is water damage near wiring or outlets.
- ☐ You are not comfortable testing or replacing 120-volt components.
- ☐ The problem returns after basic checks.

10. Notes

Dead outlet location: _____

GFCI reset location: _____

What was plugged in: _____

Likely cause: _____

Repair or part needed: _____

Follow-up check: _____