How to select a room mate

Selecting the right room/flat/house mate at the beginning can save you a lot of worry.

Have you heard about the student that had to pay a telephone bill of hundreds of dollars because his flat mates said “I did not make those calls”, or the student who found it hard to study for her exams because her flat mate liked to invite friends over and party until the late hours of the morning?

These are situations you may find yourself in. Spending some time in selecting the right person now may save you a lot of worry later. Counsellors at RMIT Counselling service have experience in dealing with students who have been in these types of situation.

It might be useful to work through the following steps to help ensure that you will live in an environment that doesn’t detract from you studies and/or cause you lots of hassles.

Steps to getting the right housemate

Step 1. One way to start your thinking about this area, is to ask yourself the question “What makes me a good flat mate?” It might be that you like cooking, you are considerate of the needs of other people (e.g. you don’t hold loud parties the night before your flat mate has an exam!), you are organised and can pay bills on time, you are prepared to take out the rubbish etc.

Step 2. Hopefully by thinking about the above question, it is easier to start thinking about “What sort of environment do I want to live in?” This includes things to think about when selecting housemates and deciding on a set of household guidelines. Some of the sorts of things you may wish to consider are:

- How long are you expecting your house mate to stay?
- How will the household chores (e.g. cleaning, cooking) be organised? Will there be a roster? How will the bills be paid? For example, how will you work out how much each household member contributes to the telephone bill?
- How do you do you want to arrange a “kitty” (a fund of money each person contributes to on a weekly basis to purchase shared food and household items)? What would be included? How much money would be contributed each week?
- What items in the house are for available for all household members to use and what are private items?
- What level of privacy and security is important to you? Do you wish to have a lock on your bedroom door, for example?
- What amount of “personal space” do you need?
- What are your study habits and those of your prospective room/flat/housemate?
- Smoking. Do you wish to live in a non-smoking household? Are you happy for smokers to smoke inside or outside the house?
- Music. How loud? How late at night can it be played?
- Parties. How often? How late at night?
- Friends and family staying over. If this occurs, will they contribute to bills?
- Pets?

Step 3. In Australia, when people are selecting a housemate, it is not uncommon to meet with the person for a cup of coffee and have a conversation to see if you are compatible. So the conversation aims to find out more about what each of you are like as a person in addition to asking the other person questions in Step 2. (Think back to Step 1 for ideas about how you can contribute to the conversation). Also, people often don’t choose the first person they meet, sometimes they meet with quite a few people before making their choice.

Step 4. O.K., assuming you have agreed to share with one or more people, it is a good idea to have a discussion at the beginning to agree on household guidelines and decide how any hassles will be resolved. For example, you might agree to hold regular house meetings where people raise issues. If this discussion is
held at the beginning, no-one needs to feel offended – it is accepted that inevitably hassles arise when people share a house and that everyone has a right to have their voice heard.

**Step 5.** Finally, here are a couple of other suggestions for a harmonious living arrangement:

- Treat housemates with respect. That is, treat others in the way you would like to be treated.
- If you are unsure about anything, ask housemates how things are done.

Good luck! Sharing a house or flat can be a wonderful experience and potentially result in life long friendships.

Assistance in this area and many others can be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service. The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you to explore your concerns, both personal and academic.

The RMIT Counselling Service can be contacted at **9925-4365** between 9am and 5pm.