

The Roommate Success Guide

Living with a roommate can be one of the most rewarding, fun and educational aspects of your college experience. Despite "roommate horror stories" you may hear about in popular culture, the truth is roommate relationships are like most relationships - they require communication, mutual respect, understanding, a common set of expectations and a good sense of humor. Roommates who communicate regularly and get to know each other are the most satisfied.

To best prepare yourself for life with your roommate, we've compiled the following resources and tips for each stage of the roommate relationship - from searching for a roommate to living together. Remember the college experience isn't just about the education you will receive in the classroom; outside of the classroom you will also grow by challenging yourself and exploring new ideas. Living with a roommate is a great place to begin this process.

Roommate Bill of Rights

The following Roommate Bill of Rights, adapted from Kent State University, is a reminder to each resident that the enjoyment of life in a residence hall will depend, to a large extent, on the thoughtful consideration demonstrated by roommates.

Remember: To be a mature adult is to accept responsibility for the welfare of oneself and others. It is incumbent upon all students to be familiar with the policies and regulations of Kutztown University and their impact within the residence halls. Ignorance of University and residence hall policies cannot be accepted as an excuse, and students are expected to read and know the information found on the Housing and Residence Life website and in *The Key*. If you have any questions about these policies, please contact a residence hall staff member. Students may be held accountable for actions that are either intentional or negligent. In order to be a responsible community member, students must understand the impact of their actions and not just the intent.

Basic rights of a roommate include:

1. The right to read and study free from undue interference in one's room. Unreasonable noise and other distractions inhibit the exercise of this right.
2. The right to sleep without undue disturbance from noise, guests of roommate(s), etc.
3. The right to expect that a roommate will respect one's personal belongings.
4. The right to a clean environment.
5. The right to free access to one's room and facilities without pressure from the roommate.
6. The right to privacy, including the right to exclude non-residents of the room from the room.
7. The right to address grievances.
8. The right to be free from fear of intimidation and physical or emotional harm.
9. The right to expect reasonable cooperation and the use of "room shared" appliances (refrigerator, fan, etc.).
10. The right to seek help with the roommate relationship from Housing and Residence Life staff.

Policies

For policies that relate to living on campus refer to *The Key* and Housing and Residence Life website.

Positive Roommate Relations

Having a positive relationship with your roommate depends on each of you trying to make an honest attempt to get know the other. When students are placed in a residence hall they must prepare for this new experience with an open mind and an appreciation for those differences that exist in each person's background. The following information is designed to assist you in practicing the important communication skills of careful listening, open and honest feedback, and reaching a mutually agreed upon living arrangement.

The Roommate Agreement Form

This agreement is designed to help roommates get to know each other and to start opening the lines of communication on topics that we know are important for successful roommate relationships. A sample roommate agreement and “The Roommate Success Guide” are available to view on the Kutztown University’s Housing and Residence Life website. Roommates will complete the form together and sign the agreement online through Kutztown University’s “KUNITED” website. This agreement may be revised at any time. Residents are encouraged to revisit this agreement after the first month of the semester.

Some Conversation Starters

VERY IMPORTANT: Before beginning any conversations, it is important that everyone feels safe and comfortable when sharing this type of information. It’s a good idea to establish some ground rules before beginning the conversation. Any information shared of this type is often private and should not be shared with others. As always, please remember to be respectful

About My Background

During the first couple of days at Kutztown, sit down with your roommate and begin to get to know each other. Even if you’ve been friends before coming to school, it is important to start getting to know each other as roommates. If you’ve just met your roommate it can be difficult to begin sharing, but start with the basics. Listen to each other with openness and suspend judgment.

Some suggested topics for “breaking the ice”:

- Discuss your family backgrounds and hometowns
- Share your reasons for choosing Kutztown University
- Describe your neighborhood, your high school friends and your best friends
- Explain your hobbies, interests and activities
- Answer the questions: what will you miss most while being away from home? What will you miss least?

