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THE ROOMMATE GUIDE FOR OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND



INTRODUCTION

Most college students live with a roommate! Deciding who to live with is an important, exciting, and sometimes daunting task. *The Roommate Guide* is designed to:

- Get you started finding a roommate
- Help you ask the right questions to make a good match
- Give you tips for good communication
- Offer strategies for avoiding and dealing with conflict

The Roommate Guide is one of many publications available from Off-Campus Housing Services to help you with your housing search. Visit us online at www.och.umd.edu for more information.

Off-Campus Housing Services
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welcome

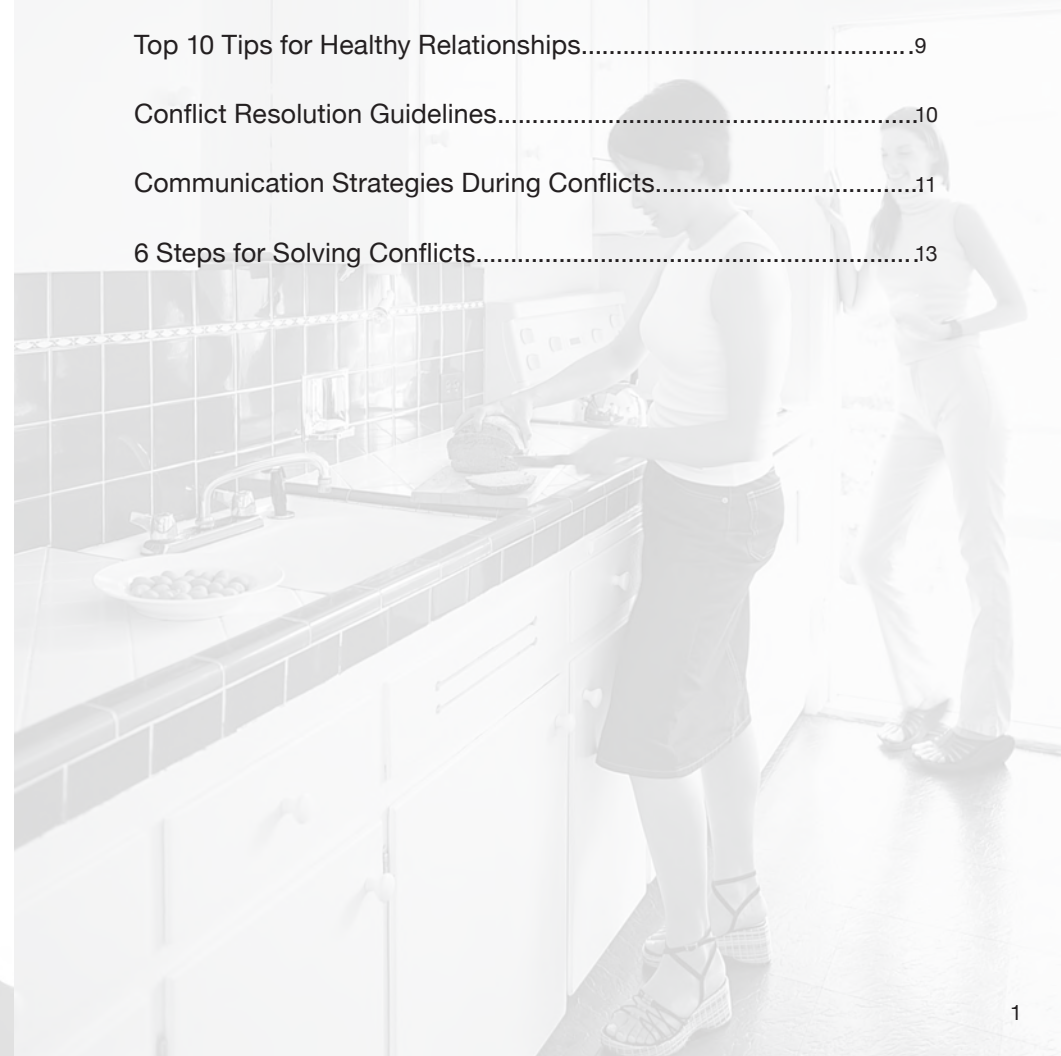
The information and resources offered by Off-Campus Housing Services at the University of Maryland are for the benefit of off-campus students. The University assumes no responsibility for situations arising from the use of the provided resources.



