ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

House-sharing

What will sharing a house involve?

You may be moving into a shared house for the first time, and wonder how this will feel. Compromise will be a watchword – living with others means adapting. It seems like fun, and promises the freedom to finally live as you’d like. The reality of a shared kitchen and bathroom, the different hours people keep, and the way people socialise, can all be experienced as stressful.

Consider living near your boyfriend/girlfriend, but not necessarily sharing, so that there’s a space of your own to live daily life in when you need time out or aren’t seeing eye to eye.

How can we best set our house up?

- Visit RUSU for dates (usually in Week 7) of talks on what to look out for when choosing a student house.
- Pick up leaflets in RUSU on “Choosing Your Student House”: finding, viewing, budgeting, contracts, and “Living in a Student House”: moving in, safety, repairs, bills.
- Check what potential housemates’ expectations are. Find out as much as you can about people you know from sharing halls/ from your course and think how it would feel to be together 24/7. Someone who seems very laidback could become a lazy housemate, unwilling to pull their weight in the running of a household.
- Discuss your expectations, and attitudes towards cleanliness and noise levels, beforehand.
- Try to choose like-minded housemates, to avoid conflict later. Consider also whether you feel you can be yourself around these people. Keeping up a façade established in Fresher’s Week could be exhausting.
- Divide up responsibilities, nominating someone for each task: paying for broadband, collecting the rent, contacting landlord/landlady when things need mending e.g. boiler,…, paying the TV licence, etc.
- Think about a cleaning rota – how will this be divided up, to cover the communal areas? Will you share shopping bills for household essentials e.g. loo rolls? What about food?
- Plan to have regular monthly house meetings.
- Agree before it becomes an issue, what will happen in the holidays. Will a housemate staying on in the property have to pay heating bills alone for that period, or will these continue to be shared?

How can we resolve our difficulties?

If difficulties arise they usually centre on bill payments/a falling out/someone fails the year and leaves/noise levels become unacceptable to some housemates/different hours disturb sleep patterns/ relationship break-up/cleaning standards differ….

Most of these should be possible to discuss if you’ve chosen like-minded people to share with. Agree a mutually convenient time to sit down and discuss it, perhaps setting a time limit so that the talk has a defined end. One person could summarise what’s been agreed, at the end, so that the outcome’s clear.

Some handy tips:

- Stick to the issue at hand.
- Avoid absolutes e.g. ‘You never…..’/ ‘You always….’.
- Try not to interrupt, or launch into a monologue.
- Recognise that you may not be able to solve everything in one go.
- If it’s difficult to have your say, one technique involves a wooden spoon. The person holding the spoon has the floor, while the others listen. It’s passed on to the next person and each member has a turn to voice their opinion.
What about when it’s hard to communicate?

Good communication is at the heart of good relationships and becomes particularly important once everyone’s settled into the house, when previously ignored differences begin to create tension.

**Facts:** Present the facts as you see them, without making judgements.

For instance: “The bathroom still needs cleaning.” This calm statement of fact presents a topic for discussion, and opens the way to possible cooperation, rather than: “You’re so lazy, you haven’t done the bathroom again!” This fires the speaker up to get angry, and is likely to provoke a strong defensive or aggressive reaction from the listener, who feels attacked.

**Feelings:** “I feel” + an emotion:

This is one of the ways of communicating that can lead to discussion rather than causing an argument.

Effective assertive communication acknowledges your honest personal feelings. It lets the other person know how their behaviour has affected you. “When I want to cook and find the sink full of dirty dishes, I feel angry.”

If the other person does become defensive or aggressive, it’s important to say that you are not judging or blaming, but that you do need to tell them how you feel. As well as it being healthy for you to let out your true feelings, you are opening the door to real communication.

**Fair requests:**

Having got the facts and feelings out without blaming or judging, you now need to take responsibility and say what it is that you want.

Be specific. Not vague and critical:

“You’re thoughtless and need to stop being selfish,” but assertive and proactive: “I’d like us to decide which days the bathroom’s going to be cleaned, and who’s responsible which week.”

**For maximum effectiveness, combine facts, feelings and fair requests:**

“We agreed that I’d pay the broadband bill for the house, and everyone’d pay me back at the beginning of each month. Now it’s 20th and you still haven’t paid me.” (Fact) “I feel annoyed and angry.” (Feelings) “I want you to pay me tomorrow so I don’t go into the red.” (Fair request)

“You see your boyfriend nearly every day, and I hardly ever get to hang out with you anymore.” (Facts) “I feel lonely and miss the fun we used to have together.” (Feelings) “I’d like to go clubbing with you/have a night in to watch a film, this weekend.” (Fair request)

**Negotiation:**

Negotiation is not bullying or threatening: it’s about finding a middle ground.

If your housemate doesn’t like your proposal at all, then ask for a counterproposal. Encourage the other person to come up with an alternative – remember you’re trying to find something you can both live with.

Be prepared to accept a workable compromise. You need to go into negotiation aware that in the end you might not get your own way.
What happens after a relationship break-up?

If you break up with your girlfriend/boyfriend and you’re living in the same house, there will inevitably be awkwardness, the extent of it depending on how amicable the break-up has been. It becomes particularly painful when one of the ex-couple starts a new relationship and wants to bring their new partner back for the night.

There may be the wish to move out, which isn’t always straightforward, as it involves finding a replacement tenant for your room, as well as looking for a new place to rent yourself. Sometimes this means paying for two places at once, while the lease runs its course.

Using the ideas above, try to express to your ex how the present situation is impacting you, and find a way you can both cope with the new circumstances. Turn to other friends outside the house, who can listen and provide alternative company, while you go through the process of grieving the relationship.

Who can we contact for help with a house-share issue?

RUSU Student Advisors: email: stu.adv@reading.ac.uk (re student houses.) There are also daily drop-in sessions if you’d prefer to talk face-to-face with an advisor.

UPP (re halls.)

Counselling Service: Carrington Building, Room 106, Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6UA tel: 0118 378 4216, email: counselling@reading.ac.uk (Includes material adapted from a hand-out from The London Diploma in Psychosexual and Relationship Therapy)