

## ROOMMATE COMMUNICATION

The most important aspect of any relationship, and especially for living with someone, is communication. It is important to begin your experience as roommates with a strong foundation of open communication. This will minimize initial problems while serving as a useful method for handling any issues that may arise. Knowledge of these fundamental aspects of communication can smooth the way to a happy and healthy living situation.

### After You Move In...

- Who will be responsible for calling the landlord if you have problems with the unit? You may want to designate a "house manager" to handle rent payments and landlord communication.
- How will you make each other aware of the conversations you have with your landlord?

### Learning to Live Together

- What time do you prefer to go to bed?
- When do you prefer to be awake?
- How important is it for things to be neat and clean?
- What are your feelings on sharing things (food, electronics, etc.)?
- How do you feel about having guests over?
- How do you handle conflict?

### *For Discussion:*

#### **Food/Shopping/Household Supplies**

- Will you buy your own food or will all food costs be shared?
- Will you be expected to cook individually or will you create a rotating schedule of who will cook for everyone?
- Is borrowing food acceptable?
- How will the cost of household supplies (i.e. cleaning supplies, toilet paper, dish soap, etc. be divided?)

#### **Cleanliness/Cleaning Responsibilities**

- Will you clean up after yourself or will you rotate cleaning the entire space?
- Will you create a schedule defining who cleans what or spend one day each week cleaning together?
- Be sure to take into account tasks such as sweeping/vacuuming, emptying the trash, dusting, tidying up the room(s), cleaning the kitchen and bathroom, etc.

#### **Community/Personal Property**

- Can you borrow personal items (stereo, television, appliances such as a hairdryer or curling iron, clothing, computer) or not?
- Do you have to ask before borrowing?
- May roommates use personal items when the owner is not there?

- Determine use of community items (refrigerator, shared furniture or appliances, etc.)

### **Guests/Visitors**

- Who will clean common areas and how often?
- How many visitors should be allowed at a time and how often?
- At what times are visitors acceptable? Is it different on weeknights and weekends?
- Will you have to give notice if you will be having visitors?
- How long may guests stay? (Length of stay: how many nights?)
- Are there rules about guests and food? Who will clean up?
- When do “guests” become classified as additional roommates who must share in the rent and household duties and expenses?
- Is permission needed from other roommates and/or the landlord before additional roommates move in?

### **Messages/Phone Use**

- Will you have a house phone?
- How will you take messages?
- Where will you keep the phone?

### **Pets**

- Will pets of any kind be allowed?
- Do you have allergies that would require banning certain types of pets?
- Will pets be allowed in common areas?
- Will all of you be responsible for the care of the pet?

### **Some Keys:**

- Understand your own communication style so that you can adapt to the styles of your roommate.
- Don't let yourself drift off while listening: you expect your roommate to hear and respect what you have to say, so try to extend the same kindness to them.
- Nonverbal communication is just as important when you are an active listener as when you are speaking. Your roommate will notice nonverbal cues of whether or not you are interested in the conversation and paying attention.
- Negative cues may discourage your roommate and block further attempts at communicating.
- Give feedback to show that you have been listening actively, but wait until your roommate has finished conveying his/her message.
- If your roommate asks you to just listen and is not looking for a response, do your best to respect those wishes.

As a good communicator you should be direct, courteous and calm. Spare others your unsolicited advice and acknowledge that what works for you may not work for others. Be sure to state your main points first and then offer details if necessary. Listen for hidden feelings and take note of nonverbal cues from the other person.

## When Expectations are Not Met:

- Stay calm.
- Schedule a house meeting.
- List what you want to talk about prior to the meeting.
- Stay in the present as much as possible. Avoid talking about things that happened a month ago and have already been resolved.
- Talk to one another and work towards a compromise or agreement.
- Look at what you can all do differently next time.
- Don't yell or accuse.
- Communicate face-to-face or over the phone. Try not to text or leave notes.
- If you don't confront issues that are bothering you, the fault ultimately lies with you.

## Experiencing Roommate Conflict?

Don't worry if you find yourself in conflict with your roommate(s). Remember that disagreements are inevitable, especially when people live together and interact every day. Don't be afraid to talk with your roommate(s) about what is bothering you. By working through the situation in a productive way, you will be able to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.

