

# GETTING ALONG WITH YOUR ROOMMATE

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## IT'S A DIFFERENT WORLD, FROM WHERE YOU COME FROM...

You may come from different parts of the country, or different parts of the world. While exposure to these new experiences may initially seem a little strange or intimidating to you, sharing differences with one another can lay the foundation for greater understanding of different religions, cultures, lifestyles, customs and traditions. The workforce of the new millennium will demand a greater understanding of the diversity of lifestyles, customs and ways of communicating, because technology has made it easier to link persons and companies across the world, with nothing more than a personal computer. Seen in this context, living with persons who have different customs and lifestyles can offer students practical preparation for the workforce of tomorrow.

Common areas of conflict include the following: neatness, noise, visits by guests, study arrangements, sharing of belongings, money issues, messages, values, social lifestyles, and schedules.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND...

Remember that roommates don't have to be best friends. It's great if you like each other or have common interests. But one of the most rewarding experiences while in college is getting to know many different kinds of people and learning to tolerate/celebrate differences. Remember that roommates are individuals with likes and dislikes, priorities and peeves, just like you.

- One of the most common problems in communications is caused by trying to read people's minds or expecting them to read yours. If you want people to respond to your ideas and needs, you have to be able to say what they are, and say it in a way that will make others want to respond nicely.
- Spend time with your roommate. Work out an agreement on cleaning. Conflicts over unmade beds, unwashed dishes, and the like can often cause feuds. Divide up the cleaning responsibilities, and if someone isn't carrying her or his share of the load discuss it before it becomes a major irritation.
- Be open about sharing some possessions. How does your roommate feel about sharing her or his possessions? Some roommates don't mind and others do.
- Arrange your study schedule. If you plan to do most of your studying in the room, let your roommate know. Do you study best with noise from the radio or television, or is silence most conducive? Agree on some general hours and change only after a discussion of the need/desire to reschedule.
- Meet other people. Don't depend on your roommate to satisfy all of your social needs. Make other friends and get involved in activities that take you out of your room.

## WAYS TO ADDRESS AREAS OF CONFLICT...

- Write up a roommate contract: create a contract which outlines the agreed upon "rules" for your living space.
- When an issue arises, address it as soon as possible. Holding on to grievances without expressing them is the best way to make conflict unmanageable.
- Use the BIG SIX Communication Classics:
  1. Empathy/Validation: Try to say something that shows your understanding of the other person's feelings.
  2. Use "I" Statements: Take ownership of your feelings.
  3. Clearly State the Problem: Describe your dissatisfaction and why you need something to change.
  4. Just the Facts: Use facts, not judgments.
  5. Summarize: Repeat back what you believe you heard the other person say. This demonstrates you were listening and gives opportunity for clarification if misheard.
  6. Be willing to Compromise: There is no one right solution; the best answer is the one most satisfactory to both parties.
- Sometimes conflict becomes so intense that a third party such as an R.A., hall director, or counselor is necessary. Don't be afraid to ask for help; not everybody can live together successfully. Good relationships of all sorts need time and effort, and in a space as small as a dorm room, this is especially so!

## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE "ROOMMATE EXPERIENCE"...

"I was so excited to meet my new roommate; I was sure we'd be good friends and do things together... I didn't turn out that way. I was disappointed. After a while, I realized that just because we didn't have much in common, it didn't mean we couldn't get along and things went better. In fact, my roommate introduced me to someone who is now a good friend."

"Even though we had a lot in common; the same taste in music, similar hobbies, and the same major, our "quirks" drove each other crazy and caused a lot of tension. Once we shared with each other what we found annoying, we were more aware and tolerant of each other. But sometimes we both needed reminding!"

"I never had to share a room with anyone, and sharing a bathroom with a lot of people – that was a new one! I learned ways to make it easier on myself. I focused on keeping my stuff organized and stopped worrying about what the other guy was doing."

Source: Pennsylvania State University



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