

Living in Shared Accommodation

Living in a share house can be a great way to save rent, make new friends, learn to cook and more.

Setting Household Rules

Anyone who has lived in shared accommodation will agree that rules help things run smoothly for everyone. How structured the arrangements need to be will depend on the group of people living in the house. Before moving in, it's important to find out as much as possible about the shared arrangement and whether it's suited to you.

It's also important to be realistic, knowing that flatmates will come and go and routines may change during the year. For example, things can fall apart a bit during holidays or around exams. Everyone needs to be clear about what's expected of them and committed to ensuring that the house functions in a fair manner for everyone. This should be discussed and agreed on from the outset to prevent misunderstandings or confusion of responsibilities.

The main things you'll need to work out at the beginning will be:

- payment of rent
 - buying food and any kitty arrangements
 - doing household chores
 - payment of bills
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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've paid your share. Always get receipts from landlords and if you're 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's 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. 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, 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's 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 arrange a pre-payment plan with some services.

Conflict

Even in the best share houses, relationship tensions can arise. 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 with your flatmates first may not be tolerated.

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 don't want a dog around.

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 Psychologist may be able to help.

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