Personal Preferences

Once you have covered the basics about each other, you are ready to move into more serious areas of concern for roommates. Living in the same room does not mean that you must do everything together nor will you necessarily be the best of friends, but you do have to develop the ability to communicate with each other and adapt to each other’s lifestyle. Discuss the following questions with each other.

Roommate Preference Questionnaire Type Questions

1. Discuss your sleeping habits (i.e., weekdays, weekend, etc.).
2. Discuss what kind of sense of humor you have (e.g., silly, sarcastic, etc.).
3. What time do you typically come home by? (e.g., before midnight, after midnight, 2:00 am) Discuss how to handle late nights and evenings.
4. Discuss issues about the noise level in the room (e.g., TV, radio, studying, sleeping, etc.).
5. How much TV do you watch and what kinds of shows do you like to watch?
6. Does it bother you if your roommate watches TV when you are in the room? (Give examples when it would/would not be okay).
7. Discuss what state you like the room to be in (e.g., very neat, messy, etc.)
8. What kind of music do you listen to? Are there any types of music that you dislike?
9. Where do you like to study?
10. What belongings of yours are you willing to share? If so, what are the ground rules?
11. How do you feel about the use of drugs/alcohol?
12. Do you smoke?
13. What are your spiritual or religious values?
14. What are some of your habits that a roommate might need to know?
15. What guidelines should be set for guests in the room? Under what circumstances can someone else stay in the room? Does this conflict with the University’s overnight guest policy?

My Personal Response Style Sample Conversation Starters

How you experience and express your feelings has a lot to do with how well you relate to each other. Roommates who enjoy living with each other typically “read” each other’s feelings fairly accurately, and respond with empathy. By sharing some information about your personal response style, you may make understanding and responding to each other easier.

Discuss the following issues:

1. When I am upset about something I usually...
2. Something that will usually cheer me up...
3. When things are going really well I’m usually...
4. I would prefer to be left alone when...
5. When do you need time alone?
6. How will you let me know when you need time alone?
7. You’ll know when I’m angry because I usually...
8. What makes you angry?
9. How will you let me know when you are angry?
10. I get tense or uptight when...
11. What makes you tense or uptight?
12. How will you let me know when you are tense or uptight?
13. You’ll know I am tense/stressed because I usually...
14. How will you let me know when you are tense/stressed?
15. Something that is likely to annoy me is...
16. How will you let me know what annoys you?
17. We will communicate feelings or frustrations by...
18. To me, relaxing is...

My Impressions/Reactions

The quality of roommate relationships is related to the communication between roommates. Positive relations have been shown to be typified by roommates more clearly understanding each other’s’ expectations, more openly communicating with each other, and their ability to verbalize to each other thoughts and feelings about one another. During all of your discussions with your roommate, listen carefully. Try to be unconditionally accepting of what you hear even though you may disagree. When you are accepting, your roommate will feel free to express things honestly.

Talk Together

Once you and your roommate have completed these individual exercises, talk together about your responses, your shared expectations, and those expectations where you differ. Be open and honest, keeping in mind that each of you has a right to your own opinions. If you are not sure what your roommate is saying, ask for clarification or try to repeat back what you have heard to make sure you understand. Remember that you and your roommates do not need to be best friends. You’ll probably have different hobbies or musical tastes. You may also find other friends to spend time with. One of the most rewarding experiences of being in college is getting to know many different kinds of people. Learning to accept and respect the differences in your roommate can be a valuable life lesson. Your first obligation to your roommate is to be friendly when you first meet, and then create a living environment that allows both of you time for productive studying, relaxation, and sleeping. Perhaps an even deeper friendship may develop over time.

Sharing

Sharing a room does not instantly mean freedom to use each other’s personal belongings. Discuss what items are and are not community property. Respect and protect your roommate and his or her belongings (as well as yours) by keeping your room locked when you leave.