No matter how hard we try, communication sometimes breaks down. Here are some clues that you have a breakdown of communication on your hands:

- Your roommates are not speaking
- They leave when you enter
- They complain to friends about you
- They get angry over trivial matters
- They won't talk to you

These are just a few of the signs that trouble is brewing. Take the initiative by talking with your roommate(s) to try and understand what the problem may be. It could just be a small issue that could easily be resolved, or it could be a larger matter that everyone must work together to solve.

### ***Sometimes there are roommate combos that just don't work out...***

Even close friends find that they cannot live together. It is better to save a friendship than force a living arrangement. If you and your roommates have made an honest but unsuccessful effort, you may decide that you cannot live together. It may be better to separate than to continue living in an uncomfortable situation. Before coming to a final conclusion, consider consulting an outside source, such as a trusted friend or other responsible person who can assist you as you work through difficulties and transitions.

## Roommate Communication: Beyond Basics

When we are in a conflict with another, it is an emotionally charged situation. Very few of us are lucky enough to have someone to teach us how to communicate our needs effectively in a way

that is easy for others to hear. Yet, conflict is an inevitable feature in most of our relationships. By learning to communicate clearly, we can express our needs and feelings in a way that helps resolve the situation instead of making it worse. When you are in conflict with your roommate, think of it as an opportunity to practice effective communication. Here are some helpful tools to assist you with the gift of clear expression.

### Observations vs. Evaluations

We are always going to have a predisposition of seeing things from our particular worldview and have our own way of organizing our experiences or making meaning of our external environment. It's sort of like the quote that says, "We tend to see the world as we are, not as it is."

Observations are observable facts whereas evaluations are how you feel about those facts. Words such as always, never, ever, and whenever are sometimes used to express an evaluation of a situation. For example: "You never listen to me." Carefully distinguishing the observable facts and how you feel about those facts will help you more clearly communicate your feelings and needs.

### Getting the Message Across

To make your messages clearer, use "I" language instead of "you" language. "I" language can help in the following ways:

- Takes *blame* out of the statement and will help prevent the receiver from becoming defensive.
- Allows the sender to express their feelings and thoughts.
- Allows the sender to get to the root of the problem for them.
- Statements are more thoughtful and helps sender to weigh their re-marks more cautiously.

When You'd Say:	Try This Instead:
"I can't..."	"I can..."
"You are wrong..."	"My understanding is..."
"I don't..."	"I do..."
"You have to..."	"It would help if you..."
"You don't understand..."	"Let me clarify..."
"I don't know..."	"I'll find out..."
"I have no idea..."	"I know who can help..."
"I never..."	"Today..."

## Beware of Demands

Have you ever felt like you would be blamed or punished if you did not do what was being asked of you? If so, then you know how it feels to have someone demand something from you. Demands also tend to come with criticisms and judgment. You can steer clear of making this mistake yourself by empathizing when your request is turned down. When demanding language is used, people will either submit or rebel. Either way, the chance of working together to meet everyone's needs is diminished.

People Shut Down When They Hear Things Like:	Find Out What They Need by Asking:
"You <i>should</i> know better."	"Can you tell me about..."
"The house is <i>supposed</i> to be clean at all times."	"What do you think about..."
"I <i>deserve</i> to have my friends over any time I want."	"What is your opinion on..."
"I have the <i>right</i> to do..."	"What do you know about..."

## Identify Your Needs

Making requests in clear, positive, concrete action language expresses the desired outcome. The clearer you communicate about what you want back, the more likely it is that you'll be successful. Be careful though, that you are making a request and not a demand. Here are some ways to begin:

- "Would you be willing..."
- "Would you consider..."
- "I would appreciate it if you..."

## Putting it All Together

To make your needs, feelings, and requests more clear, try using this formula:

I feel

- specific feeling

when

- specific behavior--don't use "you." Focus on the specific behavior.

because

- the effect of the behavior or why it makes you feel that way

*Instead of:*

"You never ask for my opinion and I'm really sick of it."

Taken from Biola University: <https://www.biola.edu/commuter-life/living-off-campus/roommate-agreement-communication>

*Try:*

"I feel hurt when I'm not asked for my opinion because I believe I have a lot of good ideas and I want to contribute to this group."