
The Good Roommate Guide

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Introduction

Sharing a living space with a roommate can be one of the most enriching experiences during your academic years. It offers a chance to develop life skills, form lasting friendships, and learn about different perspectives. However, it can also present challenges that may lead to conflicts. This comprehensive guide aims to help you navigate roommate relationships successfully, focusing on communication, setting expectations, and conflict resolution.

Did you know — the majority of roommate conflicts result from lack of communication? When a problem arises, it may be tempting to try to address it with a text message, email, and post-it or other notes. Experience has shown that these strategies tend to prolong, complicate, and sometimes exacerbate the problem. We highly encourage you to talk to one another!



Part 1: Establishing Open Communication

1.1 The Importance of Communication

Effective communication is the foundation of any successful roommate relationship. It helps prevent misunderstandings and builds trust. **Tip:** Take the time to complete a [Roommate Agreement](#). The more details you can share, the better, as it is a document you can refer to throughout your stay and is a great way to avoid conflict and also keep everyone on the same page.

1.2 Initiating Conversations

Set the Tone: When you first meet your roommate, take the initiative to introduce yourself and express excitement about living together. This sets a positive tone.

Friends and Roommates: Keep in mind that being friends and living with someone are two different things. Do not assume that because you are friends, you do not need to establish guidelines as they relate to living arrangements. Similarly, do not assume you will become friends with your roommate. Remember — you can still be good roommates even if you are not friends.

Initial Discussion: Have a candid conversation about your lifestyles, interests, and expectations. This is a great opportunity to establish rapport and understand each other's habits.

1.3 Regular Communication Practices

Check-ins: Schedule a recurring time to discuss how things are going. This could be a brief chat over coffee at the dining room table, or a more formal meeting outside of the building.

Use Communication Tools: Consider using shared digital tools, like a group chat or a shared calendar, to keep track of schedules and responsibilities. Set reminders or alerts for responsibilities. Example: If you agreed to take the garbage and recycling to the refuse room on Tuesdays and Thursdays, set a recurring alert/reminder on your phone.

Part 2: Setting Clear Expectations

2.1 Defining Responsibilities

Shared Duties: Clearly outline how you will divide household chores and responsibilities. Creating a chore chart to ensure everyone knows their tasks is a great way to do this. Sample weekly chore chart [HERE](#). Ensure everyone understands what's expected of them.

Cleaning Schedule: Decide on a cleaning schedule that works for everyone. This could include regular deep cleaning days or maintaining cleanliness throughout the week. Determine if tasks are rotated or not. Example: How should we handle shared spaces such as cupboards and the fridge? How often do we clean the fridge? Should we rotate chores? Most importantly, determine the consequences for incomplete chores. Example: If I do not complete the chore assigned to me, like taking out the garbage, my roommate(s) have the right to remind me and if I still don't comply, I must attend a mandatory household meeting to discuss and seek a resolution.

Preventing Hazards

You have the right to a clean living space and the responsibility to keep it that way. Neglecting cleanliness can lead to issues that affect not just you, but everyone in and around your room, and in the building such as:

- **Insects:** Pests like ants, flies, or cockroaches are attracted to uncovered food and garbage.
- **Fire Hazards:** Accumulation of trash, such as papers and pizza boxes near heat sources, poses a fire risk.
- **Clutter:** Excessive clutter can hinder quick evacuation during emergencies and obstruct emergency personnel.

[The Housing Terms and Conditions](#) policy IV. E., states, "The resident is responsible for room or apartment cleaning, removing waste materials regularly, maintaining satisfactory sanitation and fire safety standards and promptly reporting needing repairs." Failure to abide may result in fines and up to termination of your agreement.

Part 2: Setting Clear Expectations

2.2 Establishing Boundaries

Personal Space: Discuss personal boundaries regarding shared spaces, privacy, and belongings. This includes whether or not it's okay to borrow each other's items and be clear if there are specific items that you are not okay with sharing. **Tip:** It's best to store personal items in your secure bedroom instead of in the common areas. Establish and follow rules regarding shared spaces (living room, kitchen, fridge/freezer, cupboards, closets, bathroom, etc.) Example: Assigned cupboards and shelves in the fridge.

Personal Belongings: Never assume it is okay to use something that is not yours, always ask permission. Do not take it personally if the answer is no. If the answer is yes, return the item right away and put it back where it belongs. Apologize and pay for the item/replace the item if you damage it.

Guest Policy: A guest is defined as anyone who is not assigned to your room, including classmates. It's important to adhere to housing policies and consult with your roommate(s) before inviting guests over. Remember, having visitors is a privilege. The only individuals who have rights to your room are you and your roommate(s)!

- Do not leave your guest in your room when you are not there. Your guest must be accompanied by you at all times.
- Do not put your roommate on the spot — give advance notice and respect their right to say no.
- Guests are your responsibility and must abide by the Terms and Conditions of the Housing License Agreement, the House Rules and Regulations, or any Cornell Tech housing policy.

[The Housing Terms and Conditions](#) policy V.E., states, "You must have the consent of all other roommates before any guests can be invited." Unapproved guests are considered a violation of the terms and conditions of your license agreement and may result in fines and up to termination of your agreement. It is important to establish clear guidelines for having friends over. Discuss how often guests are allowed, if there are specific times that are okay or not okay (day or night), any noise concerns, and how to revoke a guest's access. **Example:** I can say the guest is no longer permitted to enter the unit if they violate the rules.