TABLE of CONTENTS

contents

- Roommate Checklist..... 2
- Getting to Know Your Roommate..... 4
- Establishing Ground Rules with Your Roommate..... 5
- Identifying Communication Styles..... 7
- Communicating With Your Roommate..... 8
- Top 10 Tips for Healthy Relationships..... 9
- Conflict Resolution Guidelines..... 10
- Communication Strategies During Conflicts..... 11
- 6 Steps for Solving Conflicts..... 13





ROOMMATE CHECKLIST

Consider these points throughout the process of choosing a roommate, finding a place, and getting settled.

1. Choosing a Roommate- know what's important to you:

- Someone that smokes, doesn't smoke, no preference?
- Someone with pets?
- Someone the same or a different gender than you?
- Does age matter? (younger, older, same age)
- Someone in a relationship or single?
- Someone who shares the same expectations in terms of cleaning, paying for things, sharing food, using each other's things, etc.?
- Someone who shares a similar budget?
- Someone who shares similar sleep and study habits?

2. Finding a place- Use the print materials from Off-Campus Housing Services for detailed suggestions about looking for housing.

Also discuss:

- Who will look for a place? Will one person or both be responsible?
- How will you make a final decision as to where you will be living?
- How will the security deposit be handled (by one person or jointly)?

3. Setting expectations:

- Communicate openly and honestly; be flexible, but do not feel you have to compromise on things you feel strongly about.
- How will you handle rent payments, utility bills and late fees?
- What will be your policy for using each other's possessions, including those in the common areas such as the couch or television?
- What will be your guest and party policy?
- How will you handle cleaning responsibilities?
- Will you grocery shop for one another or just yourself?
- How will you handle mail?
- Complete a roommate contract or agreement about how you are going to handle certain situations.

Who will bring what?

- Make sure you sit down and make a list of what each of you is going to bring, from furniture to appliances.
- Who will purchase any new/necessary items that neither of you currently own?
- Have you rented a furnished house or apartment?

When expectations are not met:

- Stay calm.
- Schedule a house meeting.
- List what you want to talk about prior to the meeting. Stay in the present; don't list things that happened a month ago.
- Talk to one another and come to an agreement. Look at what you can all do differently next time. Don't yell and don't accuse.
- Try not to leave notes. Communicate face-to-face or over the phone.
- It's no one's fault but your own if you don't confront issues that are bothering you.



4. Once you move in:

- Who will be responsible for calling the landlord if you have problems with the unit?
- How will you make each other aware of the conversations you have with your landlord?
- Finally, remember that you and your roommate must continue to communicate with each other if you want your relationship to remain a positive one.

Now that you have thought about what you're looking for, log on to www.ochdatabase.umd.edu and start searching! You can also create your own free profile and have potential roommates contact you directly.

checklist





GETTING TO KNOW YOUR ROOMMATE

To be comfortable living with someone, it is important to get to know each other and have open communication. Spend some quality time together, especially within the first few days of living together. Invite your roommate to a movie or out to dinner and introduce each other to your friends. It is also important to discuss house rules up front and include them in your housing agreement to avoid future confusion. And don't forget, for every question you ask your roommate, be sure to share things about yourself as well!

Good questions to help you get to know each other

- What name do you like to go by?
- Where are you from?
- Where else have you lived? (When was that? Did you enjoy the experience?)
- How old are you?
- When is your birthday?
- Why did you come to the University of Maryland?
- What are you interested in majoring in?
- What are your favorite things to do?
- What kind of activities were you involved in during high school?
- What TV shows or movies do you like to watch?
- What genre of books do you enjoy reading?
- What is your family like? Do you have any siblings? (How many and how old are they?)
- What types of hobbies or activities do you enjoy?
- What type of music do you like listening to?
- What sports do you play?
- What sports do you like to watch?
- What type of exercise regiment do you follow?
- How do you feel about living away from home?
- What kinds of activities do you want to become involved in on campus?
- What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?
- What are your friends like?
- What, if anything, do you find interesting about religion or spiritual beliefs?
- Is your lifestyle affected by your religion or spiritual beliefs?
- What jobs have you held and where have you worked?

Learning to Live Together

- What time do you like to go to bed?
- When do you prefer to be awake? (Are you a morning person or prefer to sleep in?)
- How important is it for things to be neat and clean?
- What are your feelings on sharing things (food, toiletries, etc.)?
- What are your study habits?
- What pet peeves do you have?
- Do you smoke? How often? Inside only, outside only, or both?
- Do you drink? How often and in what setting?
- Do you use any drugs?
- How do you feel about having guests over?
- How do you prefer to handle conflict?

ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES

This worksheet is designed to help you and your roommate(s) establish guidelines to follow while you are living together. Listed below are several issues that typically cause conflict between roommates. Discussing your preferences now will help you to avoid potential future conflict. Try to resolve any differences now, before conflicts arise, in a manner that is satisfactory to all roommates.

Guests

- How many guests should be allowed at a time and how often?
- At what times are guests acceptable for studying and/or social purposes? Is it different on weeknights and weekends?
- Will you have to give notice if you will be having guests?
- Can guests stay overnight?
- Are there any restrictions regarding guests that are important to you?

Food/Shopping/Household Supplies

- Will you buy your own food or will all food costs be shared?
- Will you be expected to cook individually or will you create a rotating schedule of who will cook for everyone?
- Is borrowing food acceptable?
- How will the cost of household supplies (such as cleaning supplies, toilet paper, dish detergent, etc. be divided?)

Cleanliness/Cleaning Responsibilities

- Will you clean up after yourself or will you rotate cleaning the entire space?
- Who will clean common areas and how often?
- Will you create a schedule defining who cleans what or spend one day each week cleaning together?

Be sure to take into account tasks such as sweeping/vacuuming, emptying the trash, dusting, tidying up the room(s), cleaning the kitchen and bathroom, etc.

Community/Personal Property

- Can you borrow personal items (stereo, television, appliances such as a hairdryer or curling iron, clothing, computer, etc.) or not?
- Do you have to ask before borrowing?
- May roommates use personal items when the owner is not there?
- How will the use of community items (refrigerator, shared furniture or appliances, etc.) be divided between roommates?



ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES *continued*

Study Hours/Sleeping

- What hours and days will be set aside for study time?
- Can you play low background music?
- What time do you expect to be able to go to sleep on weeknights and weekends?
- What time is it reasonable for the living space to be quiet during the week? On the weekend?
- Do you expect to be able to nap?

Parties/Entertaining

- Do you want to be notified in advance if your roommate is having a party?
- Is there a maximum number of people allowed?
- Who will clean up afterwards?
- Are there specific times or days when parties are not allowed?



Smoking/Drinking/Drug Use

- Are smoking, drinking, and/or drug use allowed in your room or common area?
- Are there specific days or times when these are allowed?
- Are any banned at all times?
- Are certain substances allowed only in specific areas of the living space?

Pets

- Do you have allergies that would require banning certain types of pets?
- Will pets be allowed in common areas?
- Will all of you be responsible for the care of the pet?

IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATION STYLES

The following is a table developed by Dr. Christopher L. Heffner, M.S., illustrating what he believes are the three styles of communication that people exhibit, and how to identify them.

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
DEFINITION	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own self worth	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights while maintaining respect for the rights of others	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights but you violate the rights of others
IMPLICATIONS TO OTHERS	My feelings are not important I don't matter I think I'm inferior	We are both important We both matter I think we are equal	Your feelings are not as important You don't matter I think I'm superior
VERBAL STYLES	Apologetic Overly soft or	I statements Firm Voice	You statements Loud Voice
NON-VERBAL STYLES	Looking down or away Stooping posture, excessive head nodding	Looking direct Relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed movements	Staring, narrow eyes Tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers
POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES	Lowered self esteem Anger at self False feelings of inferiority Disrespect from others Pitied by others	Higher self esteem Self respect Respect from others	Guilt Anger from others Lowered self esteem Disrespect from others Feared by others

styles

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR ROOMMATE

The most important aspect of any relationship, and especially for living with someone, is communication. It is important to begin your experience as roommates with a strong foundation of open communication. This will minimize initial problems while serving as a useful method for handling any issues that may arise. Knowledge of these fundamental aspects of communication can smooth the way to a happy and healthy living situation.

Communication includes both **verbal and nonverbal messages**. The different parts of the message you convey have different levels of effectiveness in terms of influencing the listener.

Words used- 7% Tone of voice- 33% Nonverbal Cues- 55%

Although you should choose your words carefully, how you say them is even more important.

Not only should you be able to make your feelings known to your roommate, but you must also **be an active listener** to create a healthy and open atmosphere for all parties.

- *Understand your own communication style* so that you can adapt to the styles of your roommate.
- *Don't let yourself drift off while listening:* you expect your roommate to hear and respect what you have to say, so you need to show the same courtesy.
- *Nonverbal communication is just as important when you are an active listener* as when you are speaking. Your roommate will notice nonverbal cues of whether or not you are interested in the conversation and paying attention.
- *Negative cues may discourage your roommate* and block further attempts at communicating.
- *Give feedback* to show that you have been listening actively, but wait until your roommate has finished conveying his/her message.
- *If your roommate asks you to just listen* and is not looking for a response, you should respect those wishes.

