

Getting Along with Housemates

Reduce the chances of housemate disputes by laying out some simple ground rules. Below is a list of topics to help get you started. Even if the rules seem straightforward enough, put your housemate agreement in writing. There is a form available for this at: http://housing.ucsc.edu/cro/pdf/housemate_agreement.pdf. Sign and date the agreement. Make a photocopy for each person and give it to them for their records.

Keep in mind that each housemate is moving in with their own ideas about how a household should be run based on their own experiences. Negotiate and be mindful of what is comfortable for others. In the end it probably will not be a carbon copy of your childhood home. Some conflict and compromise is inevitable and normal.

Pick a day each month for a house meeting that everyone will attend. This way any irritations and gripes can be brought out into the open and resolved before they escalate.

- **Organize chores**

Housework is a major cause of conflict, especially if anyone is particularly prone to messiness. Set up a cleaning schedule and stick to it. Decide together what the specific expectations are and any consequences of not doing your part. Some households create a rotating schedule and post it on a wall or on the refrigerator.

Make sure everybody knows what is required to clean each room properly in order to prevent housemates from doing a half-hearted job. You can alternate chores each week and establish a deadline.

The main chore that housemates complain about is washing dishes. While it may not seem like a big deal that there are couple of pans and plates on the counter and in the sink, it is frustrating for someone who needs to cook and needs those utensils or that space. You may want to set up a specific rule for kitchen use and messes.

- **Organize bills**

Money is another bone of contention in a shared house and some housemates may leave you to foot the bills. Establish and adhere to arrangements for sharing the costs of rent, utilities, repairs, and furnishings.

Each utility should be in a different housemate's name. This ensures that sorting out problems doesn't always fall on the same person. Most companies will only speak to the person whose name is on their accounts.

Consider creating a joint account that every person contributes to monthly with a set amount. This avoids someone having to pay a huge bill while waiting for checks from everybody else. It also allows housemates to know who made payments and when.

Share local phone service amongst the household with each housemate using their own cell phone or phone card to make long-distance calls. Or you may prefer to keep a notepad next to the phone to record all outgoing toll calls.

- **Other things to consider**

Set rules for overnight guests before it becomes a problem such as requiring reasonable advance notice or permission from all housemates. Housemates who constantly invite overnight guests may make others uncomfortable. While it may not seem like a big deal to have another person sleeping on the couch or in someone's room, it is an extra person using the shower and kitchen in the morning. Housemates who do this without warning may cause serious household discord.

Make decisions in advance about what food and other household staples will be shared and how the cost will be split. This is often a big point of contention that is not obvious in the beginning. For example, will each person have their own loaf of bread or will the household share? Who will be responsible for replacing communal food, dish soap and toilet paper?

Try to sleep properly. If new to independent living, this freedom inevitably means late nights resulting in exhaustion. Everything will be a thousand times more frustrating and you will seem like the unreasonable one as a result.

If you find your anger boiling over, refrain from complaining about your roommate to the landlord in order to maintain professional and positive landlord-tenant relations.

- **Communicate**

If there is a problem that is preventing you from getting along, perhaps an argument that was not properly resolved, get it out in the open. Try to avoid gossip as a method to invoke conversation as it is more likely to breed angry confrontation. Discuss anything like this respectfully, politely, frankly, and as soon as possible. Express how their actions influenced you rather than merely degrading the action. Listen to their thoughts and feelings and earnestly consider their perspective. If you are responsible in some way, show them respect by owning up to your actions.