

## **Handling Conflict in Residence**

Conflict is a part of life, especially when we're living with or near others, but it isn't always a bad thing! Handling conflict effectively – with respect for all individuals involved – can improve our relationships, help us learn important skills we can apply elsewhere, and give us a sense of confidence and satisfaction.

This guide contains information on effectively navigating conflicts that may arise while you are living in Residence. The first section is about roommates, and the second section is about neighbours.

### **Roommate Agreements**

Do you have one? If not, consider suggesting to your roommate that you complete one together. Not sure how to bring it up? Approaching the subject directly, but casually can be a good method. Try something like, "Hey – I was thinking it might be a good idea for us to go through a Roommate Agreement together, just so that things go smoothly the rest of the year. Are you free tonight?"

### **Conflict with Roommates**

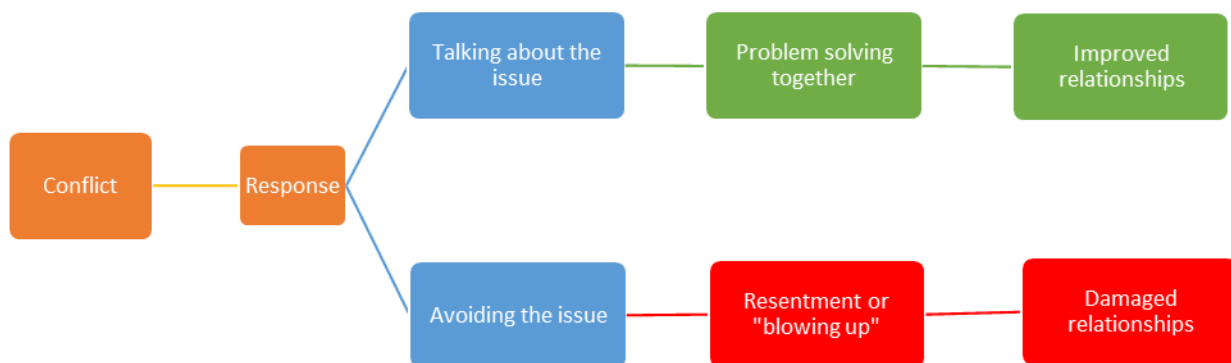
Living with roommates can be amazing. That said, there can also be moments of frustration or tension when we share a living space with someone else. Examples of common conflicts between roommates could be:

- General cleanliness in shared spaces
- Sleep schedules and noise
- Expectations for having guests over
- Leaving dishes in the sink
- Issues with purchasing shared items like dish soap or toilet paper
- Leaving a bathroom messy after using it
- Communication issues

You might sense that you're in conflict with your roommate if you find yourself feeling frustrated or upset about something that they're doing. You might find yourself thinking:

- "Why would they leave the kitchen/bathroom/living room this way? I feel like they expect me to clean up after them!"
- "They must know that I'm trying to sleep right now, but I guess they care more about hanging out with their friends..."
- "It's not that big of a deal – I should just let it go..."

At this point, you have options. You can bring up the issue, or you can try to ignore it. Sometimes trying to ignore an issue (or adjust your own expectations, so that you're not so frustrated) is a good idea. However, if we are avoiding the issue because we're **uncomfortable** with conflict, it is likely going to continue having a negative impact on us. As a result, we might build up a lot of resentment, and we may even end up exploding at them when we can't take it anymore!



NOTE – it can be really useful to speak with your CA about your concerns and get their support on how to handle it. You can also complete a [Conflict Coaching](#) appointment where you can learn more about your unique conflict style, which will help you navigate the situation (and others in the future)!

Here are some signs that it might be time for you to address the conflict with the other person:

- Feeling anger or resentment towards them
- Feeling unheard or unappreciated
- Ruminating or thinking about the situation a lot
- Playing out conversations about it over and over in your head
- Trying to “even the score” or somehow get back at them by doing less around the unit

Choosing to bring up an issue with your roommate can be uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to be a negative experience. Here are some things to remember:

- Try to remind yourself that your roommate likely does not know that their behaviour is bothering you. Their behaviour might feel careless or inconsiderate, but don't start from a place of assuming they are intentionally trying to frustrate you or make you clean up after them. Assume the best of others

- The sooner you bring up an issue, the better. As time passes, you may become more frustrated and resentful about it, and your roommate will be more confused about why you didn't bring it up earlier.
- Don't start a conversation about a conflict when you're feeling very frustrated or upset – wait until you're feeling calm.
- Pick one or two things that are frustrating you. Try not to overwhelm your roommate by trying to address all of your concerns at once.

