

## WHAT IT IS

Roommate conflicts on college campuses often stem from everyday differences rather than major incidents. Common issues include mismatched expectations around cleanliness, noise, guests, sleep schedules, and shared belongings, as well as communication styles that range from avoidance to confrontation. Conflicts can also emerge from differences in values, cultural norms, personal boundaries, or stress levels, especially during high-pressure academic periods. When concerns go unaddressed, small irritations can escalate into tension, withdrawal, or passive-aggressive behavior, making early communication and support key to preventing more serious problems.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

This approach is most useful for students living together who are experiencing ongoing tension or conflict related to shared space, routines, or communication. These strategies are also appropriate for training residence life staff, RAs, and housing professionals who support students in shared living environments.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Can you walk me through what's been bothering you, starting with the most recent example?
2. What have you already tried to address the issue? What happened?
3. Are there specific boundaries or expectations that feel unclear or unmet?
4. Is there anything about safety, intimidation, or feeling uncomfortable that we should know about?
5. What kind of help are you hoping for: a conversation, mediation, clear agreements, or a change in housing?

## TEACHING INSIGHT

Start by normalizing conflict. Most roommate issues are not about bad intentions, but unmet expectations, unclear boundaries, or stress. Framing the situation as a problem to solve together reduces defensiveness and blame.

Focus on impact and patterns rather than isolated incidents. Help students move from listing grievances to identifying what specifically interferes with sleep, study, safety, or comfort in the shared space.

Support clear, concrete communication. Encourage students to name needs, boundaries, and expectations directly and respectfully, and to avoid assumptions, avoidance, or indirect messaging.

Assess for safety and power dynamics. While most roommate conflicts are low-level, be alert to intimidation, coercion, or fear, which may require a different response or referral.

Use mediation and agreements as tools, not punishments. Written agreements, facilitated conversations, or housing changes can provide structure and relief while preserving student dignity and choice.