



RENTWISE

Communication, Compromise and Consideration – The 3 Cs of Getting Along with Roommates

Note: This handout is directed at college students and other first-time roommates, although most of the advice applies to roommates at any stage of life.

Getting your own place is an important milestone in your life. Although some circumstances are not under your control, there are things you can do to make your roommate experience as positive as possible. Above all, getting to know your roommates is essential as you adjust to life on your own. If you have an opportunity to meet and talk with your roommate before you move in together, spend some time getting to know each other and discussing how you will live together. It is important for roommates to understand one another's views and respect each other's feelings on a variety of subjects in order to avoid conflict.

LIVING CONDITIONS

It's a good idea to discuss and agree on terms of living together before you move in with roommates. It sounds formal, but you might want to write and sign an agreement that details these terms with your roommates. If there are conflicts with roommates, this agreement can help settle disputes.

COMMUNICATION STYLE

Decide when and how you will discuss any issues that come up. For example, if you prefer not to discuss issues as soon as you walk in the door, tell your roommate this and decide on a time and situation that is right for both of you.

FURNISHINGS, COOKING SUPPLIES, AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Decide who will bring what to furnish and stock the apartment with household supplies. Talk about how you will care for each other's furnishings and belongings.



DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

Doing daily chores may not be exciting, but it's necessary. Talk about how you will divide tasks, such as taking out the garbage, cleaning the bathroom and washing the dishes. You might be surprised to learn that your roommate doesn't mind doing the dishes!

WORK AND STUDY SCHEDULES

Share your work schedule and talk about when and under what conditions you study best. Some people like to study with the television or MP3 player on, while others prefer to study in silence.

RECREATION AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

What kind recreational activities do you like? Share your interests and the activities in which you participate. Maybe your roommate is into these activities as well. Either way, you might want to invite your roommate to come along. However, don't be offended if your roommate chooses not to join you. You each need your own space to enjoy your leisure activities.

MONEY ISSUES

How will common expenses be paid? Will you split costs or divide responsibilities for different bills? For example, you might pay the electric bill, while your roommate pays for Internet service. You will probably want to split the rent each month, and it's a good idea to spell out responsibilities for ensuring payment gets to the property manager on time.

SLEEP AND QUIET TIMES

Are you a night owl who likes to stay up late, while your roommate is an early bird who goes to bed and gets up early? If so, you'll each need to accommodate the other's styles, e.g., turn down the TV or use headphones while your roommate is asleep. Show your roommate respect and expect that he or she will do the same.

GUESTS AND SECURITY ISSUES

Talk with your roommates about how often they might have guests over and how long they might stay. How will you handle the issue of security for your personal property when your roommate has visitors? Discuss which items are for common use and those that you would prefer not to share.



MEALTIMES AND FOOD

Will you share meals, or are your schedules so different that you'll have to fend for yourself? Will food items be purchased together? Will you label the foods that are strictly yours? What if your roommate or their guest eats foods that you view as yours alone? Discuss all these issues upfront.

PETS

If your lease allows pets and neither of you has allergies, decide whether you want to have pets in the apartment. If yes, will you both help care for the pets, or just one of you? Will you both help pay a pet deposit fee?

MOVING OUT

Discuss how you will handle things when one or more of you wants to move out. If more, you will need to share in cleaning and other tasks in preparation for the move. If one, you will need to discuss the timing. Will the departing roommate wait until you find another roommate before leaving, or leave but cover his/her share of rent until you find someone?

Roommate conflict can tear two otherwise great friends apart. People often make the mistake of assuming that, because they are great friends, they are going to make great roommates. One definitely does not guarantee the other. Resolving roommate conflict can be a touchy issue, and it is not something you want to take lightly. You probably spend more time with your roommate than with any other individual, so having a good relationship is crucial. If you have a conflict with your roommate, use the following communication techniques to explain yourself without further harming the relationship.

PREPARE FOR COMPROMISE

Having a roommate is not much different from sharing a home with your family. You have to take your roommate's feelings and needs into consideration, and you will have to make sacrifices. The best piece of advice on how to resolve roommate conflict is to try your best to avoid it in the first place. We all have some bad habits and recognizing this makes it easier to compromise. Whether it's letting the trash pile up or listening to the television too loud, you have to pick your battles, and sometimes it's better to let some issues go. However, when things get to the point where they are seriously affecting your relationship and your ability to be happy in your own home, it is time to talk.



KEEP YOUR COOL

How do you deal with big issues, such as your roommate throwing a party and trashing the place, but making no effort to clean it up? In such a situation, it is important to give yourself time to cool down before you approach him or her. If you try to sort things out while you are still fuming, you will have trouble keeping a level head, and you may say something that will permanently damage your relationship. Take some time to collect yourself and think about what you will say. When you believe you are able to discuss the issue in a civilized manner, then sit down and have the conversation.

AVOID THE BLAME GAME

When approaching your roommate, do your best not to sound accusatory. No one likes to have their bad habits pointed out, especially in an insulting or aggressive manner. State your case calmly and clearly, and give your roommate the chance to respond. Your roommate might still get offended, but at least you did the best you could.

SET UP A TIME TO TALK

Take time to discuss what is happening. Don't ambush someone with issues he or she is not prepared to discuss.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN FEELINGS

Use positive "I" messages - use "I" statements to describe how you are feeling about an issue. Say things like:

"I feel like my CD's aren't properly cared for when they have been left on the floor by the CD player."

"It is important to me that they are taken care of because I have a lot of money invested in my collection. I would like you to put them away when you are finished with them so they do not get scratched."

USE ACTIVE LISTENING

Repeat and clarify what the other person has said to ensure you understand what he or she actually means. If you don't clarify what you think the other person means, you may each have very different interpretations of an issue and be no closer to resolving it.



TRY TO FIND AREAS OF AGREEMENT

It's much easier to work together to find a solution than try to force a view on someone. Start by looking at the areas you both agree and then work from there.

KNOW WHEN TO GET OUTSIDE HELP

If you can't resolve a situation, find someone who can mediate. Is there someone you both trust who can provide unbiased assistance?

KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT QUILTS

If you have talked with your roommate and the problem persists, it may be necessary to find a new roommate based on compatibility rather than friendship. There is no sense losing a friend by continuing a living situation that is not working longer than necessary. Sometimes, the only way to preserve your friendship is to stop living together.

Communicating with your roommate, compromising and being considerate of each other – the three Cs – will help you get along once the initial excitement of having your own place wears off and you settle into your schedule.

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