



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



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ROOMMATE SURVIVAL GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Living together in a roommate situation is an important part of your college experience. It takes commitment, involvement and work to benefit from school. These same qualities are needed if you want a good, productive relationship with your roommates.

This pamphlet contains some "How to's" to help you get along with your roommates.

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COMMUNICATION

A good beginning can help lead to positive long term relations with your roommate(s). It is important to begin talking and communicating with each other honestly and openly. In so doing, roommates can quickly come to an understanding of each other's needs regarding lifestyles and living situations. Mutual agreement at the beginning can avoid many problems in the future.

Here are some suggestions of some things you and your roommates should consider, discuss and decide together.

1. How to pay the rent. Does the lease specify how rent is to be paid? If not, should each roommate write a check for his/her share? Should one roommate collect the money from the others and write one check? What if someone's rent is late? (Keep a common file for all rent receipts and other payments, as well as a copy of the lease and Room Condition Report you should make out when you move in.)
2. Telephone and Utilities. In whose name should utilities be listed? Who should pay the deposit? Who will be responsible for collecting the money and making sure these bills get paid? (Consider dividing these responsibilities among roommates.)
3. Food. Do any of you have strong feelings about food that will affect your roommates? Are you going to buy food collectively? Will you have household meals or eat separately? How will you divide shopping, cooking and clean-up duties? If food is bought and owned separately, are there separate storage places in the refrigerator and cabinets for each roommate's food? May one roommate use another's food? If so, how soon must it be replaced or paid for?
4. Household Duties. What is each roommate's idea of a clean/messy room or house? How clean should the place be? Who is responsible for cleaning areas that you share? How often? How should you divide up the work? Who takes out the garbage? Who waters the plants? Who is going to water and mow the yard? (Under Illinois law, roommates are "jointly and severally liable" for damages caused to the premises, as well as for the rent itself.)



Did you get a visit by an "energy company" or "electric company" person? Did they ask for a copy of your electric bill? Ask if you had gotten your \$25 gift card? Tell you that you are paying too much for electricity or that there is a new program that will save you money?

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5. Smoking, Drinking and Drugs. Are these activities okay in general? Okay if confined to the roommate's room? Not okay at all? What about friends who smoke, drink or do drugs when they visit?
6. Guests. How do you feel about each other's friends? How about overnight guests: where can they sleep? how often may they come? how long may they stay? How about parties: how often? do you want any house rules? who will provide food/drink? who will clean up?
7. Male Friends/Female Friends. Are present (or future) friends allowed to spend the night and how often? At what point do they stop being "overnight guests" and become additional roommates who must share in rent and household duties? To become additional roommates, do they first need the approval of the other roommates?
8. Privacy. What are each roommate's needs for privacy?
9. Noise. At what hour should loud noise end so roommates can study or sleep?
10. Study Habits. How important are grades? When and where do you like to study? Do you need absolute quiet to study?
11. Sharing and Borrowing. May things like stereos, TV's, kitchen equipment bikes and motor vehicles be shared or are they off limits? Are there any rules about their use? May roommates borrow each other's clothes, books, records, etc? Must they get permission each time?
12. Pets. Are pets allowed? Are there any limits? Who will feed and care for pets? Do pets have full run of the place or are they confined to the roommate's area? (Beware that keeping a friend's pet in an apartment, even for a few hours or minutes, may subject you to a fine by the landlord if the lease prohibits pets.)
13. Security. Should doors be locked at night? When no one is home? Where will you keep an extra key? Should anyone besides the roommates have a key or know about the extra key?
14. Telephone Messages. How should you answer the phone? Where should messages be written and kept? How should you handle roommate's parents when they call?
15. Moving Out. Is everyone going to be available to clean the apartment before you vacate? Should the roommate(s) who cleans up the apartment receive monetary credit for the work if others don't help?
16. Interests. What do you like to do? Are there common interests or activities that you can share (skiing, movies, bowling) that will enhance your relationship as roommates?