You can practice active listening and get to know your roommate at the same time. Sit down together and tell each other a story about yourself. These steps will give you an idea of your listening style, as well as show what improvements could be made.

1. Listen closely to the story without interrupting.
2. Once your roommate is finished, repeat the story back to him/her. This doesn't have to be word for word, but should include the main points of the story.
3. Have your roommate confirm if your rendition was accurate.
4. Ask expansive questions to learn more details.

As a good communicator you should be direct, courteous and calm. Spare others your unsolicited advice and acknowledge that what works for you may not work for others. Be sure to state your main points first and then offer details if necessary. Also listen for hidden feelings and take notice of any nonverbal cues from the other person.

TOP 10 TIPS FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

10. Have realistic expectations: No one can be everything we might want him or her to be. Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are and not trying to change them!

9. It's a process: getting to know people takes time, so be patient but also make an effort; relationships don't develop out of thin air.

8. Communicate:

- Make time
- Be an active and genuine listener
- Ask questions
- Share information

7. Fight fair:

- Say you're sorry when you're wrong
- Don't criticize
- Don't make assumptions
- Be prepared to compromise and disagree
- Don't hold grudges

6. Be flexible and allow growth and change.

5. Be dependable: follow through on your responsibilities and plans to build and maintain trust.

4. Show your warmth: let people know that you care.

3. Keep your life balanced: don't overload on activities but get out and try new things. Meet new people so you aren't depending on a single person.

2. Take care of you: relationships are mutual; if you aren't happy it will be reflected in the relationship.

1. Be yourself: you'll have more fun and find it easier to connect with people if you relax and let your real self shine through.



tips





CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDELINES

Having a roommate conflict?

Don't worry if you find yourself in conflict with your roommate(s). Remember that disagreements are inevitable, especially when people live together and interact everyday. Don't be afraid to confront your roommate(s) about what is bothering you. By working through the situation in a productive way, you will be able to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.

Here are 10 Effective Ways to Handle Conflict:

1. Make sure you have enough time to effectively discuss the situation with your roommate(s). Instead of bringing up a problem as your roommate is walking out the door, it is best to find a time when you can both sit down and talk about the conflict.
2. Remember that you and your roommate(s) are entitled to the same right to be heard in the discussion. It may help to pick a neutral location to meet to discuss the conflict.
3. Enter into the discussion without the desire to "win". Resolving a roommate conflict requires that everyone make a compromise. By finding a solution that satisfies everyone, you and your roommate(s) will all "win".
4. Try to take a step back and view the situation from the perspective of your roommate(s), and ask them to do the same. Understanding the problem from each other's perspectives will help find an agreeable solution.
5. Talk about actions that a person can change rather than aspects of your roommate's personality. Personal attacks make it harder to effectively communicate with your roommate(s) about the issues at hand.
6. If you have more than one roommate, make sure you do not team up with one roommate against the other. All of you should work together to solve the problem, and teaming up on one roommate will only make it harder to find a compromise.
7. Take into account any cultural differences that could be adding to the problem. If your roommate comes from a very different background, you may find that you have different customs and values that can affect your living situation and the way you handle conflict. It is important to keep the lines of communication open so that you and your roommate(s) feel comfortable discussing these differences.
8. Make the decision to remain calm and patient while working out a solution. If the discussion escalates into an argument, it may be best to stop and cool off so that you can talk about the problem rationally later on.
9. If your roommate(s) begin fighting unfairly, it is up to you to get the conversation back on the right track. It is best to set a positive tone from the start and maintain it throughout the conversation.
10. It may be helpful to give your roommate(s) time to think about the situation (at least overnight). Your roommate(s) will be able to better discuss his/her perception of the conflict, which will lead to a more satisfactory solution.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES DURING CONFLICTS

When we are in a conflict with another, it is an emotionally charged situation. Very few of us are lucky enough to have someone to teach us how to communicate our needs effectively in a way that is easy for others to hear. Yet, conflict is an inevitable feature in most of our relationships. By learning to communicate clearly, we can express our needs and feelings in a way that helps resolve the situation instead of making it worse. When you are in conflict with your roommate, think of it as an opportunity to practice effective communication. Here are some helpful tools to assist you with the gift of clear expression.

