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myeducation

Resident advisers

What the experts say:

"I encourage students not to let Facebook be the source of first impressions since there's usually more to a student than what is posted on their online profile. Make time to talk on the phone and learn about each other."

Wendy Piper, director of residential life, Ohio Wesleyan University

"I recommended to the students that one way to reduce defensiveness — and make the conversation more productive — is to bring up the issue in a positive, 'I'-oriented way. Instead of saying, 'Your behavior is bothering me, and you need to change,' say, 'I'm having a problem, and I would really appreciate your help in solving it.'"

Robert Donley, peer mediation coordinator, Central Pennsylvania College
 "We strongly believe that it is best for you to negotiate through the actual problem on your own."
Kathy Collins, associate director for residence education, Texas A&M University

How to cultivate positive roommate relationships



▶ A recent University of Michigan study found that most roommate situations get better, not worse, over a 10-week period.

▶ Not happy with who is sharing your space? Hang in there ▶ Research shows that most situations get better

College freshmen are often tempted to request roommate changes within weeks of unpacking. But a host of research data suggests that staying the course — barring abusive situations — is likely to have a positive effect on students for years to come.

In a college roommate setting, tension could actually produce better results for students. For instance, most studies show that racial differences among roommates lead to more conflict. However, an important Ohio State University and Virginia Commonwealth University study showed that mixed-

race roommate situations resulted in better grades for African-Americans.

Moreover, a recent University of Michigan study found that most roommate situations get better, not worse, over a 10-week period. That same study presented evidence that a willingness to reveal weakness is a key factor in a good roommate relationship. Admitting to fears and shortcomings can create a healthy bond, even between extremely different personalities. "Human weakness, I think, is really one of the only reliable facts of the universe," says John Mallinen, a counselor.

"We are all dealing with a lot of fear. When we are able to share that with another person, it's bound to create intimacy."

And that can begin — at least in small doses — online, before you meet, says Natalie Caine, founder of Empty Nest Support Services, a Los Angeles-based consultant. "Let each other know you are excited and nervous so it shows some vulnerability," she explains. "Use humor, like saying you will bring ear plugs to share for snoring or late-night studies."

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