

Introduction

Each RA is required to help every pair of new roommates work through a Shared Space Agreement during the first few weeks of their first semester together. In addition, there are other techniques and programs that RAs and house leaders can use to help address ?issues? between roommates. This publication provides some ideas and tools.

Good Examples

Helping roommates learn to live together is a very important role for house leaders, whether on staff or not. The first thing to do to help roommates, of course, is to be a good example. If you have a roommate, be sure to be respectful, responsible and resourceful in your dealings with him or her. You can also be a good example by the way that you treat others that live in the house and hall. A few simple rules can help:

- Don?t assume. If you think something?s going on that you disagree with, ask whether your perception is right before acting or accusing.
- Clarify, in advance, as much as you can about how you operate.
- Be patient and honest with yourself and others around you, as often as possible.
- Don?t ever talk about the person you are having trouble with behind their back.

Ways to Help

1. Make contact early with all residents in your house and establish rapport with them. Keep your ears open for possible conflicts.
2. Encourage individuals who talk to you to go back and talk with their roommate, instead, in an attempt to actually solve the issue.
3. Offer to help them talk things out. Be a moderator for their discussion.
4. Refer anyone who has tried to work things out?or is dealing with a very serious situation?to talk with a hall/complex coordinator or an assistant hall coordinator.
5. Avoid taking sides. You can be sympathetic to a struggle without jumping on the blame bandwagon.
6. Be aware of cultural differences in lifestyles, communication style, etc. The International Student Center has some movies and good information about cross-cultural roommates.
7. Use ice-breakers early on to help you see the dynamics between roommates.
8. Take and display roommate photos, to help everyone get better acquainted.
9. Do progressive room tours, to let everyone get to know each other and for roommates to work on something together.
10. Do paired roommate activities that get roommates to work together.
11. Use some of the hour-long FOCUS programs (in hall files) to help roommates get to know one another in a group setting. FriendsTalk is a particularly good one for this.

Roommate Programs

There are also three programs you might use to help roommates sort things out. They are on the pages that follow.

Nip It In The Bud

A First-Month Roommate Awareness Exercise

PURPOSE

Enable roommates to establish communication and anticipate potential problems as a way to "nip it in the bud" before they evolve into major difficulties.

SUPPLIES

- Handouts (on next page; make a copy for each participant)
- Pens or Pencils

PARTICIPANTS

- Both roommates should be present. It is important each roommate gets to discuss his or her relationship with each other roommate.

PROCESS

- Explain the purpose of the program and that "stems" are the beginnings of sentences that they are to complete.
- Pass out the forms and ask roommates sit back-to-back, completing the form individually. (5-10 minutes)
- Let everyone know that you are available to answer questions while they are completing the "stems" and questions on the form.
- Ask roommates to discuss their responses with one another, making sure to allow whoever is speaking to completely share their thoughts and feelings (good practice for being roommates!). (15-20 minutes)

IN THE GROUP

- Ask each person to share
 - "One thing I liked about what we talked about was...?"
 - "One thing I am committed to doing to help us get along well is..."
- Before you thank everyone for participating, make sure they know you are available to help roommates with difficulties, but that **THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND** that:
 - a. they have the **PRIMARY** responsibility for working things out between each other
 - b. it is vital to talk through a problem with the "problem" roommate, instead of others (housemates), and
 - c. the RA's job is primarily to help roommates talk with one another, not to "solve" the problem by making him or her "do" something (although the hall/complex coordinator's help may be enlisted to resolve seemingly "unresolvable" problems).

Stems and Questions

- 1 What do you like most about your roommate (e.g. interests, behavior, attitudes, beliefs)
- 2 What about your roommate concerns (interests, behavior, attitudes, beliefs...)?
- 3 Possible situations/events that one of us anticipates may create a problem...and what we can do to prevent it from arising...
- 4 Specific areas we both (together) need to work on...
- 5 Specific areas each of us needs to (individually) work on...
- 6 When should we set as a time we are committed to go through this again?
- 7 I think if one of us has a difficult problem with the other/s he or she should feel it's all right to ask the RA to help us work it out. YES? NO?

Thanks for helping to "nip in the bud" potential problems that could develop into major catastrophes! Keep communicating with each another. Most things can be worked out if roommates have the courage to speak up in everyone's interest!

Roommate Scruples

A roommate communication exercise

PURPOSE

Encourage residents to develop their assertive skills and to open up the lines between two roommates.

