



Housing Harmony

How this guide helps

The SUSU Advice Centre is committed to providing guidance to all students, and direct Adviser support where possible. To enable you to [access our help remotely](#) we have produced a helpful guide on how to live in a happy and conflict-free house. It is important to read the guide first as this is the quickest way to access key information. We recognise that for many students this may be enough to answer their questions and help them with the process. We will work to provide further support for those who require it within our capacity.

House sharing pitfalls

Problems with housemates are one of the biggest sources of housing enquires in The Advice Centre. Whilst you may be very good friends with each other, moving in and living with someone 24/7 may give rise to some complications.

Different social habits, cleaning, or personal relationships, all may have an effect on how people get along in the house and how easy or difficult living together may be.

Housemate search – what to look out for?

To help avoid potential housemate problems, we have prepared a few tips:

- Take time to get to know the people you are about to enter a binding legal contract with.
- Do your lifestyles clash? Do your personalities align? Are they too messy? You can't live with everyone: you may have friends from halls, from your course and from all over the place. It is difficult choosing but be realistic, who will it be easier to live with for a whole year?
- Before you decide to live together, socialise a few times as a group. See what your future housemates are like in different social situations. Are they talkative with you? Do they respond well to challenging situations?



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- Think before living with people with whom you have intimate relationship. A year is a long time, and you can't guarantee you will stay in relationships for the length of your contract. Living with an ex is probably a situation you would prefer to avoid.
- If the stress of looking for a house is causing problems in the group, what will it be like living together? As long as you have not signed a contract, it is not too late to change housemates. Do not be afraid to speak out now, rather than suffer later.

Did you know? Smaller groups of housemates (3-4) allow for better communication, as well as fewer cliques and fewer visitors.

How to resolve a conflict with a housemate?

Even when you live together and have good relationships things can sometimes go sour. Different personalities, relationship breakdowns and other issues can all affect the harmony in the house. As most of the contracts that students sign are fixed term and rarely contain 'break-clauses', resolving the conflict may be the only realistic way of avoiding potential contractual or financial issues.

We suggest in any conflict that you access the following guide, which has been prepared by an expert in conflict resolution (University's Mediation Team).

Firstly, examine your own behaviour honestly. Have you acted reasonably and fairly? Have you become the house nag? Consider how the other person may be feeling.

STEP 1

- Do not speak on behalf of unspecified others or use 'we' without consulting housemates.
- Do not let things fester. Talk things through with the person involved but before you do, consider what sort of compromise would work for you both potentially.
- The right time, the right place and the right way – Choose your moment. It may be better to speak outside of the house in a more neutral space. Watch your tone of voice – keep it calm, reasonable and civil. Do not point, shout, dominate or demand.
- Remember your way does not necessarily mean it's the right or only way.
- Discuss and refer to the behaviour, rather than the person. Example: John, something's going on in the house that I'm unhappy about and I'd like to talk it through with you to see if we can sort it out. Is that OK with you?

If Step 1 has not resolved the issue then:

STEP 2

(Firstly decide whether this is an issue between just you and another housemate or is it something that involves/impacts the other tenants)



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- If it is just you – ask to talk to them again. Open with a clear statement of the problem behaviours, why they have become an issue for you and what you feel needs to change to make things better, and that you would like to hear their side of things. Then stop and listen.
- If it involves other tenants, convene a house meeting. If it is the behaviour of one person that is causing the problem, check in beforehand if all the others are thinking alike but do not make it a witch hunt. Pick a good spokesperson, state the behaviours that are problematic and why (do not overstate them or exaggerate). State the interventions you have tried to resolve it to date, what you would like to happen and the implications to the household if things do not improve. Then give the person an opportunity to respond, and listen to what he/she says. Talk it out.

Get external help - Mediation

If the above steps did not work and the home situation has become toxic and tense despite your best efforts, consider talking to the University Mediation Service.

Mediation is a FREE and CONFIDENTIAL service and offers the opportunity to try to resolve any conflict between people who live together. It is a voluntary process where both parties must agree to take part.

Mediation allows you to have difficult conversations within a safe environment where a trained impartial mediator will facilitate the discussion to help both parties to listen to each other and will support them as they identify areas of commonality and difference.

To find out more, go to: www.southampton.ac.uk/corporateservices/mediation

Contact via Mediation email: mediate@soton.ac.uk or Tel. 02380 597098

Being Good Neighbours

Being a good neighbour is not only virtuous, it also can be beneficial to you – who is going to keep an eye on your house when you go home for the Christmas holidays?

As well as studying at University you are also part of a wider community: a street, a neighbourhood and an entire city.

How to ensure you are part of that community?

- Introduce yourself to your neighbours
- Speak to the neighbours if you are planning any house parties
- Remind yourself of your contractual obligations regarding noise and any shared areas (most Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreements will have a clause relating to it).
- Find out when the bins are collected

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/binsrecycling/bins/>



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- If you are suffering from noisy neighbours take appropriate action by contacting Environmental Health <http://www.southampton.gov.uk/environmental-issues/environmentalhealth/>

Further guidance

For further help on living in harmony, contact The Advice Centre, tel: 02380 592 085, email advice@susu.org.

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