

5 Tips to Managing a Difficult Roommate Situation

No matter how well you think you know someone, you don't really know them until you live with them. So, whether you're rooming with your best friend from high school or a new friend you met at college, there are bound to be challenges as you learn how to live together.

The best advice is to negotiate your living arrangements *before* you move in together – what time is lights-out? will you share food or have your own? how will you split bills? – but if it's too late for those negotiations, there may still be time to salvage your roommate relationship.

Here are five tips to help you maintain a drama-free living environment:

1. **Remain calm.** Whether you and your roommate disagree about cleanliness, noise or other issues, try to keep your discussions calm. By focusing on the specific issue – without making it personal – you can help defuse a potentially volatile situation. Try to identify your conflict areas in advance, and schedule time to discuss possible solutions when you're both relaxed, rather than in the heat of the moment.
2. **Let your roommate have a say.** If you're aiming for resolution, you will need to understand your roommate's point of view. Maybe there's a good reason she doesn't put dishes in the dishwasher immediately or leaves her shoes in the living room. And by understanding the reasons behind the behavior, you have a better chance of reaching a collaborative resolution.
3. **Don't aim to win.** Your objective in talking with your roommate should always be collaboration, not victory. Make suggestions rather than demands. This can be particularly challenging if your last roommate was a younger sibling. Your role here is *not* to be in charge, it's to find a way to live together peacefully.
4. **Make time to set boundaries.** If you're not happy with your living arrangements, chances are your roommate isn't either. Set time to have a calm but candid conversation about what's working and what isn't. See if you can agree to "rules of engagement" that reinforce the good and mitigate the bad. For example, if food is a conflict area, assign refrigerator shelves and cabinets to each roommate to keep food separate. If it's cleanliness – or lack thereof – suggest that at least the common areas should be maintained.
5. **Know when to walk away.** This is true for both the short- and the long-term. If your attempt at collaborative conversation is getting heated, take a break. Leave the residence hall or apartment to get some air or grab some coffee. Or just spend some time apart until you are both ready to start again. Long-term, be prepared to recognize that your living situation may have to change if the conditions don't improve. Just knowing you have an "Option B" may make things more tolerable.

The important thing in all this is to make your living arrangements as stress-free as possible so you can focus on your studies. The added anxiety of a challenging roommate can make it difficult to concentrate, to study, and to complete assignments. It can also make it difficult to eat or sleep well, which will in turn also impact your overall performance. Remember why you're *really* in school—to deepen your knowledge—and do what's right for you to achieve your goals.