

# ROOMMATE SURVIVAL GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

---

Living together in a roommate situation is an important part of your college experience. It takes commitment, involvement and work to benefit from school. These same qualities are needed if you want a good, productive relationship with your roommates.

This document contains some "How to's" to help you get along with your roommates.

## COMMUNICATION

---

A good beginning can help lead to positive long term relations with your roommate(s). It is important to begin talking and communicating with each other honestly and openly. In so doing, roommates can quickly come to an understanding of each other's needs regarding lifestyles and living situations. Mutual agreement at the beginning can avoid many problems in the future.

Here are ten suggestions of some things you and your roommates should consider, discuss and decide together.

1. **How to pay the rent**- Does the lease specify how rent is to be paid? If not, should each roommate write a check for his/her share? Should one roommate collect the money from the others and write one check? What if someone's rent is late? (Keep a common file for all rent receipts and other payments, as well as a copy of the lease and Room Condition Report you should make out when you move in.)
2. **Telephone and Utilities**- In whose name should utilities be listed? Who should pay the deposit? Who will be responsible for collecting the money and making sure these bills get paid? (Consider dividing these responsibilities among roommates.)
3. **Food**- Do any of you have strong feelings about food that will affect your roommates? Are you going to buy food collectively? Will you have household meals or eat separately? How will you divide shopping, cooking and clean-up duties? If food is bought and owned separately, are there separate storage places in the refrigerator and cabinets for each roommate's food? May one roommate use another's food? If so, how soon must it be replaced or paid for?
4. **Household Duties**- What is each roommate's idea of a clean/messy room or house? How clean should the place be? Who is responsible for cleaning areas that you share? How often? How should you divide up the work? Who takes out the garbage? (Under Illinois

law, roommates are "jointly and severally liable" for damages caused to the premises, as well as for the rent itself.)

5. **Smoking, Drinking and Drugs**- Are these activities okay in general? Okay if confined to the roommate's room? Not okay at all? What about friends who smoke, drink or do drugs when they visit?

6. **Guests**- How do you feel about each other's friends? How about overnight guests: where can they sleep? how often may they come? how long may they stay? How about parties: how often?

7. **Male Friends/Female Friends**- Are present (or future) friends allowed to spend the night and how often? At what point do they stop being "overnight guests" and become additional roommates who must share in rent and household duties? To become additional roommates, do they first need the approval of the other roommates?

8. **Privacy**- What are each roommate's needs for privacy?

9. **Noise**- At what hour should loud noise end so roommates can study or sleep?

10. **Study Habits**- How important are grades? When and where do you like to study? Do you need absolute quiet to study?

A successful roommate situation requires good communication. Take time to talk frequently to each other. Chatting with each other helps keep up the basic relationship which can provide the underpinning for a harmonious relationship. Let each other know who you are and what's happening in your life. If something in the household is bothering you (it's too noisy to sleep, someone is drinking your milk, the house/room is too messy) talk it over with your roommate(s) as soon as possible. Be honest in telling your roommate what your needs are in the household.

## **CONFLICT**

---

Don't be dismayed if you find yourself in conflict with your roommate(s). Disagreements between people are inevitable, especially in a roommating situation where people live together and interact on a daily basis. Conflicts usually occur when changes are needed and when behaviors, thoughts and feelings need to be re-examined. Don't be afraid to confront your roommates about what is bothering you. If you know how to deal with conflict positively and productively, all involved can benefit from the situation.

---

## SOME STEPS IN RESOLVING CONFLICT

---

1. Get together everyone involved in the conflict;
2. Each roommate should take a turn describing his/her perception of the situation, how he or she feels about it and what he/she wants.
3. Together, come to an agreement on what the conflict is.
4. Everyone should agree to be willing to compromise something to come up with a solution.
5. Together, describe a situation which would be a compromise among yourselves.
6. Come to an agreement on the described situation.
7. Talk about what changes will be needed to bring about the acceptable situation.
8. Together, make a plan of action which will help achieve the desired new situation and set a time frame for these changes.
9. Make a commitment to make the necessary changes.
10. Set a future date to evaluate the situation and to re-negotiate any differences if necessary.

These steps sound very simple but to make them work you need to know how to fight fair. The key to successful dispute resolution is effective communication. To resolve conflict, communicate with each other on a one-to-one equal basis and avoid behavior that will break down communication.

-If you and your roommates have a conflict over a question that none of you can answer, find someone who knows the answer who can help you resolve this conflict.

---

## **WHEN A ROOMMATE MOVES OUT**

---

If you are thinking of moving out of your apartment because of roommate or other trouble, or your roommate is thinking of moving out or has moved out already, it is best to get legal assistance concerning the situation immediately. The most common legal issues presented when a roommate leaves are the respective obligations of the parties to pay rent and/or utilities and the rights of the departed roommate to sublet his or her share of the apartment. The answers to these questions depend on a variety of factors including applicable provisions in your lease, any written and/or oral agreements made by you as roommates, the reasons why the departed roommate left, etc. Generally speaking, a departed roommate continues to have the legal duty to pay his or her share of rent and utilities, but also has the legal right to sublet. Specific circumstances may change the legal position of the parties, however. Again, consult an attorney.

**Written by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Student Legal Services office**