

Roommates

There is a lot to consider when deciding whether or not to live with a friend or find a place by yourself. A roommate relationship is more than a living arrangement. Roommates can have an emotional as well as financial effect on each other's lives. Consider your class schedule, your study habits, your eating habits and your time management. Will conflicts occur because of clashes in personal schedules, styles of studying or diets? Do you have different opinions about levels of cleanliness and housekeeping? How will you handle overnight guests, borrowing items, parties or smokers?

You should have an open discussion with anyone you're interested in living with. It is better to get any concerns out in the open before a lease is signed or an agreement is made. To determine your compatibility with a potential roommate, fill out the questionnaire in this section.

It's important to choose a roommate wisely and to communicate so you can work out problems that might occur. If you arrange to share an apartment with a roommate you don't know, ask the landlord to let you sign separate leases so each of you are responsible only for your share of rent and any damages you cause.

Beware; your best friend may not be the best choice for a roommate. Living together could strain your friendship if you find you disagree about any number of things. Negotiating a compromise, subletting or sticking it out can become very difficult.

Of courses there are many pluses and minuses to living with a roommate and by yourself. Living by yourself will give you the chance to enjoy solitude and release the potential burdens of living with others. Living with roommates, though, may help you save money by sharing expenses such as rent, utilities and telephone.

Roommate Agreements

Here are some issues to resolve with prospective roommates before you sign a lease:

Cleaning: How often should the place be cleaned and how should the work be shared?

Privacy: How much privacy does everyone want and where to get it?

Guests: Will overnight guests be allowed? When and how often can guests visit?

Parties: Agree on how often, how many people and how late parties can run.

Shared personal belongings: Will food, clothing, music, toothpaste and other belongings be shared?

Bills: How will bills be divided among roommates and who will be responsible for the payment? If you and your roommates have to pay several utility bills, it is a good idea to put each bill in a different person's name. This divides the responsibility and gives everyone leverage if a roommate fails to make payments.

Solving Minor Problems

A common problem is personality and lifestyle clashes. The best way to deal with these is to negotiate one on one with your roommate. Identify the problems, what causes them and what each roommate can do to solve them. Put any agreement you reach in writing and post it prominently, such as on the refrigerator. If necessary, you may seek mediation.

Solving Major Problems

Solving serious roommate problems are those that threaten your health, safety or substantially deprive you of full use of your apartment. The first step to solving such problems is to ask roommates to stop whatever they're doing.

Offer to negotiate and work out a solution. If they ignore you or negotiation does not work take a more formal approach: document the problem.

- keep a complete record of roommate conflicts in your rental log.
- include specific dates and notes on what is said or what happened.
- use friends as witnesses.
- an important step is to write a letter to your roommate. It should be an account of problems that have occurred and steps you have taken to resolve them. Demand an end to the unacceptable behavior and threaten further action if such behavior continues. Present the letter in person and keep a copy. Writing a letter to someone you live with may seem ridiculously formal or embarrassing but it may be the best way to communicate your viewpoint.

Let The Landlord Know

When a serious roommate conflict occurs, it is important to send the landlord a letter that describes the problem and requests his/her help in taking action to resolve it. If the landlord responds to the letter, you will have aid in dealing with the problem. If the landlord ignores your letter, it may be more difficult for him/her to take action against you if you are forced to move out.

Keep a copy of the letter and send the original by certified mail with return receipt. You can ask the landlord to evict a problem roommate. A renter who threatens the health or safety of other roommates or who has broken the lease can be evicted. However, under a joint lease, the landlord would have to evict all the roommates and sign a new lease with the remaining roommates. The landlord could also choose to evict all the roommates for good.

The eviction option should only be considered by tenants who have a good relationship with the landlord and who recognize the potential risks involved. It is important to keep a copy of all correspondence if an avenue like this is to be taken.

When All Else Fails

Call ASUO Legal Services 346-4273 or Lane County Legal Services 342-6056 for legal advice. If neither roommate nor landlord takes action to solve serious problems after receiving your letters, you can give your roommate a written ultimatum asking him/her to move out and find a sublessee.

Keep a copy of the ultimatum for yourself. Subletting is the easiest way out of a lease if the lease permits it, but it can be difficult if roommates refuse to cooperate in finding a new tenant.

Roommates Who Don't Pay

Each year students have to deal with roommates who don't pay rent and landlords who want their money. These situations can be difficult, but tenants can take a few steps

to resolve them. Talk to the delinquent roommate. However, the most effective way is to document that serious problems exist and record your efforts to do something about them.

For serious problems, seek mediation. If a roommate physically threatens or assaults you, steals your belongings or otherwise breaks the law, call the police right away. Also talk to ASUO Legal Services on campus or Lane County Legal Services for additional advice.