

# ***The Rights and Responsibilities of Roommating***

*The selection of your roommate(s) should not be treated lightly. There are legal, financial, and personal implications affecting people living together. The following information explains the rights and responsibilities of roommating.*

A good beginning is to become acquainted with your roommates so you can be open and honest with them. This does not mean sharing everything with them, but it does require that you feel comfortable enough with one another to be assertive about your own needs, as well as respecting their needs. When you appreciate each other's backgrounds, attitudes, habits, and moods, you will be ready to talk about your roommate expectations.

This process involves actively talking and listening to each other. The listener is also responsible for the communication. Just as you want to be understood and appreciated, it is your responsibility to listen and clarify certain points. This way you can understand and appreciate your roommates' needs just as they do yours. Understanding what you both expect early on can minimize or eliminate problems later.

## **Roommate Rights and Responsibilities**

The following issues represent areas where conflict has been known to occur between roommates. We suggest you discuss this list with each other. As you talk, develop a list of your mutual expectations.

### **Finances**

How is the rent to be paid? Does one person collect the money for everyone else and write a check, or does everyone write a check for his/her share? Does the landlord leave you that option? What happens when someone is late with his or her share of the rent?

### **Do Not Disturb**

How do you feel about privacy? How are your needs for privacy different from your roommate's?

### **Quiet Please!**

What's your definition of noise? At what times should noise be minimized so others may study or sleep?

### **PETS**

Are pets allowed? Who is responsible for their behavior? In what areas are they allowed?

### **No Smoking Please**

How do you feel about smoking and drinking? In what areas are they allowed?

### **Cleaning**

What are your standards of cleanliness? Who is responsible for what areas? How should the workload be divided? Will it be a rotating weekly schedule, or is someone specifically designated to take out the garbage, water the plants, etc.?

### **Messages**

What about telephone and general messages? Where should they be kept? How do you respond to a roommate's calls?

### **Safety**

What about security? When should the doors be locked? Where should you keep the extra key? Would anyone else have an extra key or know where it is located?

### **One For All and All For One**

When moving out, should a roommate be responsible for costs related to his/her moving out early? If a deposit was paid, when will it be returned? How much notice should be given? Should that roommate find a replacement before leaving? Will that roommate be responsible for rent until a replacement is found?

### **Bills and Deposits**

How much will you each pay for deposits, telephone and other utilities? In whose name do you list them? Who is responsible for collecting and paying these bills?

### **Groceries**

How will you buy groceries – collectively or individually? If collectively, how much money will you budget for food and other items each month? If individually, how will you identify who bought what? Will you eat meals together or separately? May roommates borrow food from one another? If so, how soon should it be replaced or paid for?

### **Personal Belongings**

What about sharing and borrowing personal items such as clothes, CDs, or skis? Are items such as stereos, TVs, or kitchen appliances off limits or for mutual use? Is permission required for all items or just certain ones?

### **I Need to Speak With You Concerning Our New Roommate**

Keep these questions in mind:

- How do you feel about overnight guests?
- How often may guests come, and how long may guests stay?
- Where do guests sleep?
- Do you have any house rules about guests' food and drink, and who will clean up afterwards?

- Who is responsible when your guest is in the apartment for a long period of time and you are not?
- Is there a difference between guests and boyfriends/girlfriends staying the night?
  - How often may they stay?
  - When do they stop being classified as an overnight guest and become an additional roommate who must share in the rent and other household duties?

Is permission needed from the other roommates or the landlord before additional roommates move in?

## **If the Boat Springs a Leak**

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

- your roommates are not talking to you
- they leave the room whenever you enter
- they complain to their friends about you
- or they get angry with you over trivial items

You can be fairly sure that these are clues of trouble. Take the first step in confronting your roommates to try and understand what is wrong. It may be something very simple that can be easily cleared up, or everyone may have to work on the issue together to clear it up.

## **Nine Steps In Resolving a Conflict**

1. Everyone involved in the conflict should get together at one time.
2. Each roommate should take a turn describing his or her perception of the situation – how each person feels about it and what each person needs.
3. Come to an agreement about the conflict.
4. Everyone should agree to compromise and help develop a solution. The alternative is continued tension and bitterness.
5. Devise a solution that is acceptable to everyone. If you cannot agree amongst yourselves, use fair competition by tossing a coin, or bring in a third party to mediate.
6. Talk about what changes are needed to resolve the problem.
7. Make a plan of action and set a time frame for these changes.
8. Everyone should be committed to the plan, including implementing whatever personal changes are necessary.
9. Set a future date to evaluate the situation and renegotiate if necessary.

*The key to successful conflict management is communication on an equal basis and avoiding behavior that will break down communication.*

*Take responsibility for keeping things set and hold the tone of the discussion by your example*

## **Rules of Fair Fighting**

- **Start right.**  
Set a time to discuss the conflict that is convenient for everyone involved. A good approach would be, “we need to talk about what is going on; when do you have time to work things out?”
- **Everyone involved has equal rights to be heard.**
- **Set aside your desire to “win.”**  
Winning an argument is not the same as succeeding in conflict management, where you and your roommates all find an agreeable solution.
- **All roommates should be able to talk freely about how he/she feels without feeling uncomfortable.**
- **Avoid blaming each other.**
- **Be task oriented by sticking to the topic.**
- **Avoid generalizations or blanket remarks like, “you never do the dishes.”** A more constructive approach would be, “you did not do your share of the dishes this week.”
- **Talk about actions that can be changed, rather than personalities.**  
Personal attacks will only lead to defensiveness and hostility. Personal attacks destroy communication of productive ideas.
- **Do not team up with one roommate against another.**
- **You do not have to let a confrontation go from bad to worse**

## **Roommate Combinations Do Not Always Work**

Even close friends may find that they cannot live together. If you and your roommates have made an honest but unsuccessful effort to work out your problems, you may need to realize that you cannot live together. It may be better to part company than to continue in an uncomfortable situation, since this may impact your schoolwork, happiness, and health. Before you come to this conclusion, however, you may want to consider outside help, especially concerning legal advice. If you and your roommates have tried to work out your conflicts among yourselves, but were

unable to get anywhere, a third party may be able to help you and your roommates as a group.

**REMEMBER...**

Most leases bind roommates to JOINT and SEVERAL liability. Under this clause, if one roommate moves out, the others must pay his/her share of the rent and assume responsibility for his/her damages. If need be, roommates have recourse by encouraging the landlord to hold the security deposit or by a suit in Small Claims Court. It is helpful to write down what you and your roommates have agreed to, using the Roommate Agreement form as your guideline. A written agreement insures that everyone understands and accepts the living situation.