

FOR THE FRIDGE

Shared Space: Roommates

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AD/HD IS KNOWN for throwing a wrench into the gears of a romantic relationship. With 42 percent of the U.S. adult population currently unmarried, however, it's not just spouses and partners sharing space. Especially among younger adults, house-sharing arrangements are going strong. And, of course, most college students share living space while they attend school.

Living with a roommate while coping with AD/HD can provide many challenges and a handful of unique situations. Elbows are sure to bump when two people live closely together, but when either one is affected by AD/HD, it can become very difficult. Forgetfulness, poor time management, frustration, and blame can begin to take a toll on the relationships between roommates. Here are some tips that can help.

Where to start

The first concern for many adults affected by AD/HD entering a roommate situation is whether or not to disclose their diagnosis. *Attention* covered the topic of disclosure in the April 2009 issue. The decision to disclose, and how much information to disclose, is always a personal decision. Offering information early on can help roommates develop effective communication. If you decide to disclose, offer information directly and answer your roommate's questions simply. If he or she continues to be curious, suggest a few books that discuss adult AD/HD.

Working out the details

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It's important to be honest with yourself about your own home-management strengths and weaknesses and which among them are related to AD/HD. If you're honest with yourself, you can be honest with your roommate when you sit down to divvy up household responsibilities. Offer to take on areas that are

your strengths and ask for help in areas that are more difficult for you.

Be sure to discuss money and bills (who pays for what, how rent is divided, is there a shared bank account for household needs and who handles the statements?). Also discuss housecleaning, house maintenance, and other practical details of a shared home.

Some housemates prefer to write out their agreement so there is no misunderstanding. Another idea is to hang a calendar somewhere in the shared living space that you can mark with reminders about your agreements. This calendar can also keep track of events and dates for both roommates.

Communication

Communication is perhaps one of the most important aspects of sharing a home with anyone. Adults affected by AD/HD often struggle with social skills, which can make communication difficult when they live in close proximity with someone with whom they have limited experience.

It can help to practice active listening. One person in the conversation listens to what the other says. Then the listener repeats what was said back to the first speaker. This is done until the first speaker's message is clear. The speakers then reverse roles until each side has been heard, and hopefully the situation is resolved.

Another option is to handle some discussions through email or instant messaging. This isn't done to avoid the topic, but to be clear and better understand the topic without heated discussion, in a space that allows thoughtful consideration.

Some people find in-

stant messaging

to be highly

stimulating and can better attend to the discussion if it's on screen.

It's important to try to limit distractions and unnecessary stimuli when trying to have a conversation. Make an effort to turn off the TV and computer screens, turn down or turn off radios and other electronics that could grab your attention from your roommate as you talk.

Other tips for a harmonious shared home

Tackle concerns when they're small; don't wait for them to build up. They're easier when small.

- Define "your space" and "my space" and stick to it.
- **Keep your agreements.** If you forget, apologize and do your best to fix the problem as soon as possible.
- Let your roommate know if there will be overnight guests, who they are, and how long they're staying. Try to do so as far in advance as possible.
- Be friends with your roommate, but don't worry if you're not best friends.
 It's important to have your own social circle and activities.

For more information on social skills, visit help4adhd.org, CHADD's National Resource Center on AD/HD, at and look up What We Know sheets 12 and 15, "A Guide to Organizing the Home and Office" (WWK12) and "Social Skills in Adults with AD/HD" (WWK15). •





