

Living in a share house can be a great way to save money on rent, make new friends and introduce yourself to domesticity. Those who have shared will tell you that rules are necessary to keep things running smoothly. Just how structured the arrangements are will depend on the people living in the house. It's important to find out as much as possible about the shared arrangement and whether it is suited to you before you move in.

It's important to also be realistic and know that flatmates will come and go and routines may change depending on the different stages of the year. For example, things may fall apart a bit during holidays or around exams. Everyone needs to be clear about what is expected, and be committed to ensuring that the house functions in a fair manner for everyone. This need not be a difficult task, but it should be discussed and agreed on from the outset.

The main issues to work out at the beginning will be the payment of rent, food and kitty arrangements, household chores and bills.

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 have paid your share. Always get receipts from landlords and if you are 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

This system involves all flatmates contributing a certain amount each week into the "kitty"; it works best when combined with co-operative cooking and shopping. Generally, the kitty should only be used to cover the cost of common food and other necessities (e.g., cleaning products) that everyone will use. It is not for emergency loans, nor for cigarettes or alcohol, and is best restricted to major meal foods rather than your 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 which have to be done for a household to continue functioning, such as washing up, cleaning, and taking out the rubbish. 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, or perhaps have a list of necessary chores and people put down a tick every time they complete a chore.

Again, it's necessary to realise that if you want the advantages of having flatmates, you will have to do your share in the upkeep of the household. If someone is failing in their duties, it is reasonable 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, it's a good idea to get together and discuss it before things get out of hand. It can be helpful to hold regular "house" meetings, perhaps every two weeks or monthly, to address any issues that arise. 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 in a share house is often about paying bills. It is vital to decide when you move in who is responsible for paying the bills and how they are to be divided. Generally, bills such as gas, electricity and water are divided equally between all members of the household. However, if one person often has guest/s staying over, or has an appliance that uses a lot of electricity, then maybe they should pay extra. You need to decide whose name the account will be in, because they are liable for payment of the bills. It is a good idea for different flatmates to organise different services in order to spread the financial responsibility around. This way no one person will be left responsible for all the bills if things go wrong in the house. You may decide to put some money away weekly for bills, or you could arrange a pre-payment plan with some services. It is a good idea to buy a diary or exercise book, or use a calendar, so you can write down when bills are due and who has paid their share.

Conflict

Even in the best share houses, relationship problems can happen, so it's best to do what you can to avoid problems arising, or to *address them early*, before they escalate into major conflict and the house falls apart.

Each flatmate needs to make every effort to respect others and be tolerant of differences in the household. Clearly annoying behaviour, such as playing loud music at 3am or having numerous friends to stay without checking it out with your flatmates first, may not be tolerated well. If you're in a bad mood, try not to take it out on the others - go for a walk instead.

Unfortunately, despite the best intentions and efforts, arguments will occur. These might be between two flatmates who have very different values or beliefs, or between a couple 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 absolutely do not want a dog around. Problems can quickly escalate into full-scale conflict. And it's hard to keep your temper when you have to see the other person every day! If conflict does arise here are some helpful tips:

- Providing there is no threat of physical violence, it is best to speak to him/ her face-to-face (rather than leaving notes, sending sms, talking behind their backs, etc).
- Plan to talk to your flatmate at an appropriate time and in a private place.
- State clearly what the problem is and how you feel about it.
- Avoid blame, being judgemental, or accusing statements; i.e., focus on the offending behaviour.
- Don't interpret their behaviour (e.g., you are doing this deliberately to annoy me).
- Give your flatmate a chance to tell their side of the story and what they think has been happening to cause the trouble; be prepared to listen.
- Let your flatmate know that you hear what they are saying even if you do not agree with them, and you are glad that you are talking about the problem.
- Try to work out what you both have to do to resolve the problem.
- Make sure that you talk about the whole problem, don't leave out the bits that are difficult to talk about.
- Agree to check with each other at a specific time in the future to see how things are going.

If there is *violence*, or if you are afraid for your safety at any time, call the police immediately.

For further information contact:

UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Support

Phone: 02 6773 2897 for an appointment

Email: studentcounselling@une.edu.au or via [AskUNE](#)

<http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling>

Adapted from: <http://www.rlc.org.au/sharehousing/>; ECU Tip Sheet

The support you need to succeed