

Adjusting to Dorm Life

Objective

To successfully adjust to living in a college dormitory.

What to Know

When you move into a college dormitory, you might feel overwhelmed, excited, stressed, homesick, or even lonely. And it's true that successfully adapting to dorm life is very different from any other living situation you've experienced.

Dorm life is the ideal living situation for your first year away at college. It's a great environment to build your social life, and it gives you the benefits of living on your own while sheltering you from some real-world responsibilities.

Here are some important survival tips to help you adjust.

Get to know your resident assistant (RA). This is often an upperclassman who lives on your floor. They are there to mentor, problem-solve, and answer questions. Your RA can help you adjust to dorm life, and you can reach out if you're homesick or having roommate problems.

Personalize your room. Make your room a comfortable place where you feel at home. Think about things you love the most in your bedroom at home—a soft blanket, comfortable chair, or unique lamp. Bring a few of your favorite items with you.

Keep your room clean. Set up a cleaning schedule with your roommates that everyone can follow.

Keep healthy snacks on hand. Some colleges have dining services 24 hours a day, but others don't. Keep snacks available in your room.

Be open to differences. One benefit of living in a dorm is you'll probably meet people from other countries and cultures.

Give your roommate a chance. This is probably your first experience living with someone other than family members. Get to know your roommate and have an open mind.

Communicate. If there's a problem, talk it out with your roommate first. If you still have problems, seek help from your RA.

Adjust to minimal space. You might get frustrated about sharing such a small space with other people. You'll get used to it, and if you organize your space and make the room comfortable, you may worry less about the small size.

Get to know students on your floor. Everyone in your dorm is living in tiny rooms, too, and have many of the same concerns and fears as you. Consider leaving your door open so your neighbors can stop in and hang out. Walk down the hall and say hello, and be sure to attend activities planned by your RA.

Prioritize sleep. Dorm room beds can be oddly sized and uncomfortable. Get a mattress topper and bring a good pillow. Use earbuds you can comfortably sleep in if you're used to listening to podcasts or music to fall asleep. You can even use an eye mask or earplugs.

Schedule time outside your dorm. Find a location on campus that serves as your go-to space when you need time away from your room. You might visit a café or go to the library or lounge area.

Keep in touch. You'll meet lots of new friends but living away from home for the first time can lead to homesickness. Consider writing a letter or sending an email to a high school friend attending a different college. Call your parents, siblings, or other loved ones on a regular basis.

Set some rules. Unless you have a single room, you'll be living with at least one roommate. With a friendly attitude, let others know upfront what your non-negotiables are. Make sure everyone is on the same page about basic house rules. Hopefully, your personalities and living preferences are basically compatible. If not, compromise. Here is a basic checklist of some issues you might consider when you establish ground rules.

- quiet / lights out hours
- room temperature
- what is shared food and what isn't
- when friends can come over / sleep over
- general cleanliness level of the room
- who purchases room / cleaning supplies
- room chores schedule
- acceptable noise level when studying
- borrowing etiquette
- personal space boundaries
- communication protocol when there's a problem
- room security and safety
- privacy
- sharing TV time
- alarm clock settings
- allergies
- acceptable and unacceptable behavior

Anything else? _____

This worksheet will help you brainstorm ideas to successfully adjust to living in a college dormitory.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

What can you do to personalize your dorm room and make it feel like “home”?

What items can you bring from home?

Do you have roommates? Y / N If yes, how many? _____

Do you know your roommates, or are they strangers? _____

Write down one thing you can do to get to know your roommate(s).

Are you concerned about homesickness? Who can you contact if you feel homesick?

It’s important to set some dorm room ground rules. What are your non-negotiables?

What are some issues you're willing to be flexible about?

Write down any concerns you have about having roommates or living in a small space. Be specific.

It can be stressful living in a cramped, hyper-social environment. What are some ways you can take care of yourself and de-stress? Be specific.

What else can you do to make this a smooth transition?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
