Roommate Relations

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Roommate relationships are the foundations for community development. It is not necessary to be best friends or share every aspect of college life together, but it is important that roommates respect each other’s rights. Developing a positive relationship is a process; it does not happen overnight and takes effort. Listed below are some proactive steps a resident can take to develop a successful relationship. A good place to start is by developing a relationship with your roommate(s) and/or apartment-mates. In order to develop a healthy roommate relationship, it is vital that you begin communicating right away.

Shortly after the semester begins, you will be asked to schedule a meeting with your Resident Advisor (RA) to complete the Roommate, Suitemate, or Apartment-mate Agreement. Your RA will be present to help you and your roommate(s) engage in discussion about the topics included in this handout. At the conclusion of this meeting, you will have an agreement that will be scanned to both you and your roommate(s) which will guide you through the reminder of the year in your room. Although this document is written, please remember that staff members are available throughout the year to revisit previous decisions should they not be working out for you and your roommate(s). Our number one priority is to assist you in making your experience at the University of Hawaii-Manoa a positive one, and students frequently report that the Roommate/ Apartment-mate Agreement contributes to this effort.

Step by Step Approach to Building a Successful Relationship

- Get to Know Your Roommate

- Ask questions that will help you learn about each other and build on your similarities. Some specific topics can be discussed that will open the door to a greater understanding of each other, such as: Where are you from? What are your favorite things to do? What is your major?

- Now that you know a little about your roommate, it is time to talk about the expectations from each other and set some guidelines for living in the same room/apartment. Be open with your needs and be willing to compromise. There are always issues that may cause disagreements. Several issues that can be discussed include: alcohol use, music/noise, sleep habits, cleanliness, safety and security, use of property, computer use, schedules, food sharing, guests, study habits.

Step 1: Getting Started

Before you complete the Roommate Agreement, spend some time getting acquainted with your new roommate(s). Talk together (preferably privately), keep your conversation in confidence, only ask questions that you are willing to answer, and be honest. Also, take some time before the meeting to reflect on topics presented in the next section so that you are better able to express your personal needs during the agreement provided.
Step 2: Define your living arrangement

Use the categories outlined in the following pages to start a discussion about your expectations for day to day living. As you talk, record the key issues that relate to each topic and several possible solutions. Once you have covered every topic, go back to the beginning and identify potential solutions for each category that works best for all roommates. Make sure the solution you select is in keeping with the policies and procedures published in The Community Standards, Policies, and Disciplinary Procedures and the Code of Student Conduct.

Step 3: Complete your agreement

Once your living arrangement is defined, your RA will finalize your agreement. He or she will help you write your negotiated solutions in clear, specific language. Once the agreement is complete, roommates are asked to sign and date the document. The Residence Director (RD) will scan you and your roommates a copy of the agreement and keep the original for the room records.

Step 4: Use your agreement

Once the agreement is signed, refer to it whenever there seems to be a roommate dispute. Does the agreement address the situation at hand? Is the agreement clear enough to resolve the situation? Does that agreement require renegotiation?

If the Agreement requires renegotiation, which is possible at any time during the academic year, follow steps one through three to negotiate the agreement. If you are unsuccessful in working through a conflict, contact your RA for consultation or additional mediation.

The myth that roommates need to be best friends is false. Acquaintances can be excellent roommates, as long as respect and willingness to communicate are present. If you and your roommate aren’t close? do not despair!! It probably means that you have found other people with common interest in other areas, and you are probably focusing your energy and friendship on them.

You can obtain a Living Agreement? from your Resident Advisor or download it here.

Talking About Conflict

If problems develop between you and your roommate(s), speak up! There are ways to voice your concerns without alienating your roommate(s). Here are some basic rules for talking about conflicts:

- Speak to your roommate directly; stating issues neutrally and relaying feelings.
- Be calm and cool. When you lose your temper, you can lose the opportunity to resolve your differences.
- Use statements that begin with “I” such as, “I get really frustrated when you don’t wash the dishes;” instead of, “You never clean up after yourself!” This way your roommate(s) can see the direct connection between her/his actions and your reactions. (Be careful. Don’t let this deteriorate into “I am sick and tired of...”)
- Be careful not to make accusations such as, “You couldn’t care less about how I feel!” This will only make your roommate defensive. Talk about specific habits and behavior, not about character.
- Put yourself in your roommate’s position. Treat your roommate(s) as you hope to be treated. Before you make any demands, think about how you would react to such demands.
- Be willing to offer solutions and compromise.
Seeking Staff Assistance

If the roommates cannot reach a solution, the next step is to ask the Residential Life staff for help or mediation. Resident Advisors and Residence Director/Assistant Residence Directors, have been well trained to serve as impartial mediators. Roommate transfers are only used after other methods of resolving conflicts have been attempted. Transfers are granted at the discretion of the RD/ARD and are based on space availability.

Student Housing Services is a program of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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