

Living with Roommates

It is a source of anxiety for most new college students: what if my roommate and I don't get along? It is a challenging situation, to be sure, to meet someone for the first time and then live in close quarters with that person for a whole school year. However, having a roommate can be a very rewarding and pleasant experience. In fact, many college roommates choose to share rooms for years, and even become life-long friends!

Here are a few tips to make your roommate relationship as enjoyable and supportive as possible:

1) **Clear Communication from the Get-Go:** Probably the most important tip for any relationship of any kind! As roommates, you will be sharing a small space for a long time, and you will need to respect each other's needs and preferences. What do you know about yourself already? Maybe you expect things to be cleaner than your roommate does. Maybe you like to play music while you study, but your roommate cannot concentrate with it on. Maybe you need some quiet time each morning before starting your day. Do not 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.

2) **Nip It in the Bud:** Solve problems while they're still small; don't wait until the problems are enormous! Is your roommate doing something that is bothering you? Borrowing your things without asking? Leaving the room a mess too often? Address these issues as soon as you notice them. It will be easier to address them in a calm and friendly manner this way. After all, your roommate may not even be aware that there is a problem. It is much easier to solve a problem when it is small than when it's become a big, entrenched habit.

3) **Don't Wait - Solve Big Problems Immediately:** Maybe you tried to follow step #2 and solve the problem when it was small, or maybe a huge problem just seemed to explode out of nowhere. Whatever the case, do not procrastinate, do not wait to see if it'll just go away. Address the situation immediately.

4) **Your Roommate's Stuff is Your Roommate's Stuff:** It seems obvious, but this is probably the most common problem that arises between roommates. Do not just assume he would not mind if you finish off his leftovers; he probably will. Always ask for permission before borrowing or using anything that belongs to your roommate!

5) **Be Cautious About Inviting People Over:** You might be an extroverted socialite who thrives in a group, but that might not be true of your roommate. Your roommate may need some quiet time to study, and bringing a group of friends or classmates into your room may be very irritating. Perhaps you can alternate who gets the room and who goes to the library. Talk to your roommate about this, and make sure you do not overstep any boundaries when inviting others over.

6) **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 and stereo have vanished mysteriously.

How do you think you will feel about your roommate after that? Locking the doors and windows is important for keeping you and your property safe. Remember: it is not just your own stuff that you are protecting, it's your roommate's as well.

7) **You Might Not Be BEST Friends, and That's Okay:** Be pleasant and friendly with your roommate, but respect each other's space. Trying to force a best-friend relationship will only cause strain and discomfort for both of you. Be friendly, but make sure you each have your own life and your own social circles.

8) **Keep an Open Mind:** Your roommate may have a background VERY different from yours. He or she may be from another culture, and 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 will find the diversity this experience brings into your life to be very rewarding.

9) **The One Constant is Change:** College is a time for learning and growth, and both you and your roommate will likely change a lot during your time together. Be aware of the changes as they come, and do not cling to the past. New challenges will arise, and you may need to address new issues or come to new agreements. 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!

10) **Treat Your Roommate How You Want to Be Treated:** Having a roommate can certainly be challenging, and you may sometimes be unsure how to solve a problem between you. When in doubt, follow the Golden Rule, and treat your roommate how you would hope to be treated. That way, no matter what happens, you will know that you treated your roommate respectfully, and you will have no regrets.

What to Do If You and Your College Roommate Don't Get Along

When you go away to college, you get to be on your own, do what you want to do, and life is great. But what if you can't stand the person you live with? Living with someone you have just met and who undoubtedly lives a different lifestyle than you is hard. Here are some tips to try if you and your roommate do not get along.

Get Some Distance

Sometimes someone who you would otherwise be very good friends with just isn't a good fit for you as a roommate. 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 really are friends with your roommate, you can also likely talk to them about what might be bothering you and the two of you can work it out amicably.

Figure Out What it is About Them That Bothers You

Do you really hate your roommate, or do you just hate the way they leave their towel on the floor after they get out of the shower? Or the fact that they never take the trash out? When you let little things like this bother you day after day without actually doing anything about them, you can quickly build up resentment.

Avoid the path of leaving a passive aggressive note, but just casually mentioning something to your roommate could solve the problem. They might not even realize that what they are doing is bothering you so much. Sometimes, when you fester emotions, they just keep building up because there is no outlet for them. If you just get it out in the open, you and your roommate will both feel better and you won't feel like you have to tiptoe around each other.

On the other hand, maybe the issue is a little bigger—they steal your things or engage in illegal activities inside your apartment or dorm room. In this case, you might say something to your roommate, but you may also need to contact the authorities. No matter what, you always need to be safe and secure in your living space.

Use Your Resources

If you are living in a dorm, a great first step is to talk to your Community Assistant (CA). They will have resources to help you and they can give you advice on what to do for your particular situation. They can even help facilitate a discussion between you and your roommate. CAs are trained to help you navigate tricky situations and to just be there for you if that is what you need.

Don't Get Revenge

It can be really tempting to try 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 and can only make them worse. Your roommate should respect you and your property, but that does not give you the right to disrespect them when they do not. Be the bigger person and work it out. Trying to get revenge will only make it harder for you to get along with your roommate in the future.

Remember That You Are Roommates

Nobody said that you had to be best friends and trying too hard can just make the situation worse. So your roommate is not your favorite person in the world; that's okay. You do not have to form a lifelong bond, you just have to get along. Maybe it is 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 do not like them very much, is actually a really good skill to have for the workplace and for all relationships in your life. There are a lot of ways to go about conflict resolution, so finding a technique that works well for you will be a great asset for you to carry with you the rest of your life. You could even take this opportunity to take a conflict resolution class—it will look really good on your résumé anyway.

There are a lot of strategies you can use to try to resolve conflict with your roommate and find a happy living situation for both of you. The bottom line is, you just need to do what's necessary for you to feel comfortable and at home in your room or apartment. It might mean you have to step out of your comfort zone, especially if you do not like conflict. At the end of the day, you have to ask yourself: do I want to feel stressed, angry, and annoyed every day for the next year OR do I want to suck it up, have a tough conversation with my roommate, and be happy for the next year? Enlisting your CA to help facilitate the discussion can be extremely helpful.