

GUIDE TO LIVING WITH A ROOMMATE

The opportunity to live with other people provides a myriad of critical life and social skills. We strongly believe that the experiences shared through being a roommate are valuable and essential to a student's college education and development. This guide was created to offer suggestions on how to successfully navigate roommate relationships, and we hope that students will use this guide to gain the empowering skills and abilities that can come with living with another person.

What Do Healthy Roommate Relationships Look Like?

- **Communication**
 - Early, clear, and honest - *clear is kind!*
 - Seeks to solve problems and address feelings/impact
 - The method, timing, and delivery does not escalate concerns
 - Verbal - not just communicating through texts
 - Respectful
 - A two-way street
- **Boundaries**
 - Communicated early and honestly
 - Reasonable for people sharing a living space
 - Adaptable to the room and community needs, renegotiated as things arise
- **Respect**
 - Understanding of what each roommate needs to be successful (sleep, studying, socializing)
 - An open mind to solving conflict without being defensive
 - An understanding of how different contexts, upbringings, and cultures can impact how others live
 - Apology and restoration when harm is caused
 - General civility and kindness towards one another

Tips for setting up a successful roommate relationship

Roommate Agreements

Setting clear expectations and having healthy communication are important in building a strong relationship between roommates. To encourage these important conversations and provide a building block for discussions down the road, all residents are asked to complete a roommate agreement. The roommate agreement is kept for review and changed as needed by the roommates throughout the year. Residential Life staff are available to assist with any roommate disagreements or to help process situations that may come up in a room throughout the year.

The Roommate Agreement is typically sent out by the Residential Life staff during your first week of class. We encourage you to take the Roommate Agreement seriously - schedule time to sit down with your roommate and talk through each of the points. It is important that you are honest and clear with your roommate during this time, and don't just say what you think your roommate wants to hear! If you need assistance in talking through and filling out the agreement, please talk to your RA.

You can always revisit your Roommate Agreement throughout the year, if you realize something isn't working. It can be helpful to plan in advance to review your roommate agreement at the beginning of the Spring semester.

Communication is Key

Keep the lines of communication open with your roommate. Regular check-ins can help you stay on the same page and address any concerns before they become bigger issues. It can be helpful to schedule these check-ins in advance (i.e. every Thursday night, the first Monday of the month, etc.).

Remember, it's easier to address small issues early on than to deal with larger conflicts later. Share anything with your roommate that they would probably like to know, and be open to listening to your roommate when they want to talk to you, as well. Talking about potential issues in a calm manner can help you avoid a bigger argument, and will prevent you from acting passive aggressively towards each other.

Get to Know Them

Some people become best friends with their roommates, and others don't - both are perfectly normal! We are firm believers that roommates do not have to be best friends, but it is still important to get to know each other on a personal level. Understanding someone's story and perspective can be really helpful in understanding their behavior, and could give you an additional level of empathy for your roommate.

It can also be helpful to have an understanding of each other's schedules. While this might seem unnecessary, it can be helpful as you adjust to living with another person. Having an idea of when the room will be empty, when you'll have late nights or early mornings, and more, can help you be prepared.

Find Other Spaces Around Campus

While we want you to be comfortable in your room, you also have an entire campus (and town!) at your disposal. Trying to get everything done in the same room as another person can be difficult, which is why it's important to find other spaces around campus. Whether that's studying at the library or in the Pine Grove, hanging out with friends at the Keppel House, grabbing a coffee at the Kletz or LJs, or attending your hall's weekly event, make sure you are not spending all of your time in your room.

Navigating Roommate Conflicts

Roommate conflicts are a natural part of learning to live with someone and sharing space. Where there are relationships, there will also be conflict, and that is completely normal and good. While conflicts are common, they also present opportunities to develop important communication and conflict-resolution skills that will benefit you in your time at Hope and beyond.

Here are some steps you can take when navigating a conflict with your roommate:

- **Reflect on the situation**
 - Before addressing the conflict with your roommate, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What exactly is bothering me? - See if you can identify the root of what is bothering you.
 - How significant is this issue? - Is it something that needs to be addressed immediately?
 - Am I concerned about my safety? - (See the "Unsafe vs. Uncomfortable" section below). If you feel that your safety is at risk, please contact your RD or Campus Safety immediately.
 - How might my roommate view the situation? - Trying to see things from your roommate's perspective can help you approach the situation with more empathy.
- **Initiate a face-to-face conversation with your roommate**

- Communication is the key to resolving conflicts, and face-to-face conversations are the most effective ways to ensure clarity and understanding. Here are some tips for approaching the conversation:
 - Be prompt - Don't let your frustrations fester! If you have a concern, it is best to address it openly and honestly with your roommate in a timely manner. With that being said, it can be good to give your roommate advance notice that you want to have a conversation, and to make sure you both have enough time to talk through the situation constructively.
 - Be honest and direct - Clearly express what is bothering you without making it personal. Use "I" statements (i.e. "I feel frustrated when...").
 - Listen actively - Give your roommate a chance to share their perspective. Listening is just as important as speaking.
 - Aim for a solution - Focus on finding a compromise that works for both of you, rather than just venting your frustrations.
 - Refer back to your roommate agreement - If the agreement no longer covers your needs, or if you've learned more about each other's preferences, it may be time to refine or add to the roommate agreement. Let it serve as a neutral document that can help guide your conversation.
- **Involve your RA or Residential Life Professional Staff for guidance**
 - If you are feeling overwhelmed about how to navigate a roommate conflict, or have tried to resolve the conflict on your own without success, your RA is a valuable resource. RAs are trained in conflict mediation, and can help facilitate a meeting between you and your roommate. They can help keep the conversation focused on finding a resolution and fostering a positive living environment for both you and your roommate.
 - If issues continue to persist, a Residential Life Professional Staff member (RD, RLC, NC) will facilitate a conversation between the roommates. The goal of this conversation would be to resolve the conflict and allow you to remain comfortably in your space. A change in housing could be the outcome of this process, but that is typically the exception and not the rule.

