

Roommate Conflict Tips

“Does your roommate know that X, Y, and Z bothers you?”

“Have you talked with your roommate(s) about those annoying habits?”

“Was there a roommate agreement made?”

“Have you talked with your RA or your GHD to write a roommate agreement?”

The Role of Residence Life Staff

The Residence Life Staff are trained to assist students through difficult conversations and in low-level conflict mediation. In most cases they will enter into a roommate conflict with the goal of “working it out.” Students who need help with a roommate conflict must talk with their RA and the GHD to vent frustrations, get ideas on how to approach the other roommate, or ask for direct help in resolving the problems.

When Residence Life gets directly involved, we use the following approach:

- We will not take sides. Our job is to work toward a mediated resolution.
- If the roommates cannot resolve their differences, Residence Life will facilitate a room change with the Housing Operations Coordinator.
- Sometimes the roommate who has tried to compromise and resolve disagreements will need to make the decision to move.
- If a room change is the next step, Residence Life will provide all possible options.

The Resident’s Role - Living with a new person for the first time is not always easy, and disagreements are bound to happen. Some conflicts can be resolved with a simple conversation, while others may need help from an RA. Resolving a roommate conflict is a process, and Residence Life is here to help and support you through it.

If you and your roommate are having a conflict, here are some things you can do to help the situation.

- Talk to your roommate to discuss your concern directly and respectfully. If the issue concerns items already agreed upon in the roommate agreement, be sure to address what was agreed upon. Remember, your roommate may not know that they are doing something that bothers you unless you talk with them openly and honestly.
- Seek help from your Resident Assistant if the conflict persists. Your RA is trained and available to assist in the mediation process, and conflicts can often be resolved at this point. All students need to bring the spirit of communication and compromise during the mediation process.
- If additional assistance is still needed, seek out help from your Residence Director. Laker Hall and Laker Village has a GHD who is a professional staff member. GHDs are fully trained and available to assist with roommate conflict issues.

Roommate Agreement - Creating a Roommate Agreement is a way to set boundaries and expectations with your roommate *before* problems arise. Some of the areas of living together that most likely cause conflict are included in the Agreement.

What is in a roommate agreement?

Room Environment - You and your roommate will discuss your habits and expectations regarding the noise, cleanliness and temperature in your room.

- ***When do you typically go to bed? Get up in the morning?*** Late nights quickly become part of the college routine while 8:00 a.m. classes or starting a workday are unavoidable for many. Make sure you communicate with your roommate about your weekly schedule. It will take some time for you to get used to another person's sleep patterns, so it is important that you communicate early and often about each other's sleep needs.
- ***What kind of environment do you need when studying?*** Courtesy quiet hours are in affect all the time. You should not have to escape your room in order to have a place to study, yet your room should not be a 24-hour quiet sanctuary. Most students make the assumption that their roommate is fine with noise because they have not said otherwise. Conflicts in this area are usually the result of poorly communicated needs. You have the responsibility to be flexible when your roommate requests quiet time for study as well as the responsibility to be reasonable with your needs.
- ***How clean do you keep your room?*** Most people can handle their own mess but find others' messes annoying. If you are someone who is comfortable living in a more chaotic and messy environment, make sure you periodically ask your roommate if he or she is OK with the room's order and cleanliness. Like sleep and study time, this area requires that you accommodate reasonable requests and have reasonable expectations in your need for cleanliness.

Shared Space, Shared Stuff - You and your roommates need to discuss borrowing and sharing personal items – food, clothing, shoes, appliances, electronics, etc.

- Everyone defines “personal” differently. Most roommates don't want to seem rude or territorial and fail to communicate that some personal items are completely off limits. Talk to your roommate about what items are for shared use, items that guests can use, and items that should not be handled by anyone but you.

Guests and Visitors – It is hard managing the needs of everyone in your apartment/suite. Discussing rules about visitors will help you and your roommates create some expectations about guests.

- ***How do you feel about groups of people socializing in your apartment/suite?*** It can be enjoyable to live in a highly social room, and all floor communities eventually develop patterns in which certain rooms are the most common place for groups of students to hang out. It is important to set some boundaries about your needs for privacy and others' use of personal property. Make sure that you and your roommates see eye to eye on this issue by talking about it. If your roommate doesn't like your friends, or vice versa, it is especially important to have a discussion right away about arrangements that can be made.
- ***How do you feel about your roommate's significant other frequently spending time in your apartment/suite?*** Regardless of sexual orientation, roommate's significant others can be especially problematic in living situations. It is important to follow visitation policy regarding guests of both genders, and it is expected that roommates agree about who is allowed in and the duration of a guest's stay.

Background, Values and Modesty – Campus housing communities are made up of a wide variety of individuals with different social identities (nationalities, races, sexual orientations, socio economic groups, cultural, and religious backgrounds) and lifestyles. It will be important for you to understand your roommate's background and values

- ***How do you feel about living in this type of diverse environment?*** We know that everyone has a different level of experience and openness to differences. It will be helpful to explore how your social identity influences the way you view the world (e.g., how the makeup of your hometown has impacted your religious and political beliefs). If you have the good fortune to live with someone whose social identity is in an area where you lack exposure, please take advantage of this powerful learning opportunity. These things can help you learn, grow, and change, and we believe that the more you work to understand and communicate through your differences with your roommate, the better chance you have of satisfaction in your room.
- ***How would you describe your attitude toward the use of alcohol? Smoking?*** Using alcohol on campus and smoking in the residence hall are against the University's Student Code of Conduct, and anyone serving minors or underage drinking could face legal consequences. The fact of the matter is that excessive alcohol use on or off campus virtually guarantees roommate conflict. Coming home intoxicated is rarely something that occurs without disruption and often results in some fairly inconsiderate actions. This is an issue that must be confronted early in your roommate relationship before the relationship is damaged beyond repair. Likewise, problems with the smell of smoke in your room should be discussed as soon as a problem is noticed.

What if one roommate Does Not Follow the Agreement?

- It is fully expected that you will experience minor conflict in your apartment/suite --that's just part of living with someone else! Failure to assert or ineffective assertiveness techniques will contribute greatly to every possible roommate problem. It is incredibly rare that someone will understand your concerns without you clearly expressing them. Talk to your roommate after you make your Roommate Agreement about how you will be expected to bring up a problem.
- If roommate feel that the roommate agreement is not working, contact your Resident Assistant (RA) right away and ask for mediation help. Mediation is a great way for a third party person listen to the main issues are and to rewrite the agreement with more structure for living together.
- Roommates found in violation of a roommate agreement may be entered into a conduct hearing after speaking with the Graduate Residence Director. If found in violation of the roommate agreement, a sanction to be moved from the apartment/suite could occur.