

The Odd Couple

When Roommates Don't Get Along

When your child starts college he may know his roommate because they went to high school together and requested each other, or his roommate might just be a brand new face in the crowd. In either case, soon they will know more about each other than they ever thought, such as who snores or likes to wake up to loud music. Some of these roommate pairs will become fast friends. Others might even find a way to share the room, but keep to themselves. Unfortunately, the other possibility is that they just can't get along.

In that last situation, there can be many reasons that contribute to their demise as roommates. For example:

- Too many guests or overnight visitors.
- Using each other's things without asking.
- One likes quiet to study. The other likes to have the radio on.
- Different expectations of what a roommate will be (just someone to live with vs. new best friend).



The list could go on and on. As a parent, it's hard not to step in, particularly if you see your child's roommate as the cause of all of the problems. However, remember a few things first:

- **Be supportive.** Ask questions that get to the heart of the issue. Ask for specific examples of when problems have occurred.
- **It takes two.** Ask questions about your child's behavior to help understand if he is part of the problem.
- **Encourage communication.** Maybe his roommate doesn't even realize that his behavior is a problem. Role-play it over the phone. Have your student tell you what he would say to his roommate.
- **Give them the tools.** Instead of jumping in to "solve" a roommate issue, help your student figure out how *he* can address the issue instead. This type of resolution tends to go more smoothly than one where parents get involved. Plus, it helps your student take responsibility while learning to take positive action.

If your child has tried to work it out on his own and he isn't getting any satisfaction, suggest the following staff people to talk with:

- **The Resident Assistant.** The RA is most likely trained in mediation and can help roommates compromise.
- **Peer Mediators.** Have him check with the Wellness Center or Student Development office to find out if there are peer mediators on campus. These people will be specifically trained in helping students resolve a conflict.
- **Residence Life.** If the behavior is illegal, unethical or could potentially cause harm, encourage your student to contact a Residence Life staff member immediately. The Residence Hall Director or Area Coordinator of his hall or community lives right there, ready to help. He can also call or visit the Residence Life office to provide a first-hand account of the situation. The staff will work with your student to determine whether a room change is necessary (or even possible) and can help finalize that process.

What Might Cause Problems?

Sharing a room in college can be an adjustment, especially if your child has always had a space of her own. You know your child well and might be able to guess at issues that could cause friction with a new roommate. You might brainstorm some things that could cause problems....

- Cleanliness of the room
- Sharing things, everything from food to clothes
- Quiet times versus when it is okay to have friends visit

In the midst of talking about what your child expects her room to be, discuss some alternatives and possible solutions, should issues arise. This will help her offer compromises to her roommate so their difference of opinion doesn't lead to a battle of wills.