



HOW TO: MEDIATE ROOMMATE CONFLICT?

Roommate conflict is inevitable, especially between first-year students. RAs may have to mediate or diffuse conflict between two students. Basic conflict resolution skills can be very useful. The following information explains common causes of conflict, steps to mediation, and conflict resolution tips.

The truth about conflict:

Conflict is a normal, healthy, and inevitable part of relationships. Learning how to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. Just like when conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship, when handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people.

Where does conflict begin?

Conflict arises from differences. Listed below are the five major sources that cause conflict:

1. Goals – motivations, ideas, desires
2. Values – basic beliefs
3. Tasks – performing basic chores
4. Rules – adherence to laws and policies
5. Communication – being able to talk and listen to each other

The core to almost any roommate/suitemate/relationship conflict is lack of communication. Expressing problems when they arise and working to find common ground in solving those issues is important. Usually, the problem will not “just blow over,” but will most often become a bigger issue and harder to overcome.

What is a facilitator/mediator?

- A person to guide/facilitate the conversation.
- Facilitators/mediators are NOT there to solve the problem.
- Facilitators are not responsible for making the students agree.

Steps to mediation (3 U's):

1. Understand the problem

- Ask them both to explain each side of the conflict, one at a time.
- Separate controllable factors from uncontrollable factors.
- Encourage use of "I" statements.
- Ask them to be specific about the problem and to focus on behaviors, not personality.

2. Untie interest from position

- Win-win: Ask each individual what they both want? Choose the best option possible.
- Time-limited compromise commitment (TLC Commitment): If Win-win does not work – ask the to choose a compromise and put a time-limit on it. Let them choose the time (days, weeks, semester) and the agreeable compromise. Recommend setting up another meeting time to revisit situation.
- Additional Alternative: If Win-win and TLC do not work, what is the best alternative solution?

3. Unconditionally constructive

- Focus on the 4 Ps – 1st person, present, positive and process.
- 1st person: Ask them to use "I" statements ("I feel happy/angry/sad/scared/hurt when _____ because _____.")
- Present: Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, keep them focused on what they can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- Positive: Remain positive and encouraging throughout the conversation. Help them be respectful of their differences.
- Process: Keep the focus of the conversation on creating a solution and maintaining the relationship, not the problem at hand.

Other tips for conflict resolution:

- Discuss only one issue at a time.
- Encourage both sides to verbalize emotions and feelings during conversation.
- Keep a calm, even tone of voice.
- Watch your nonverbal communication (eye contact, facial expression, posture, gestures).
- Intervene if either side begins to "hit below the belt" or attack areas of personal sensitivity.
- Help them specify when they use generalizations (never or always).
- Do not be discouraged if the problem is not immediately resolved. Set a time to come back and revisit the issue.

When to refer:

- If either student presents a danger to self or others, contact Counseling Services by calling (434) 223-6411 or (434) 223-6164 after office hours, immediately.
- If there is a continued lack of agreement, refer to Dean of Students office.