Establish Your Roommate and Suitemate Agreements

After finishing these activities, you should both complete a Roommate Agreement to determine how to share your room — how you will share space and respect each other's needs, including cleaning, music, sleep, study hours, food, and guests. Your Community Assistant (CA) can assist you in completing this document, so if you need help, please contact your CA to set up an appointment. Roommate Agreements and Suitemate Agreements are contracts that help you discuss issues and negotiate resolutions respectfully before seeking mediation.

As the year progresses, you'll probably need to discuss your relationship and make changes to your agreement. Work with your CA to help resolve conflicts. He or she has training, experience, and insights to help you work through tough issues.

Keep Talking

Throughout the semester, you'll have many opportunities to discuss your community standards, roommate agreements, and suitemate agreements through meetings and individual discussions. Keep the lines of communication open and discuss problems and concerns before the pressure begins to build. Honest negotiation can bring solutions to most concerns

Roommate Conflict Resolution

In any situation where you spend a lot of time with someone, conflict may arise. When these differences arise, first try talking out issues while using the communication skills that help most—be open and honest, listen closely, and be specific.

Use the Roommate Agreement Form, reevaluate your living situation, and establish ground rules. You will both change throughout the year, which means that this document should change as well. Here is an outline you can use to talk through issues in your relationship with your roommate. Allow each person to express his or her thoughts and feelings using the discussion outline below.

- Remain calm. If emotions are running too high, take a break and talk again later.
- What's the problem? State the problem as you see it. Focus on the behavior and not the roommate.
- How do you feel about it? Share your feelings about the issue.
- Listen to your roommate's perspective. Let them speak without interruption.
- Make sure you understand what is being said. Never assume anything.
- What do you want or need? Describe how you think the problem could be solved.
- What would you like your roommate to do? What is keeping this from happening?
- Be accepting of feedback as you are giving it.
- How can you help? Offer what you would be willing to do to help the situation.
- What other options are available? Discuss other options and alternatives to ensure you have considered many different ways of resolving the issue.
- What is our final decision? Come to a mutual understanding of how you are each going to improve the situation.
- Remember that this is not a win-lose situation. The goal is to find some kind of compromise with which you can all live.

As 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!

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.

If things can't be worked out and you are still having difficulties with your roommate relationship, there are people and resources on campus available to assist you:

- Not sure where to start? Talk with your Community Assistant or any residence life staff member. They can point you in the right direction.
- Seek assistance from your Resident Director
- If you have talked to all the above resources and you feel you still need for assistance, contact the Housing and Residence Life at (610) 683-4027.

Most roommates can work out mutually agreeable relationships with their roommates. When roommates have conflicts, the Housing and Residence Life staff can help resolve the conflict through mediation or room-change requests. When students are unable to amicably resolve conflicts on their own, the residence life staff may assert more control over finding a resolution. The staff may require the roommates to participate in a conflict resolution meeting, or staff may make a determination without the input of the residents as to how to resolve the conflict. As stated in the housing license, the University may relocate any student to another room to resolve a conflict. Residents that are reassigned to a more expensive room assignment will be financially responsible for their new living space.

Common Roommate Issues and Suggested Solutions

You are more social and your roommate is more reserved. It is important to equally share the room for each of your needs. Take turns having friends over and/or having private time in the room.

Your roommate does not want to be good friends. Roommates do not need to be best friends. However, you need to establish a respectful relationship. Avoid competition and improve your relationship by finding interests and friends that suit your individual needs.

One of you is a borrower. Make a habit of asking before borrowing, even when your roommate is not around. If your roommate is a borrower, be open and tell him or her how you feel about this. Try to come up with some compromises about mutual sharing and splitting the costs of items you both use.

One of you is very clean. The other is very casual. If you constantly dust around your bed and your roommate's bed is constantly unmade, this may become a source of tension. Try to determine a physical space for each of you and respect each other's areas. You do not have to set up a partition, but divide the room so that each of you has your own space.

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