

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Resolving Roommate and Interpersonal Conflicts

Living with someone else is an art no matter who that person is or what relationship you have with them. When learning this art, it helps to be flexible, courteous, and respectful and to communicate openly in a productive, positive manner. You do not need to be friends with your roommate, but it helps to be friendly. Remember, you are your roommate's roommate. Get to know your roommate by establishing a pattern of open communication and cooperation with your roommate(s). Taking time to learn information about your roommate(s) background, interests, lifestyle, and university expectations will help you to develop an understanding about who they are. Communication is the key to preventing and resolving roommate conflicts.

8 Steps for Resolving Disagreements and Disputes

As soon as disagreements or disputes begin to arise between you and your roommate(s) follow these suggestions to move your communication in a positive and productive direction.

1. Get everyone involved in the conflict together to discuss the problem. Try not to involve your neighbors or mutual friends in your conflict. This can aggravate the conflict and complicate the situation.
2. Each roommate should take a turn describing his/her perception of the situation, how she/he feels about it and what he/she wants. Remember that everyone involved is an equal and should have equal rights to be heard in the discussion. To create a sense of equality, you may wish to meet at a neutral place. It may help to have everyone sit on the floor or at a table (all at the same level). Each roommate should be able to talk freely about how she/he feels. Make sure that each person's ideas and feelings are clear to everyone involved. Be willing to share your feelings honestly and don't expect others to know how you feel without being told.
3. Communicate in an assertive, clear and non-blaming manner, using "I" statements. Use the following example as a guide:
 - When you (said, did, etc.) (what the offending action was),
 - I felt (hurt, angry, insulted, etc.).
 - I imagine you (did, said, etc.) it because (the reason you imagined).
 - What I need from you is (action to create resolution or understanding).
4. Validate other's positions. Try to understand others' point of view even when they differ from your own. Attack problems not each other. If there are more than two roommates don't team up with one roommate against another. This creates defensiveness in the third roommate. You are all working together for a solution.
5. Together, come to an agreement on what the conflict is about.
6. Negotiate. Identify possible solutions. Everyone should agree to be willing to compromise something to determine the best solution. State issues positively. Instead of detailing why you can't do what someone asks of you, state what you're willing to do.
7. Together, talk about what necessary changes will be required to ensure that the solution will help achieve a harmonious living arrangement. Make a commitment to make the necessary changes. Set a time frame for these changes to begin.
8. Set a future date to evaluate the situation and to re-negotiate any differences if necessary.

If your attempt to negotiate a roommate conflict does not improve the situation, contact your RA for assistance. Your RA is an excellent source of support and ideas for dealing with roommate issues. Contacting your RA early can prevent the conflict from growing. Your RA may decide the best opportunity lies in referring the conflict to the NSU Student Mediation Services (SMS) to be handled through a neutral third party. Your RA can assist you in this decision. You can also contact SMS staff directly at studentmediation@nova.edu or 954-262-7196.

Many of these ideas are from the Northern Illinois University Student Legal Assistance website and Carnegie Mellon Student Affairs Division website.