Understanding Housing Changes

While the goal is to resolve conflicts and learn to live together respectfully, sometimes it's clear that a different living arrangement may be the best option. Room changes are typically considered if there is a founded safety concern (see "Unsafe vs. Uncomfortable" section below), and/or if other conflict-resolution steps have been fully explored. This means that we will very rarely allow a student to move if they have not gone through the full mediation process, as outlined above. This process could take a few weeks, and we know it may be uncomfortable during that time.

If a room change is the best option, Residential Life Staff will guide you through the process of finding a new housing placement. Typically, Residential Life Staff will work with Housing to determine what spaces are available on campus, and what might be a good fit. Once we have identified a space, you and your potential roommate will be sent an email from the Housing office. You will be given the opportunity to meet each other in order to confirm that it will be a good fit. Before moving you will typically be expected to tell your current roommate(s) that you will be moving.

Know that we do not accept requests to change rooms within the first 2 weeks of the semester (except in extenuating circumstances). We want students to have made an effort to be a part of their communities and get used to their environment before requesting a change. Additionally, know that it is very rare that we would require a student to move. The only instance where a required move could take place would be in extreme circumstances, such as if a physical threat is made or as an outcome of the student conduct process.

Unsafe vs. Uncomfortable

To feel unsafe means that a student is actively in harm's way. To feel uncomfortable means that a student may be out of their element and may not be navigating their ideal situation.

Here are some questions to ask yourself to discern if you are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable:

- Am I in immediate danger, or is there a threat of danger?
 - If the answer is no, consider that you may be feeling uncomfortable
 - If the answer is yes, consider the following:
 - Are you worried about a potential reaction or upcoming behavior that your roommate may exhibit? What makes you think your roommate will respond this way? Your answers to this question could help you discern if you are feeling uncomfortable or unsafe.
 - Have you been threatened by your roommate? If the answer is yes, inform your Resident Director or Residential Life Coordinator or call Campus Safety if there is an active threat.
- Is the feeling I am experiencing fear or a strong feeling of unhappiness?
 - Think through the difference between being “scared” and being “worried.” Which best describes the way you are feeling?

While being uncomfortable is challenging, it is not dangerous and can lead to growth. Being unsafe, however, is dangerous, and our staff will address the safety concerns quickly as we move toward a permanent solution. Know that whether you are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, your concern is valid and the Residential Life staff will be there to support and guide you through the conflict.

Frequently Asked Questions

If I'm having trouble with my roommate, what should my first step be?

If you've read through this guide and still don't know where to start, consulting with your RA is never a bad idea! They can provide a listening ear, and can offer suggestions on how to best proceed.

What happens if my roommate moves out?

If you learn that your roommate is leaving Hope or moving to different housing, you will receive an email message from the housing office indicating that a change has occurred. You will be offered an opportunity to name a new roommate. We provide you with 72 hours (not including weekends) to name a new roommate. If you are able to identify a roommate, the person you are pulling into the space will also need to email housing@hope.edu to confirm that they are interested in moving. If all parties agree, the housing office will communicate moving instructions and notify the RA, RD or RLC of the change.

If you are unable to name a roommate, the housing office will look at filling the space with a student who is requesting a housing change, returning from a semester study abroad program, or an incoming new/transfer student. With each housing placement, we would look at all available spaces, compare housing applications for a compatible match for the best possible roommate/housemate match.

Per the Housing Agreement, you agree to accept a roommate placement. If a roommate placement does not happen immediately, you agree to maintain the room in a manner that would allow for a roommate placement at any time.

Can I buy out my room as a single?

The college does not offer an option for students to “buy out” a space in their room to reduce the occupancy or to keep the room to themselves. Decreasing the occupancy of a room will only be considered if the student in the room has an approved accommodation for decreased occupancy or single room through Disability and Accessibility Resources and there are no other available spaces on campus that would meet the approved accommodation. Visit the [Disability and Accessibility Resource](#) website to learn more about the accommodation process.

Can you make my roommate move?

It is very rare that we would require a student to move. The only instance where a required move could take place would be in extreme circumstances, such as if a physical threat is made or as an outcome of the student conduct process.

I'm not getting along with my roommate - why can't I just move?

We believe that navigating conflict can present opportunities to develop important communication and conflict-resolution skills that will benefit you in your time at Hope and beyond. Additionally, there are other reasons that moving is not always the norm when a conflict arises:

- **Community-Building:** Residential Life values creating and maintaining healthy communities, and an important part of community is stability. Living in the same place for a full year encourages people to rely on each other, develop relationships, and establish ongoing community norms.
- **Problem-Solving:** Working through challenging situations is an important experience, and learning to compromise and communicate effectively is a very important life skill.
- **Administrative Impact:** Changing rooms is not as simple as just packing your bags. Every room change requires work from the Housing Coordinator, Resident Directors, RAs, custodial services, Campus Safety, and more. We also have limited space on campus. As administrators we need to steward this space well for the good and benefit of the community as a whole.