PROCEDURE

[Before beginning the exercise, cut the situations into strips. They are placed on the floor, in the middle of a circle of ten or fewer participants.]

1. Facilitate introduction of participants.
2. State purpose of game and explain Ground Rules.
3. Divide into groups of no more than 10 people.
4. Someone starts the game by drawing a strip of paper that includes a situation on it. He or she then reads it aloud, and answers it.
5. To answer, you must speak as if you were talking directly to your roommate.
6. If there is a disagreement or any comments, they are to be made after the person is done speaking. Personal experiences are encouraged.
7. After conversation dies, move clockwise, the next person draws a strip of paper, either from the discard pile or the unused pile.
8. The game ends when the time set prior to the game is up or you go through all the strips. (You can create your own strips, too, if you believe some situations are missing.)
9. Before you thank everyone for participating, make sure they know you are available to help roommates with difficulties, but that **THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND** that:
 - a. they have the **PRIMARY** responsibility for working things out between each other,
 - b. it is vital to talk through a problem with the "problem" roommate, instead of others (especially housemates),
 - c. the RA's job is primarily to help roommates talk with one another, not to "solve" the problem by making him or her "do" something (although the hall coordinator's help may be enlisted to resolve seemingly "unresolvable" problems.

GROUND RULES

- Speak in "I" sentences, not "you" sentences
- Be genuine and honest in answering.
- Respect each other's right to speak.
- Keep the names of people in past experiences anonymous.

Roommate Scruples

Questions

- What would you say if your roommate's friend was always in the room and you had no privacy?
- What would you do if your roommate continually had overnight guests without asking you first? You slept on the floor in the room next door!
- What would you say if your roommate failed a class and he was always out partying instead of studying? Now he complains about it!
- What would you say if your roommate's girlfriend was pregnant and he came to you for advice?
- What would you say if your roommate came to you and he thought that he has V. D.?
- What would you say if you knew that the girl that your roommate was dating was also dating someone else?
- What would you say if you absolutely hated the girl your roommate was dating?
- What would you say if your roommate borrowed your earrings and lost one of them?
- What would you say if your roommate ate in the dining center and said, "Oh well, I'll eat later." Your roommate only eats on occasion and then she eats a lot! You think that she may have an eating disorder.
- What would you say if you found laxatives and/or diuretics in her desk drawer? You were looking for a marker when you found them.
- What would you say if your roommate was seeing a guy who you knew was seeing another girl?
- What would you say if your roommate thought she was pregnant? She comes to you very upset!
- If your roommate had a man over one night without asking you what would you say? She expected you to sleep somewhere else. What would you say if this became a habit?
- What would you do if your roommate was sexually active and did NOT take ANY precautions? She came to you with this information and didn't think that it was any big deal because, "It would never happen to me!"
- What would you say if your roommate's boyfriend was always making a move on you whenever she was out of the room? It happened more than just once.
- What would you say if your makeup (blush) was gone after you had just used it in the morning. It was gone in the afternoon after your roommate left for home. How do you confront her on Monday?
- What would you do if you absolutely hated the guy that your roommate was dating?

- What would you do if your roommate always used your makeup? She never asked, she just assumes it's okay.
- What would you say if your roommate got in a fight with her boyfriend and you thought that your roommate was wrong? She came to you and asked you what you thought.
- What would you say if your roommate's boyfriend was always in the room and you could never get dressed, talk on the phone or anything?
- What would you say to your roommate if she failed a class but you knew that she never studied? These friends were around quite often and hung around our room.
- What would you say if your roommate was seeing one of his/her professors and this Prof. was married?
- What would you do if you heard your roommate on the phone and you knew that she had dialed long distance and she could not afford it? HE/SHE still owes you \$10.00 from the last bill.
- What would you say if your roommate never took phone messages for you? When he/she did they told you 2 days later.
- If your roommate used the hair dryer in the morning and your were asleep what would you say? You don't have class until noon and they have class at 8:00 a.m.
- What would you say if your roommate had a party in your room every weekend and you wanted to sleep or to study?
- What would you say if you thought that your roommate had a serious drug problem?
- What would you say if your roommate never made any attempt to meet anyone on the floor and was always complaining of not knowing anyone?
- What would you say if your roommate always turns on the radio while you're trying to study?
- What would you do if your roommate was overweight and they were always complaining but never took any suggestions?
- What would you say if your roommate drank every weekend and 3 or 4 times during the week? When they drank they got to the point of not knowing what happened the night before.
- If your roommate wore clothes that didn't match and they asked you how they looked, what would you say? They are going to the same party you are and they are going with you.
- What would you say if you let your roommate borrow your I.D. to check out some library books and then they are overdue and you got the bill?· What would you say if your roommate wanted to borrow your car? You know that if she does that your insurance will not cover her if she were to get into an accident.
- If your roommate continually ate the food that you bought what would you say? She never bought any food and when she did, she did NOT share.

