Student and Community Relations
Article for Spartan Family Connections Newsletter

The collegiate journey is chock full of milestones. Moving off campus and into a house or apartment is one of those key developments. Akin to taking the training wheels off a bike, students moving out of on-campus residences have more on their respective ‘to do’ lists: meal prep, budgeting differently, communicating with landlords, managing a new commute to campus. Residence halls come equipped with resident assistants who can help students navigate a great deal, including roommate issues. Off-campus roommate relationship-building and negotiation also requires attention.

Living in shared spaces successfully begins by acknowledging multiple sets of values and experiences. According to Charlie Horton-Anderson, Coordinator for Student and Community Relations, new or prospective roommates should consider 9 key areas:

1. Personal Values

MSU students come from all walks of life. Having early discussions about identities and values is paramount to understanding difference and respecting beliefs.

2. Guests

Expectations around having visitors is important. Are guests permitted? How long can they stay? What spaces will they occupy? Does the gender of the guest(s) matter? What behaviors are frowned upon?

3. Cleanliness

Everyone has their own idea of what ‘clean’ means and what the cleaning process should look like. It's important to discuss all needs and incorporate some flexibility when it comes to cleaning schedules and personal responsibilities in keeping things tidy.

4. Conflict Management Style

Conflict is nearly unavoidable when people share a dwelling. Having conversations about how individuals have managed conflict in past situations is critical. Having those discussions before conflicts arise is equally important. Setting expectations early can help stop problems from developing.
5. Financial Arrangements

While many landlords deal with each tenant individually, lots of dwellings have shared arrangements (one check for monthly leases, combined billing for utilities, etc.) Within days of moving in, or ideally before moving in, roommates should decide how contributions to these payments will be handled, who will make the actual payment, etc. Writing this down and posting it in a common area may be helpful.

6. Personal Items & Sharing

Tenants may decide to bring or purchase items for shared spaces and common areas including kitchens and living spaces. Having an early discussion about which items are free for everyone to utilize versus which items are marked for personal use only is a good idea.

7. Use of Alcohol or Other Drugs

The use of alcohol and other drugs is another key discussion to have. While some roommates may balk at this and make assumptions about their fellow students, it’s important to be on the same page. Some students may come from backgrounds or experiences of abuse/misuse and would prefer to not have substances in the home. Other students may view usage as situational or without limit.

8. Noise

Personal noise levels, with or without guests, is an additional point to negotiate. Everyone deserves the ability to be able to study or spend their time freely without being subjected to excessive or unexpected noise from those they live with. Discussing appropriate times for noise levels to be reduced or overall general volume may help avoid unnecessary tension or conflict.

9. Pets and Their Care

Many students choose their off campus dwellings because they are eager to have a pet. This can be a major responsibility. Some spaces may be pet friendly or someone in the living space may have a service animal/emotional support animal. Discussing care for the animal and expectations around interactions are necessary to ensure the success of all roommates, including the animal itself.

Additional resources can be found at offcampushousing.msu.edu and at CollegeLifeEL.msu.edu