

Getting Along with Housemates

Reduce the chances of housemate disputes by laying out simple ground rules. Below is a list of topics to help get you started. Even if the rules seem straightforward, 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. It probably will not be a carbon copy of your childhood home. Some conflict is inevitable and compromise is necessary.

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 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. We recommend you create a rotating schedule and post it on a bulletin board or on the refrigerator.

Make sure everybody knows what is necessary 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.

Housemates often complain about finding dirty dishes. While it may not seem like a big deal if there are a couple of pans and plates on the counter and in the sink, it is frustrating for someone who is ready to cook and needs those utensils or that space. Set up specific rules 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.

Share local phone service amongst the household with each housemate using their own cell phone or phone card to make long-distance calls.

Other things to consider

Set rules for overnight guests before they become a problem, such as requiring reasonable advance notice or permission from all housemates. Housemates who constantly invite overnight guests may make others uncomfortable. Agree at the beginning what the consequences are when a housemate violates the agreed rules. 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. Not obvious in the beginning, this often becomes a reason for conflict. 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 becomes a thousand times more frustrating when you are overly tired and, as a result, you will seem unreasonable.

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. Show others respect by owning up to your actions.