

Getting Along With Your Roommate

by
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There are many situations that involve sharing housing. Roommates in a dormitory, students sharing a house, widowed or divorced adults opening their home to others, and families taking in relatives. Sharing a living space offers companionship, safety, and an opportunity to split expenses. The wrong roommate however, can turn your castle into dungeon, so carefully choose your new housemate, agree on a common way of doing things, and be willing to work out your inevitable differences.

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The first step to compatibility is to find the right roommate. Good roommates will be responsible, pay the rent on time, replace anything they break, and live up to their agreements. You will want a considerate roommate who notices how their actions affect you. A tolerant one will overlook your occasional misstep.

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Take a closer look at your own habits. Do you leave your things in common areas, but expect others to pick up theirs? Do you prefer a clean house, but vacuum the carpets semi-annually? Do you pick up after your pet? If you want to have a good roommate, be one.

Your best friend may not be your best roommate. Friends choose each other for mutual interests and activities. While it is good to have something in common with your roommate, their cleanliness standards, kitchen habits and noise level are more important while sharing a living space. If things don't work out, you don't want to lose a roommate and a friend.

Make a list of what is important to you. Screen potential housemates with questions that have no correct answer.

If you are looking to share space with a couple or a parent and children, make sure you are compatible with their style of interaction. Does this couple argue frequently? Do parents yell at their children? If that's not okay with you, don't invite them to live in your home.

Do you prefer living with a night owl or an early bird?

What is your noise tolerance?

What smoking & drinking habits can you live with?

Make a list of what is important to you and screen potential housemates with a series of questions that have no correct answer. Think about your neatness and cleanliness standards. Will you prefer living with a night owl or an early bird? What is your noise tolerance? What smoking and drinking habits can you live with? What conditions are necessities, and where can you compromise?

You don't want to be stuck with the rent, so investigate financial stability. You can ask a potential roommate for a credit report, or pay a rental agency to run one for you. Ask questions like: "How long have you been on this job?" "Do you need the dishes done after every meal, or is once a day enough?"

"What time do you have to be at class or

work in the morning?" "What music do you listen to?" "Do you have any allergies or other living requirements that I should know about?" Compare the answers with what you observe about their current lifestyle. Someone with a filthy car filled with fast food wrappers, is not likely to live up to promises to be tidy and cook dinner. A person who describes constant conflict in their life, will soon be fighting with you too.

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Before moving day, establish a common way of doing things. Who will clean what, and how often? How will rent be collected? Who is responsible for which bills, by when? Will you

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share food, or keep things separate?

Does there need to be an established quiet time? How long will overnight guests be welcome? If you share a phone, set up a message taking system.

Things go along pleasantly enough, but eventually an IRRITATING HABIT will interrupt your domestic tranquility. You can move, live with an unpleasant situation, or you can stick around and work things out. Don't wait until you are really angry then unload everything at the slightest mistake. A regular house meeting or check in time can be useful to head off potential disagreements. It is good to ask how things are going. Is there anything you would like to be done differently?

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Figure out what you really need, and say so, without blame. Banish the words, "I always" and

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"you never." Use the famous "I statements."

"When you _____, I feel _____." Say what you need without anger, sarcasm or put-downs. Then be ready to listen to another's viewpoint. And compromise. It's not just your living space.

If you can't work it out, get help from a neutral third party. A mutual friend who is not affected by the situation can meet with both of you to help you resolve the problem. In a dorm, a resident advisor

should be able to help. A religious

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leader can often intervene. Or try a professional mediator.

Sharing a home can be mutually enriching, offer ready-made companionship, and save

money and resources. The people in your living space, will impact one of the most important parts of your life. It is worth it to make sure that you choose the right person, set up household systems that function smoothly, and seek help if you can't work things out.

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