Newly Roommies Game

SET-UP:

Ask the first roommate five of these questions and record it on index cards. Then bring the roommates back in and have them try to match. Each of those questions is worth five points. Then have the opposite roommate leave the room and ask five more questions and one more bonus question. Again, bring the exited roommate back in and attempt to match the five questions. Each of those questions is worth ten points. Finally, ask the bonus question, which is worth twenty five points. The winners will get the chance to compete in the whole hall contest for prizes. Ask any combination of questions, but do use one of the multiple choice questions for the bonus questions. Mark which questions you used and return it to Schmiddy when you are done with your winners.

- 1) What is your roommate's favorite gameshow?
- 2) If your roommate was a movie, would they be:
 - a. As Good as It Gets
 - b. Varsity Blues
 - c. American Pie
 - d. Scream 2
 - e. The Great Outdoors
- 3) What is your roommate's pet peeve?
- 4) What is your roommate's favorite leisure time activity?
- 5) What drink would best describe the attributes of your roommate?

- a. Jolt
 - b. Orange Juice
 - c. Water
 - d. Sex on the Beach
 - e. Milk
- 6) How would you rate your roommate's cleanliness?
- a. Mr. Clean
 - b. The dust is swept under the rug
 - c. Cleans about once a month
 - d. Knows Pigpen personally
 - e. Nuclear Disaster waiting to happen
- 7) If your roommate was a band name, they would be:
- a. Dixie Chicks
 - b. Green Day
 - c. Guns and Roses
 - d. Red Hot Chili Peppers
- 8) What is your roommate's father's name?
- 9) What high school did your roommate graduate from?
- 10) What is your roommate's astrological sign?
- 11) If your roommate was an animal, what would they be?
- a. Dog
 - b. Cat
 - c. Hyena
 - d. Lamb
 - e. Snake
- 12) What brand of soap does your roommate use?
- 13) How would you describe your roommate's sleeping attire?
- a. The bare minimum
 - b. It's Victoria's Secret
 - c. It's a cover up
 - d. Muhammad Ali (Boxers)
 - e. It's legal (Briefs)
- 14) What is your roommate's dream job?
- 15) What is your roommate's dream car?
- 16) Which movie would you describe your roommate's love life?
- a. Titanic
 - b. War of the Roses
 - c. Fatal Attraction
 - d. Love story
 - e. Dirty Dancing
- 17) How long does your roommate study every day (within a half-hour)?
- 18) How tall is your roommate (within an inch)?
- 19) What is your roommate's favorite saying?
- 20) How did your roommate meet their significant other?

Championship Questions

A-

- 1) How many times a day does your roommate look at themselves in the mirror?
 - 2) What is your roommate's most embarrassing moment?
 - 3) What movie would you use to rate your roommate's sense of humor?
- a. Tommy Boy
 - b. Mrs. Doubtfire

c. American Pie

d. Scream

e. Fargo

4) Where is your roommate most likely to shop?

5) What is your roommate's favorite sports team? None is an option

B-

1) What was your roommate's least favorite class in high school?

a. Math

b. English

c. Phy Ed.

d. Science

e. History

2) In fifteen-minute increments, how long, on average, does your roommate take to get ready in the morning?

3) What magazine would you use to describe your roommate's lifestyle?

a. Sports Illustrated

b. Better Homes and Gardens

c. Car and Driver

d. Glamour/GQ

e. Business Week

4) What brand of shoe is your roommate most likely to buy?

5) What is one thing that your roommate likes that you hate?

BONUS:

What song would you use to describe your roommate's love life?

a. 50 Ways to Leave your Lover

b. Just a Jiggolo

c. Love Hurts

d. From this Moment..e. I Ain't Got Nobody

TIE BREAKER: How old is your roommate's mother?

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