

SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES TO DISCUSS WITH HOUSEMATES

Good housemates can be one of the best parts of your university experience. But picking compatible housemates isn't all luck. When you start looking for a place, take some time to sit down with your potential housemates and have a frank, honest discussion about how you see your life together working on a practical day-to-day basis. Open communication, right from the start, is the best approach. Below are some of the concerns that should be discussed. You may want to consider signing a brief agreement to record your understanding.

- 1) **LEASE** – You may choose to all appear on the same lease or, alternatively, each sign a separate lease. Under most tenancy agreements, if you all appear on the same lease, you are each responsible to the landlord for the whole rent. If one of your roommates fails to pay their share of the rent, the landlord can look to the remaining roommates to make up the difference. If you sign separate leases, you can each have an independent relationship with the landlord and are only responsible to the landlord for the rent specified in your own agreement.
- 2) **RENT** – Money can be the single biggest source of friction between roommates, particularly when you all appear on one lease. It is important to clarify what amount is being paid and by whom. For example, if one person shares a room, do they pay less than the roommate that gets a single room? Alternatively, if all roommates get a single room does the person with a smaller room pay less?
- 3) **OTHER CHARGES** – It is important to know exactly what costs are shared when living together (ie: telephone, food, TV rental, etc). Also, it is advisable to decide when payments are due. For example, if one roommate is responsible for paying the telephone bill, the other roommate(s) may be required to pay their share a certain number of days after the bill is received or before the due date of the bill. Remember that if only one roommate signs for a service, that roommate will be responsible to the company for the entire bill.
- 4) **ROOMS** – If the rooms are identical, choosing one may not be a concern. But if one room is larger than others, or has a better view, some negotiation will be necessary. It can be as complicated as negotiating a different rent for each room, or as easy as a coin flip to determine who gets a particular room.
- 5) **OBLIGATIONS** – Different individuals prefer different chores. Whether washing dishes, cooking, general cleanliness, or cleaning the bathroom, it is necessary to determine a level of tolerance for tasks. Sometimes it's beneficial to set up a schedule and/or alternate duties on a weekly or monthly basis.
- 6) **SUMMER MONTHS** – Often students are not present during the summer months or stop in only occasionally. You should discuss what is happening during this time period. If the place is to be vacant for an extended period, it would be a good idea to have a friend check the premises periodically for security reasons, and to pick up any mail. If the tenants are going to return at varying times throughout the summer, it may be prudent to coordinate those dates.
- 7) **SUBLETTING** – There are two primary situations that involve subletting. One is when you sublet in the summer to get extra income. The second is when a roommate leaves for a longer period for whatever reason and wants to sublet to meet their monetary obligations. In the first case, it is necessary to discuss who will sublet and how the income is to be divided. Does the subtenant have the use of the entire apartment or just one bedroom and the common area? (It is advisable to have a

written agreement with the subtenant.) In the second case, there should be some discussion as to whether the subtenant needs to be approved by all the parties or if the subtenant needs to be a non-smoker or the same sex as the remaining roommates.

- 8) **HOUSE RULES** – Often this can be the most difficult area of discussion. One issue may bother a roommate but they do not want to say anything because it may be interpreted as “complaining” or “whining” by other roommates. In these situations, the irritation festers until a person “blows up” (often during exam time when stress is already high) over what might appear to be a minor issue. It is strongly advised that some ground rules are set regarding the following issues:

Noise: early morning or late at night, it can be caused by stereos, television, or simply talking late with a friend.

Common Complaint – *“My roommate likes to listen to his/her stereo [even at low volumes] late at night.”*

Guests: can consist of mutual friends, visitors, overnight guests, partners, or parents.

Common Complaint – *“My roommate has their partner over every Friday and Saturday night or they stay for a week at a time.”*

Personal Items: whose furniture is to be used, policy on borrowing items, replacing items in the fridge. NOTE: it may be worthwhile to do a property list to ensure that everybody knows which items belong to each roommate and also for insurance purposes.

Common Complaint – *“My roommate went into my bedroom to borrow my hair dryer and didn’t tell me until a couple of days later when I couldn’t find it.”*

Smoking: roommates and guests? In their room? Throughout the apartment?

Common complaint – *“My roommates and I agreed that we would not smoke but my roommate has a friend who chain smokes. After three hours the apartment stinks!”*

Leaving Messages: it is always important to have good communication between roommates and to designate an area to leave messages/mail for each other.

Common Complaint – *“My roommate never writes down messages and tells me after the message becomes irrelevant.”*

Studying: are there times when visitors will not be allowed, do people have preferred areas to study?

Common Complaint – *“My roommate likes to work in the living room on the computer late at night. The computer doesn’t bother me but the keyboard clicking does!”*

- 9) **OTHER** – Other issues include: Do you want pets? How are you going to resolve disputes? Will any additional roommates be allowed? How will you decide what happens at the end of the lease?