Part 2: Setting Clear Expectations

2.3 Understanding Lifestyle Differences

Daily Routines: Share your daily schedules, including wake-up times, study habits, and sleep patterns. This understanding can help avoid conflicts related to noise or interruptions.

Social Life: Be open about your social preferences. If you prefer quiet evenings at home while your roommate enjoys hosting parties, discuss ways to compromise.

Tip: If planning a gathering, engage your roommate, embrace them in your friend group, and invite them to the gathering as a friend. If the gathering is not approved, consider holding it in one of the amenity spaces such as the River Room or Patio instead.



Part 3: Preventing Conflict

3.1 Proactive Strategies

Anticipate Issues: Before conflicts arise, think about potential points of tension and discuss them openly. This may include differences in cleanliness standards or lifestyle choices.

Establish Ground Rules: Create a list of mutually agreed-upon ground rules that cover various aspects of living together, such as allergies, sharing food, bathroom schedules, cleaning schedules, guest rules, and noise levels and honor them.

Share Schedules: Roommates may not always be in the same program. Take time to understand your roommate's schedule, particularly their "busy times," as this can help you recognize and better understand behaviors that might be influenced by stress.

3.2 Building a Positive Atmosphere

Celebrate Differences: Embrace the unique traits and backgrounds of your roommate. Use this as an opportunity to learn and grow from one another.

Create Positive Rituals: Engage in activities that foster a positive relationship, such as cooking together, watching movies, or exploring the campus, Roosevelt Island, and its surroundings.



Part 4: Conflict Resolution Strategies

4.1 Addressing Issues Early

Don't Bottle It Up: If something is bothering you, address it as soon as possible. Allowing small annoyances to fester can lead to bigger problems.

Choose the Right Time: Discuss issues when both of you are calm and able to talk without distractions. Avoid bringing up sensitive topics during stressful times but again, do not let it linger. **Tip:** Ask your roommate if you can chat over coffee, tea, or lunch. Meeting outside the apartment offers an opportunity to see each other in a different light, and offering to pay for coffee or tea is a nice gesture that sets a positive tone.

4.2 Communicative Techniques

Use "I" Statements: Frame your concerns using "I" statements to express your feelings without sounding accusatory. For example, say, "I feel uncomfortable when the room is messy" instead of, "You never clean up." See, Cornell Health's, [Assertive Communication Tips](#) for more information.

Active Listening: Practice active listening when your roommate expresses their concerns. Show empathy and validate their feelings to foster understanding.

4.3 Finding Solutions

Brainstorm Together: When addressing an issue, collaborate to find a solution that works for both of you. Be open to compromise.

Document Agreements: Once you've agreed on a solution, consider writing it down or adding it to your [Roommate Agreement](#) to avoid future misunderstandings.

Part 4: Conflict Resolution Strategies

Anonymous Complaints

"I need your help with my roommate. He keeps leaving dirty dishes in the sink. Can you ask him to clean them up? Just don't let him know I said anything."

The Housing Office & Building Team often hear requests like this, but handling roommate conflicts anonymously is rarely effective. For example, how would the staff become aware of the issue if you don't bring it to their attention? Your roommate will likely figure out that you were the one who reported it. It's best to approach your roommate directly about the problem first. If the situation doesn't improve, you can then express your desire to seek assistance from staff.

4.4 Room Change

Please understand that requesting a room change is a last resort and is based on availability. A room change may not resolve the underlying conflict.

4.5 Seeking External Help

Mediation: We encourage you to resolve issues among each other first. If you cannot resolve conflicts on your own, seek help from a friend or another neutral party. They can provide guidance and mediate discussions. If the issues persist, based on your needs, additional resources are available here:

- For noise or guest complaints, contact Building Management: conciiergect@related.com
- For license or unit changes, contact Cornell Tech Housing: housing@tech.cornell.edu
- For wellness and support resources, contact Student Health and Wellness: studentwellness@tech.cornell.edu
<https://studentaffairs.tech.cornell.edu/health-wellness/>
- For Emergencies, contact Cornell Tech Security: 646-971-3611 or 9-1-1.

If you are unsure of the best contact, you may reach out to housing@tech.cornell.edu for guidance.

Part 5: Creating a Supportive Environment

5.1 Fostering a Sense of Community

Get to Know Each Other: Spend time together outside of your room. Go to campus events, explore local spots, or just hang out in your living space.

Support Each Other: Be there for each other during stressful times, whether it's offering a listening ear or helping with studying.

5.2 Practicing Kindness

Small Gestures: Show appreciation for your roommate through small acts of kindness, such as leaving a note, sharing snacks, or surprising them with coffee.

Celebrate Achievements: Acknowledge each other's accomplishments, whether big or small. Celebrating successes helps build a positive relationship.



Conclusion

Living with a roommate can be a valuable learning experience that enhances both your academic and lifelong journey. By establishing open communication, setting clear expectations, proactively preventing conflicts, and fostering a supportive environment, you can create a harmonious living experience. Embrace the opportunity to learn from one another and grow as individuals, making the most of your time together.



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