

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Hidden College Cost: Roommate Conflict”

Parents, if you’re already reeling from the costs of today’s college education, take a deep breath. According to one expert, if your kids lack conflict resolution skills, it could end up costing you even more.

“Students who can’t manage conflict run into trouble with roommates almost immediately,” said Susan Fee, author of *My Roommate is Driving Me Crazy!* “They avoid the issue rather than deal it, causing increased stress, lower grades, and additional moving and housing expenses,” said Fee, who is a licensed professional counselor. She said students who focus only on academic success do so at the expense of other life skills. “Some students have spent so much time studying and fitting in extracurricular activities that they never develop necessary social skills. Well-intentioned parents have become overly-involved in their kids’ lives, planning their time, and solving their dilemmas. By the time these kids enter college, they have no confidence in speaking up for themselves,” said Fee.

Another factor leading to trouble adjusting is a sense of entitlement. “It’s not uncommon for students to come from homes where they had their own bedroom, bathroom, and TV,” said Fee. “They have unreasonable expectations about having things their way.”

The bottom line for parents: Children’s poor communication skills can hurt your wallet. Kids who can’t get along with their roommates request single dorm rooms, which

are not only more costly, but usually unavailable. Others move off-campus, transfer to another school, or return home. Grades can be affected by the stress causing some students to repeat entire semesters. “The ultimate solution is for students to learn how to resolve roommate differences rather than find ways to avoid them,” said Fee.

She offers these five tips to parents:

1. *Offer suggestions, not solutions.* Telling your child what to do, or worse, handling the problem yourself, does more harm than good. Conflict resolution is a skill that needs to be practiced and the more you do for your kids, the longer it will take them to become confident. Instead, help them become critical thinkers by imagining scenarios, brainstorming solutions, and considering possible outcomes and consequences.

2. *Prepare for conflict.* Students who assume things will be “perfect” get thrown for a loop when they’re not. Conflict is inevitable because people are different. Even best friends should expect to have differences in needs, living habits, stress levels, and communication skills. Teach your child that conflict does not have to be negative; it’s an opportunity to be creative and learn how to problem solve.

3. *Share expectations.* Roommate contracts are required by many universities as a way to get kids talking about their expectations. Even if your child’s school does not have formal contracts, encourage him to discuss things like sleep and study habits, bills, sharing items, cleaning, and the best times to have visitors. Just like pre-marital counseling, the more that’s discussed upfront, the better the relationship.

4. *Encourage face-to-face conversations.* Communicating via texting or online can lead to misunderstandings that escalate conflicts. Without the benefit of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, messages can be misinterpreted. Also, warn kids that

gossiping to others instead of talking to their roommate directly only intensifies the problem.

5. *Ask for help.* Residence life staff will help to mediate, as long as the student has already tried problem solving face-to-face. (In reality, most students wait to mention there's a problem until they want to move out, or at the first sign of trouble, they report it to their RA expecting that person to solve it.) Campus counseling centers are also available for help if a roommate is exhibiting signs of mental illness such as depression, substance abuse, or cutting. If nothing else, a counseling session can help your child learn to better deal with stress and find other ways to manage the situation.

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“How to Survive College Roommate Personality Clashes”

Are you living with your total opposite? It’s amazing how different two people sharing the same (tiny) room can be. Even the littlest things can drive us crazy after awhile! You eat Big Macs and chicken wings while your roommate swears by tofu and beans; you like Coldplay and your roommate cranks up Tim McGraw. You’re East Coast; your roommate is West Coast. Whatever your differences (and there are bound to be a few), you need to figure out what you’re willing to live with and what’s fair to ask your roommate to change.

Your roommate may have an accent that grates on your nerves, but that’s not something you can ask a person to change. It’s also not fair to expect someone to change his entire personality to suit you. It would be great if we could snap our fingers, and BAM, instant personality makeover! Not gonna happen. So, you need to separate her personality from her irritating habits. You won’t transform your roommate into your new best friend, but you can make things a lot more bearable. Here are five survival tips from Susan Fee, author of *My Roommate Is Driving Me Crazy!*

1. Talk. If something’s bugging you, bring it up in a non-defensive way rather than assume your roommate can read your mind. Nothing can change unless you acknowledge it. It’s possible that your roommate may not even be aware of the problem.

2. *Focus on behavior, not personality.* It's not reasonable to ask people to change who they are, but you can ask them to tone down how they express themselves, especially when it's invading your turf. So, you can't criticize someone for being "perky," but you can ask for someone not to talk so much while you're studying.

3. *Stay flexible.* It's not your job to fix anybody else, and it helps to recognize that no one is perfect. Be willing to look at your own behavior. Consider what you could do differently to help the situation instead of only blaming your roommate.

4. *Start with one pet peeve.* What can you absolutely not deal with? What do you find extremely irritating, but could live with if you had to? There are probably tons of things your roommate does that get on your nerves. But nothing kills a relationship faster than listing dozens of reasons why you don't like a person. Instead, both of you need to list your number one pet peeve and focus your energy on solving that first.

5. *Consider the positives.* Before you decide that life would be better with a roommate exactly like you, think of what you could gain by living with your opposite. We're often attracted to people who are different from us because they represent qualities we wish we possessed. If you're shy, maybe being around a more outgoing person will force you out of your shell. When one person's strength makes up for the other's weakness, being opposites is an advantage.

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