It will be helpful to write down the agreements you and your roommates make on these items to: (1) ensure that the agreement is clear and acceptable to every one; (2) encourage roommates' commitment to them; (3) prevent faulty memory from causing disagreement about the agreements; and, (4) provide a basis to enforce the agreements legally if necessary. The Tenant Union Office has a form available called Roommate Agreement for this purpose.

A successful roommate situation requires good communication. Take time to talk frequently to each other. Chatting with each other helps keep up the basic relationship which can provide the underpinning for a harmonious relationship. Let each other know who you are and what's happening in your life. If something in the household is bothering you (it's too noisy to sleep, someone is drinking your milk, the house/room is too messy) talk it over with your roommate(s) as soon as possible. Be honest in telling your roommate what your needs are in the household.

Keep communicating. Try to talk things out on a regular basis. There are various ways to keep in touch with your roommates

- hold regular household meetings (such as once a week)
- leave notes on the refrigerator
- schedule a "roommates only" meal together (even if you cook separately).

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CONFLICT

Don't be dismayed if you find yourself in conflict with your roommate(s). Disagreements between people are inevitable, especially in a roommating situation where people live together and interact on a daily basis. Conflicts usually occur when changes are needed and when behaviors, thoughts and feelings need to be re-examined. Don't be afraid to confront your roommates about what is bothering you. If you know how to deal with conflict pos and productively, all involved can benefit from the situation.

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SOME STEPS IN RESOLVING CONFLICT

1. Get together everyone involved in the conflict;
2. Each roommate should take a turn describing his/her perception of the situation, how he or she feels about it and what he/she wants.
3. Together, come to an agreement on what the conflict is.

4. Everyone should agree to be willing to compromise something to come up with a solution.
5. Together, describe a situation which would be a compromise among yourselves.
6. Come to an agreement on the described situation.
7. Talk about what changes will be needed to bring about the acceptable situation.
8. Together, make a plan of action which will help achieve the desired new situation and set a time frame for these changes.
9. Make a commitment to make the necessary changes.
10. Set a future date to evaluate the situation and to re-negotiate any differences if necessary.

These steps sound very simple but to make them work you need to know how to fight fair. The key to successful dispute resolution is effective communication. To resolve conflict, communicate with each other on a one-to-one equal basis and avoid behavior that will break down communication.

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RULES OF SUCCESSFUL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

1. Start Right. Set a time to discuss the conflict that is convenient to everyone involved. Avoid bringing up the problem when your roommate is walking out the door on the way to a mid-term exam. A better approach would be, "We need to talk about what is going on. When do you have time to work this out?" Schedule enough time so you will be able to prevent time pressure.
2. Remember that Everyone Involved is an Equal and Should have Equal Rights to be Heard in the Discussion. To create a sense of equality, you may wish to meet at a neutral place. It may help to have everyone sit on the floor or at a table (all at the same level).
3. Set Aside your Desire to "Win". Winning an argument is not the same as succeeding in conflict where, together with your roommates, you will all win over the conflict situation.
4. Each Roommate Should Be Able to Talk Freely About how He/She Feels. Make sure that each person's ideas and feelings are clear to everyone involved. Be willing to share your feelings honestly and don't expect others to know how you feel without being told.
5. Assume Each Other's Perspective. Ask your roommate to reverse positions, i.e., to stand in your shoes while you stand in theirs. This can sometimes be the most effective way of getting your point across and, contrariwise, understanding where your roommate is coming from.
6. Avoid Blaming Each Other. Assessing blame often has the effect of making the other party defensive and anxious to find fault with you, widening instead of narrowing the conflict.
7. Talk About Actions Which can be Changed Rather than Personality. "You leave your books on the dining room table," can lead to a change of habit; while, "You're a lazy slob," will only lead to defensiveness and hostility. Personal attacks destroy communication of productive ideas.
8. Don't Team Up with One Roommate Against Another. This creates defensiveness in the third roommate. You are all working together for a solution.
9. Don't Psycho-Analyze your Roommate. Avoid "Maybe you don't realize this about yourself, but..." Most people don't like the feeling of being analyzed. Instead, take responsibility for your own feelings. A better approach might be, "What you're doing makes me feel..."
10. If your Roommates Begin Fighting Unfairly, Take Responsibility for Getting Things Back on the Right Track. You don't have to let a confrontation go from bad to worse. Help set and hold the time of the discussion by your example.
11. Don't Put your Roommate on the Spot by Insisting on an Immediate Response to Your Demands. If possible, give each other time (at least overnight) to think over a specific demand or suggested cause of action.

