

Coping with College Series

Managing Roommate Conflict

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The simplest way to manage roommate conflicts is to take steps to prevent them from happening in the first place. There are several steps one can take to accomplish this. First, take the time to get to know your roommate. Get a feel for who your roommate is and where he or she is coming from (e.g., family, hometown, interests, values, etc). Second, establish clear lines of communication early on (ideally before you move in). Share with each other your living preferences, habits, expectations, and needs (e.g., smoking preference, sleep habits, study time, guests, parties, telephone usage, use of space, use of personal property, security, privacy, etc.). Finally, after clarifying your initial expectations for living together, negotiate solutions and compromises that will work for both of you. You can informally contract these agreements out loud or formally commit them to paper. Use whatever approach you feel most comfortable with.

Often conflicts occur despite genuine attempts to prevent them. Unforeseeable conflicts may arise. Annoying habits and idiosyncrasies often rear their head only after you spend some time living together. In addition, situations and people often change. Your roommate may take on a heavy course load. One of you may take up smoking. Your roommate may become addicted to the home-shopping network. Any number of situational changes could potentially lead to conflicts.

Should conflicts arise, keep in mind the three C's: Clarity, Calm, and Compromise. **Clearly** articulate your thoughts, needs, and feelings to your roommate. Honest and direct communication is essential to working through any disagreement. When doing so, use "I" statements. Using "I" statements allows you to own and express your thoughts and feelings without sounding accusatory. For example, "I feel disrespected by you and I get angry when you play your stereo at 3 AM." As opposed to "You have absolutely no respect for me. You really tick me off." If you put your roommate on the defensive, he or she will be too busy defending himself or herself to listen to what it is that you have to say. Remain **calm** when speaking with your roommate. If you allow your discussion to escalate into a shouting match, little can be accomplished. Again, **comprise** is often the key to resolving disagreements. Try to find a common ground that you and your roommate can **both** live with.

When confronting your roommate, be sure to acknowledge your roommate's feelings without minimizing them. Also make sure that you discuss

any disagreements in private. Your roommate may become embarrassed or resentful if others are present for the discussion (e.g., mutual friends, family). However, if you feel that nothing you do seems to be working with your roommate, you should seek help. If you live in a residence hall, you can contact your RA. or other UHS staff. Students can also call Student Counseling Services at 438-3655 and schedule an appointment to meet with a counselor