



How to Get Along with Your Roommate

Living with a roommate is one of the cornerstone events of a post-secondary experience. However, it can also make or break your experience and can even negatively impact your academic success and mental health.

Students having issues with their roommates is a common problem:

➤ **25%** of students experience conflict with their roommate.

➤ Up to **17%** of students report that roommate and relationship difficulties impact their academics.



➤ The most frequent issues roommates report are noisiness, cleanliness, stealing/borrowing, and generally not getting along.

➤ Roommate conflicts are highly correlated to stress which contributes to fatigue, depression, increased alcohol use, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and loneliness. Some students may ease these feelings by leaving school altogether.

Issues that can Impact Roommate Relationships



Housing Insecurity – To add to the pressure of finding compatible roommates, Canada is in the midst of a housing crisis, and students are having difficulty finding affordable, stable student housing. More and more students are facing demanding financial decisions causing stress on physical and mental health. Students may feel the need to stay in not-so-great roommate situations because there is no other affordable place to live.



Lack of communication – Many students may not have had the experience of sharing a room before. Without this experience, these students may not have had the chance to build negotiation skills to navigate a disagreement. Students in this situation may also lack the will to address ordinary conflicts. Instead of working through the problem, students may avoid the problem altogether, for example sending messages through the phone rather than speaking face to face.



Media's portrayal of roommates – the media's portrayal of roommates as inseparable friends who become 'besties' as soon as they meet each other can be problematic for new roommates. It results in an expectation being placed on the new roommates, and if not realized, it could become a barrier, preventing the roommates from even starting a relationship.

Being Roommates with your Friends

It may be convenient and exciting to be roommates with your close friends. However, sometimes even the closest friends may not be compatible as roommates. Before moving in together, you should have an honest talk with your friends to see if everyone's at-home habits are compatible.

To start the conversation, you can start with the **“What Kind of Roommate are You?”** questionnaire (see below) to see how compatible you and your prospective roommate really are. There should also be a discussion about how you will deal with small and big disagreements. Depending on the relationship, friends can be afraid of offending each other when setting boundaries or bringing up an issue. Small problems can gradually lead to larger conflicts.

What to keep in mind when getting to know your roommate for the first time

If possible, you and your new roommate should try to get together before moving in. Talk about your likes, dislikes, goals for post-secondary or discuss answers to the “what kind of roommate are you?” questions below. It is also important to speak about personal boundaries, and clearly express needs. For example, stating “I do not like other people using my things without my permission” could be beneficial to the roommate relationship. You can find more information about setting boundaries in CICMH's [infosheet on boundaries](#).

How to make the best of a bad roommate situation

- Speak to each other about any issues you are having when they first come up, so they don't end up boiling over.
- Have discussions face to face rather than through messages (texts, emails etc), as the tone of the message could be misunderstood.
- Schedule regular roommate meetings to discuss any conflicts.
- Before meeting with your roommate to discuss conflicts, take a few moments to do some meditation or breathing exercises so that emotions won't take over the conversation.
- During meetings, be clear and direct about what is bothering you – if the other roommate does not understand what the issue is, it will not be resolved.
- State what you want to achieve in the discussion.
- Listen to each other's side of the situation.
- Negotiate a solution; when both sides give a little, the conflict is more likely to be resolved.
For example – if your roommate is having a party, you can negotiate the number of guests they can have, the time when the party should be over, etc.
- Respect each other's differences, as everyone has their own values, expectations, communication styles, and lifestyles.



If the issue persists, you can contact your resident advisor, who can help mediate the situation. Those living off campus, can speak with their landlord about next steps.

How to write a roommate agreement

Roommate agreements are a great way to safeguard against common problems and those named in the agreement can use it to bring up issues. Roommates can work on the agreement together and decide what kind of topics the agreement will cover.

Click [here](#) to access a template that students can use as a guide to make their own agreement. Sections can be added or removed to suit any situation. This template has been modified from A Guide for Students Living Off Campus from places4students.com.

“What Kind of Roommate are You?” Questionnaire (Serquina, 2004)



The following questions may be helpful as you begin to search for a new roommate.

What noise level are you used to? Do you usually have a TV or a video on? Do you play loud computer games? Or do you like things quiet?

Are you a smoker? Would you be comfortable having a roommate who smokes?

What temperature do you like to keep your room?

What light level are you used to? Do you like soft lighting or bright lights? Do you like it pitch black at night, or do you like to have a nightlight or soft light on?

Do you have a romantic partner? Will they be coming to the room often? Will you expect your roommate to leave the room so you can be alone? How do you feel about your roommate bringing a partner/date to the room and asking you to leave?

Lots of decoration or only a little? Formal or casual?

Do you talk on the phone a lot? What time(s) of day are you usually on the telephone? Do you expect privacy for those calls? Will you be willing to give your roommate privacy for his or her calls?

Do you like to have everything neatly in its place? Or are you comfortable with a certain amount of disorder?

What kind(s) of music, television shows, games and movies do you like? If you and your roommate have opposing tastes, how will you deal with that--use headphones, take turns choosing, leave music off completely unless you're alone?

Are you willing to loan personal items? If so, is anything off-limits?

Do you stay up late? Wake up early?

What is your social life like? Are you an extrovert or an introvert?



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