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THE UNCOMMUNICATIVE ROOMMATE

Despite your best efforts, it may happen that a roommate simply refuses to participate in efforts to overcome the problems which divide you. Even in such unfortunate circumstances, steps can be taken to keep in check the financial and other risks which may be present and minimize the hard feelings between you.

First, the effort to communicate on your part should continue at least as to the matters relating to your joint responsibility, i.e., payment of bills and observance of rules and regulations of your apartment lease, dorm, etc.

Second, contact your landlord and/or dorm R.A. about any situation which may jeopardize your relationship with the landlord or the University.

Third, without assuming sole responsibility for rent and utilities, you should consider taking control of these accounts to insure that additional expenses are not incurred which you can be

held accountable for.

Fourth, control your temper. Retaliation will not only certainly make the situation worse, it may be illegal and subject you to court action or a criminal complaint.

Finally, realize that roommates can and have survived despite not liking each other. "Getting along" in some cases means agreeing to disagree or reaching an understanding where each party goes his or her own way with minimal contact with or interference from the other.

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SOMETIMES OUTSIDE HELP IS NEEDED

-If you and your roommates have tried to work out your conflicts among yourselves but weren't able to get anywhere or, if you and your roommates keep confronting each other over the same issues but never make any progress, a third party may be able to mediate.

-If you have a personal problem such as a difficult relationship with your parents or boyfriend/girlfriend that makes it hard to get along with your roommates, you can get individual help to deal with basic problems that are affecting other areas of your life.

-If you and your roommates have a conflict over a question that none of you can answer, find someone who knows the answer who can help you resolve this conflict.

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WHERE YOU CAN GET OUTSIDE HELP

Friends can make good listeners and good mediators. Residence HaLL Advisors (RA's) and Counselors will help University housed students deal with roommate problems (available in each Hall). Counseling Center provides psychological, vocational and academic counseling for students (206 Student Services Building, 333-3704). Mental Health Program provides psychological and psychiatric counseling for students (McKinley Health Center, 333-2705). Psychological Services Center provides psychological services for the community (505 E. Green, 333-0041). Student Conflict Resolution provides mediators and assistance in resolution of conflicts between students (300 Student Services, 333-3680) www.conflictresolution.illinois.edu. Student Legal Service provides legal information but cannot represent one student against another (324 Illini Union, 333-9053). Tenant Union provides information but does not mediate between roommates (326 Illini Union, 333-0112).

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WHEN A ROOMMATE MOVES OUT

If you are thinking of moving out of your apartment because of roommate or other trouble, or your roommate is thinking of moving out or has moved out already, it is best to get legal assistance concerning the situation immediately. The most common legal issues presented when a roommate leaves are the respective obligations of the parties to pay rent and/or utilities and the rights of the departed roommate to sublet his or her share of the apartment. The answers to these questions depend on a variety of factors including applicable provisions in your lease, any written and/or oral agreements made by you as roommates, the reasons why the departed roommate left, etc. Generally speaking, a departed roommate continues to have the legal duty to pay his or her share of rent and utilities, but also has the legal right to sublet. Specific circumstances may change the legal position of the parties, however. Again, consult an attorney.

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