

How to: Roommate Edition

Having a roommate can be a cause of anxiety for college students. It's a challenging situation but it can also be a very rewarding and pleasant experience. In fact, many college roommates choose to share rooms for years and even become lifelong friends.

Here are a few tips to help make this relationship as enjoyable and supportive as possible.

Communication.

You will be sharing a small space for a long time and you will need to respect each other's needs and preferences. Are you a clean freak? Do you like to play music when you study? Don't assume that your roommate will just figure all this out; communicate these needs, preferences, and expectations as soon as possible. This will save you both a lot of conflict. If you need something to be said, just say it. Also be willing to compromise.

Your roommate's stuff is your roommate's stuff.

This is the most common problem that arises between roommates. Don't just assume that they won't mind if you finish their leftovers; they probably will. Always ask for permission before borrowing or using anything that belongs to your roommate.

Be respectful.

Your roommate may need some quiet time to study, and bringing a group of friends into your room may be very irritating. Let them know if you plan to have guests over. Perhaps you can alter who gets the room and who goes to the library. Talk to your roommate about this and make sure you don't overstep any boundaries when inviting others over.

Create an agreement.

Include things like how often a significant other can spend the night, how often areas need to be cleaned and how chores need to be divided up. It's better to agree on things early on than to just assume you are all on the same page.

Communicate about how you each do things.

What is your idea of cleaning a bathroom? Does "doing the dishes" include putting them away once they are dry?

Discuss what food, if any, you want to share.

Have an adult conversation.

A lot can be accomplished by talking about what you will or will not accept. Small arguments can be avoided a lot more quickly if you do this when you first move in instead of waiting until something happens to upset you both.

Respect everyone's finances.

Pay your bills on time. Put a calendar in a communal place and write the amount everyone needs to pay on the due date each month.

Lock up.

Imagine your roommate steps out for a moment to grab a snack and forgets to lock the door. You come home to find your laptop gone. Locking the doors and windows are important for keeping you, your roommate, and your property safe.

Good friends do not always make good roommates. Good roommates do not always make good friends.

Be pleasant and friendly with your roommate, but respect each other's space. Trying to force a best friend relationship will only cause strain for both of you. Be friendly but make sure you each have your own life and social circles.

Exchange emergency information with each other.

If you are in the hospital who should your roommate call? Do you have serious allergies? Is there medical issues they should be made aware of?

Remember that not everyone was raised like you.

They may have an entirely different lifestyle, ideology, and perspective than yours. Be open to this new perspective and respect the differences between you. If you do, you'll find the diversity this experience brings into your life to be very rewarding.

The one constant is change.

College is a time for learning and growing. You and your roommate will likely change a lot during your time together. Be aware of the changes as they come and don't cling to the past. New challenges will arise and you may need to address new issues or come to a new agreement. You may start out close and slowly grow apart, or the opposite may be true. Be open to this change and go with the flow.

Treat your roommate how you want to be treated.

You may sometimes be unsure how to solve a problem between you. When in doubt, follow the Golden Rule. That way no matter what happens you will know that you treat your roommate respectfully and you will have no regrets.

Let your roommate know when you're having a tough time or feeling emotional.

When you're sensitive to other's needs, the atmosphere stays peaceful and everyone is taken care of.

But what do you do if you and your roommate just can't get along?

Get some distance.

If every little thing they are doing is getting on your last nerve but you otherwise like your roommate, find some ways to get some distance. Maybe you can go home for the weekend or spend some time at a friend's place. If you are friends with your roommate, you can likely talk to them about what might be bothering you and the two of you can work it out.

Figure out what is really bothering you.

Do you really hate your roommate or do you just hate the way they leave out their dirty clothes? When you let little things like this bother you day after day without doing anything about them, you can build up resentment quickly. Don't leave a passive aggressive note, but just casually

mention something to your roommate. They may not even realize they are bothering you. If you get it out in the open, you both will feel better.

Use your resources.

If you're living in a dorm, a great first step is to talk to your resident assistant (RA). They will have resources to help you and they can give you advice on what to do for your particular situation. RA's are trained to help you navigate tricky situations and to just be there for you.

Don't get revenge.

It can be very tempting to retaliate and try to get back at your roommate when they leave a mess or when they eat your food without asking, but doing this is never going to make things better. Your roommate should respect you and your property, but that doesn't give you the right to disrespect them when they don't. Be the bigger person and work it out. Trying to get revenge will only make it harder for you to get along with them in the future.

Remember that you are roommates.

Nobody said you had to be best friends and trying too hard can make the situation worse. You don't have to form a lifelong bond; you just have to get along. Maybe it's time to give up on the really high expectations you have for you and your roommate to become besties. Figure out what you need to do to live peacefully with each other and when the semester or year is over, you can go your separate ways.

Conflict resolution.

Learning how to get along with other people, even if you don't like them very much, is actually a really good skill to have for the workplace and for all your relationships in your life. Finding a technique that works well for you will be a great asset for you to carry with you for the rest of your life. The bottom line is, you just need to do what is necessary for you to feel comfortable and at home in your room or apartment. It may mean you have to step out of your comfort zone, especially if you don't like conflict.

If your situation is in anyway dangerous or threatening, your safety needs to take priority. Remove yourself from the situation and/or contact the authorities if necessary.