Observations VS. Evaluations

We are always going to have a predisposition of seeing things from our particular worldview and have our own way of organizing our experiences or making meaning of our external environment. It's sort of like that quote that says, "We tend to see the world as we are, not as it is."

Observations are observable facts whereas evaluations are how you feel about those facts. Words such as always, never, ever, and whenever are sometimes used to express an evaluation of a situation. For example: "You never listen to me." Carefully distinguishing the observable facts and how you feel about those facts will help you more clearly communicate your feelings and needs.

Getting the Message Across

To make your messages more clear, use "I" language instead of "you" language. "I" language can help in the following ways:

- Takes "blame" out of the statement and will help prevent the receiver from becoming defensive
- Allows the sender to express their feelings and thoughts
- Allows the sender to get to the root of the problem for them
- Are more thoughtful statements and helps senders to weigh their remarks more cautiously

WHEN YOU'D SAY

I can't
You are wrong
I don't
You have to
I never
You don't understand
You can't
I don't know
I have no idea

TRY THIS INSTEAD

I can
My understanding
I do
It would help if you
Today...
Let me clarify
You can
I'll find out
I know who can help

Beware of Demands

Have you ever felt like you would be blamed or punished if you did not do what was being asked of you? If so, then you know how it feels to have someone demand something from you. Demands also tend to come with criticisms and judgment.

PEOPLE SHUT DOWN WHEN THEY HEAR THINGS LIKE:	FIND OUT WHAT THEY NEED BY ASKING:
• You <i>should</i> know better	• Can you tell me about...
• The house is <i>supposed</i> to be clean at all times	• What do you think about...
• I <i>deserve</i> to have my girlfriend/boyfriend over any time I want	• What is your opinion on...
• I have the <i>right</i> to do whatever I want	• What do you know about...

You can steer clear of making this mistake yourself by empathizing when your request is turned down. When we use demanding language, people will either submit or rebel. Either way, the chance of working together to meet everyone's needs is diminished.

Identify your Needs

Making requests in clear, positive, concrete action language reveals what we really want. The clearer you are about what you want back, the more likely it is that you'll get it back. Be careful though, that you are making a request and not a demand. Here are some ways to begin: • **Would you be willing...** • **Are you willing...** • **I would love it if you...**

Words that are interpretations of others:	Words that express feelings when we are upset:	Words that express feelings when we are content:
abandoned	aggravated	alive
attacked	angry	amused
betrayed	annoyed	appreciative
cheated	concerned	carefree
ignored	confused	comfortable
manipulated	disappointed	encouraged
misunderstood	discouraged	ecstatic
neglected	frustrated	glad
pressured	hesitant	inspired
put down	hurt	interested
rejected	irritated	pleased
taken for granted	puzzled	relieved
unappreciated	resentful	thrilled
unsupported	sad	trusting
used	scared	wonderful

Putting it all Together

To make your needs, feelings, and requests more clear, try using this formula:

I feel (specific feeling—be sure to express feeling below anger)
when (specific behavior—do not use “you,” focus on just one behavior)
because (the effect of the behavior or why does it make you feel that way).

When you'd say: You never ask for my opinion and I'm really sick of it.

Try this instead: I feel hurt when I'm not asked for my opinion because I believe I have a lot of good ideas and I want to contribute to this group.

Adapted from a creation by Shay Bright from *Defusing the Angry Person* by Rhea Joyce Rubin, *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshal Rosenberg, and *The Conflict Center* handouts.

6 STEPS FOR SOLVING CONFLICTS

STEP 1 Pick a time when everyone involved in the conflict can come together and discuss the situation.

STEP 2 Give each roommate a chance to explain (1) his/her perception of the problem; (2) how he/she feels as a result of the situation; and (3) the best outcome.

STEP 3 Work together to determine the best way to resolve the conflict. After debating possible solutions, come to an agreement that will best satisfy everyone's needs and expectations.

STEP 4 Make an action plan explaining the changes each roommate will make to achieve the desired resolution. Be sure to be specific and to give a time frame for making the changes.

STEP 5 Set a future date to reevaluate the situation. Depending on if the conflict is resolved or not resolved here are future steps to follow in those instances.

If the conflict is **RESOLVED**:

Make sure you maintain the behavioral changes put in place as a result of this process. Resolving roommate conflicts is a process, so do not give up if it does not work perfectly the first time!

STEP 6

If the conflict is **NOT RESOLVED**:

Initial attempts at resolving a roommate conflict may not be successful, but try not to get frustrated. It may take several conversations before the situation is completely resolved. Continue working with your roommate(s) to resolve the situation!

STEP 6

conflicts