When you're ready to have the conversation, here are some simple steps you can follow:

- **Take some time to think** - what is it exactly that you would like your roommate to do differently?
- **Come to them with a solution, not just a problem.** Instead of saying "You always leave your dishes in the sink", you'll have a better conversation if you say, "Would it be possible for you to make sure all your dishes are done before bed every day?"
- **Try to have this conversation in person** rather than over text since intention and tone can be hard to read.
- **Find a time to talk that's right for both of you** – "Hey, do you have a few minutes to chat?" "Do you mind if we talk about the kitchen for a second?"
- To help ease both of you into the conversation, **consider starting with some acknowledgment and appreciation.** Maybe that sounds like, "I really appreciate the things that you do to keep our unit tidy" or "I'm so glad that we're roommates, and you make living in Residence more fun." This lets your roommate know they're not a "bad roommate", and that that your intention in having the conversation is to make things better, not to make them feel bad.
- **Avoid using the words "always" or "never"** (ie. "You never clean the bathroom!")
- **Consider using neutral and open starter-phrases** like "I noticed..." or "I wonder if..."
- **Describe the issue as objectively as possible, and mention how it's impacting you.**
- **Make a specific request** for what you would like them to do differently. If your roommate disagrees, try to be open to negotiating with them about it. Remember – you are the one making a request of them.

All together, this might sound like:

- "Hey – do you mind if we talk about the kitchen for a second? First of all, thank you for always taking the trash and recycling out – I really appreciate that. I've noticed that sometimes dishes are left in the sink overnight, and then in the morning I find they kind of smell. Would it be possible for you to wash and put away your dishes before bed every night? That would really help me out."

Your roommate might need some time to think about this, or they might be concerned that they cannot commit to that solution. Be open to other ideas that might improve the situation for you (even if they weren't what you had initially hoped for). Get creative!

**Want to really knock it out of the park?** Consider asking your roommate, "Is there anything that you'd like me to do differently around the unit?" and giving them a chance to share anything that's been on their mind. Maybe they would appreciate it if you took the garbage out a bit more often! If you can approach these conversations with openness, kindness, and respect, both of you can leave feeling pretty great about living together, and confident that you can address any future issues that arise.

If your roommate brings up something with you, recognize that for a lot of people, this likely was not easy for them to do. Try not to take it personally or get upset. Listen to what they have to say and consider asking some questions to make sure you understand what the problem is for them. "Ok, so it sounds like it's frustrating for you when I leave my dishes in the sink instead of washing them after dinner. Is that right?" Try to understand what change they would like to see and consider whether that's something you can actually commit to. Try to find a solution that will work for both of you – "I'm not sure I can commit to washing my dishes right after I use them, but would it be ok if I made sure they were done before I go to bed?"

### **Conflict with Neighbours**

Many of us have had an experience where we became frustrated with a neighbour. Maybe they were playing their music too loud or had guests over late when we were trying to sleep. Noise carries in Residence, and other people's choices can impact our ability to sleep, study, or relax. As a resident, you likely understand that everyone will have to put up with noise from time-to-time, and that not all noise is negative. Sometimes we may need to go study at the library or in a quiet lounge. That said, you always have the right to speak with your neighbours respectfully if something is having a negative impact on you, so they have the chance to adjust their behaviour.

Reviewing the information above, much of it applies to how we handle conflicts with our neighbours. Specifically:

- Take a moment to think about and plan what you are going to say – what change are you requesting?
- Don't knock on someone's door when you're feeling particularly angry – if you are polite and calm, they are more likely to be polite and calm as well.
- Introduce yourself if you haven't met before
- Use neutral and open starter-phrases like, "I'm wondering if..." or "Would it be possible..."

- Show appreciation

This might sound like:

- “Hey – I hate to interrupt. I’m Nick – I live across the hall. I’m wondering if you could turn down the music? I’m just trying to study right now. Thanks!”

Your neighbour might be embarrassed that their music is bothering other people, and they might be a bit awkward in this interaction. Perhaps they will be really apologetic and tell you they’ll turn the volume down immediately. Alternatively, they could be defensive (even if you are kind). Regardless, you can leave the interaction knowing that you were respectful and clear, and you did what you could!

If there are similar issues with that neighbour in the future (for example, the next evening they’re playing music loudly again), you could consider knocking on their door again, or speaking with your floor CA about the issue. Maybe they have some advice or can offer to speak with the person about the loud volume of their music.

If your neighbour is defensive and does not turn the volume down, please contact a CA.