Living in a share house can be a great way to save rent, make new friends and introduce yourself to domesticity.

Setting Household Rules

Anyone who has lived in shared accommodation will agree that rules are necessary to ensure things run smoothly and just how structured the arrangements need to be will depend on the group of people living in the house. Before moving in it is important to find out as much as possible about the shared arrangement and whether it is suited to you.

It is also important to be realistic and to know that flatmates will come and go and routines may change depending on the different stages of the year. For example, things can fall apart a bit during holidays or around exams. Everyone needs to be clear about what is expected of them and committed to ensuring that the house functions in a fair manner for everyone. This need not be a difficult task, but it should be discussed and agreed on from the outset to prevent misunderstandings or confusion of responsibilities and avoid conflict.
The main issues you will need to work out at the beginning will be:

- payment of rent;
- buying food and any kitty arrangements;
- doing household chores; and
- payment of bills.

**Paying the Rent**

The golden rule is to always ask for or give receipts for any rent or bond paid to, or by, flatmates and to keep them somewhere safe. That way, if confusion arises you can prove you have paid your share. Always get receipts from landlords and if you are the head-tenant, you should give rent receipts to your flatmates when they pay their rent. Bond money should also be issued a receipt.

**The Kitty**

Generally, a kitty should only be used to cover the cost of common food that everyone will use. It is not for emergency loans, nor for cigarettes or alcohol, and is best restricted to major meal foods rather than that favourite snack which the rest of the house detests. While the quickest way to disrupt domestic bliss is to abuse the kitty system, it’s also important to realise that everyone has different ideas about what is a vital household purchase.

**Chores**

Like it or not, there are certain tasks that have to be done for a household to continue functioning. Many households find that a roster system, especially for cooking and washing-up is the best way to ensure that chores are completed fairly. Others may go for a more flexible honour system. Again, it’s necessary to realise that if you want the advantages of having flatmates, you will have to do your share in the upkeep of the household. If someone is failing in their duties, it is not unreasonable to remind them politely that the jobs have to be done. However, rude notes left under people’s doors are probably unproductive. If you feel there is a problem developing, it’s a good idea to get together and discuss it before things get out of hand.

Basically, living in a contented household means finding people who have similar ideas about cleanliness and domestic arrangements. If the differences are too great, it may be difficult to continue living together.

**Paying Bills**

A major point of conflict within a share house is often about paying bills. It is vital to decide when you move in who is responsible for paying bills and how the bills are to be divided. You may decide to put some money away weekly for bills, or you could arrange a pre-payment plan with some services.

**Conflict**

Even in the best share houses, relationship problems can arise so it’s best to do what you can to avoid problems before the house falls apart. Each flatmate needs to make every effort to respect others and be tolerant of differences within the household. Clearly annoying behaviour such as playing loud music at 3am or having numerous friends to stay without checking it out with your flatmates first may not be tolerated well. If you’re in a bad mood, try not to take it out on the others - go for a walk instead.

Unfortunately, despite the best intentions and efforts, arguments will occur. These might be between two flatmates who have excessively different politics; or between couples who are in the middle of a messy break-up; or between one flatmate who wants to buy a dog and the rest of the household who definitely do not want a dog around. Share house relationship problems can quickly escalate into full-scale conflict and it’s hard to keep your temper when you have to see the other person every day over the breakfast table!

If you want to speak to someone about the difficulties you’re having dealing with flatmates, or need some help to resolve a conflict and restore a good relationship with your housemates, an ECU Counsellor may be able to help.

**Acknowledgements**

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Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.