

How to Share Space with Your Roommates During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Sharing space with roommates can have its ups-and-downs even in the best of circumstances. Because of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, you're probably spending way more time with your roommates than you have before, and that can lead to...

Method 1 of 4:

Making House Rules

- 1. Discuss your individual handwashing habits.** While it may be frustrating, you can't do much to control what other people do. However, you can change how you behave if your roommates aren't washing their hands as often as you would prefer. Talk to your roommates about how well they're following the CDC's recommendation to frequently wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.^[1]
 1. If you believe 1 or more of your roommates isn't washing their hands often, gently remind them why it's important. Then, start treating them like someone who may have been exposed to the virus. Distance yourself from them, but don't engage in arguments about your concerns.
- 2. Create a chore chart so your home stays clean.** You'll likely all be spending most of your time at home, so it's important that you work together to keep your home clean. Additionally, the CDC recommends disinfecting high-touch areas daily, so you'll want a house plan for meeting these cleaning goals. Meet with your roommates and make a list of the chores that need to be done. Then, decide how you'll assign chores each day.^[2]
 1. Make a plan for disinfecting high-touch surfaces every day to prevent contamination. For instance, you might take turns spraying or wiping down door knobs, faucets, toilet flushers, and countertops every morning.
 2. Consider how you'll keep your space tidy. For instance, each person could pick up their personal items every night before bed.
- 3. Decide how you'll handle groceries and household items.** You don't need to worry about running out of supplies because stores will remain open. However, it's a good idea to plan how you'll refresh your supplies and whether or not you'll share items as a household. Talk to your roommates about whether or not they want to share food and household supplies. Then, discuss who will purchase the supplies.^[3]
 1. You might decide to take turns doing a weekly supply run. In general, it's best to send 1 adult per household to minimize how many people are at the store.
 2. You could also decide to order everything you need and have it delivered to your home.
- 4. Create a routine to help you all manage your time together.** Since you're all going to be spending more time at home, it's likely you'll have some conflicts over shared spaces and each other's behaviors. Following a routine can help you all know what to expect from each other and set rules for shared spaces. Work with your roommates to create a loose household structure for the outbreak period.^[4]
 1. For instance, you might set quiet hours at night for people who need to get sleep for work. Additionally, you might designate times when each person will be working or using shared spaces.

5. **Make a plan for what you'll do if a roommate gets sick.** If a member of your household gets coronavirus, they'll need to self-isolate for 14 days and the remaining roommates must self-quarantine for 14 days. Talk to your roommates about what they think should happen. Then, create a plan that addresses the following concerns:^[5]
 1. Where a sick roommate will recover, such as their bedroom.
 2. How you'll disinfect shared spaces while your roommate is ill.
 3. How you'll get supplies since none of you can leave the home, like by delivery.
 4. How you'll communicate with people outside your household in case you need help.
 5. How each roommate will handle their work and personal responsibilities during the quarantine period.

Method 2 of 4:

Enjoying Time Together

1. **Eat dinner together every night to boost camaraderie.** There are probably going to be times when you and your roommates are sick of each other. Instead of focusing on potential conflicts, try to enjoy having other people in your household. Treat mealtimes as a social occasion in your home. Cook and enjoy meals together as often as you can.^[6]
 1. You might try theme nights, like Taco Tuesday or Thai Thursday. Try to have fun with your meals so you don't feel so cooped up.
2. **Schedule a roommate movie night.** Movies and TV are providing a much needed source of entertainment during the coronavirus outbreak. Watching with someone is often more fun than doing it alone because you can talk about the show. Invite your roommates to a nightly viewing party to watch something you all like.^[7]
 1. Consider watching a mix of TV shows and movies.
 2. Make popcorn or treats to make movie night feel more like a party.
3. **Do a puzzle together.** Puzzles are a great way to pass the time because they help you relax and give you a sense of accomplishment.^[8] Choose a puzzle with a picture that makes you feel cheerful, then invite your roommates to help you put it together. Do the puzzle on a flat surface where it won't be disturbed so you can work on it over several days if necessary.^[9]
 1. If you don't have any puzzles, you can order them online. Additionally, you may be able to do curbside pickup of puzzles from local bookshops if your area isn't under a shelter-in-place or stay-at-home order.
4. **Make an art project together.** Get your creative juices flowing and create a collaborative drawing, painting, or collage. Use whatever supplies you have and don't worry about whether or not it's 'good.' Just try to have fun expressing yourselves.^[10]
 1. You could also make a short film or write a play together.
 2. Being creative is a great stress reliever, so this could help you and your roommates feel less worried.^[11]
5. **Enjoy the great outdoors together.** Unless you are under quarantine or are sick, it's okay to go outside as long as you stay at least 6 ft (1.8 m) away from people who don't live in your household. Plan outdoor outings with your roommates so you can have fun outside your home. Here are some ideas:^[12]
 1. Go for a walk or hike.
 2. Have a balcony or backyard picnic.
 3. Enjoy drinks on your porch, balcony, patio, or right outside your front door.
 4. Play an outdoor sport. You might kick a ball around, play catch, or hit a tennis ball back and forth.

Variation: You might choose to spend time outdoors by yourself to get time away from your roommates, as well. Go for a walk or run, or just sit outside in your yard.

6. **Plan fun group activities to pass the time and keep the mood light.** One of the benefits of having roommates during the coronavirus outbreak is being able to do activities together. Take advantage of having built-in social-distancing buddies by scheduling fun activities into your week. Here are some ideas: [13]
 1. Have a game night.
 2. Turn on music, bust out the drinks, and enjoy a roommate party.
 3. Sing karaoke.
 4. Do a reading of a play.
 5. Play beer pong.
 6. Do a campout in your backyard or living room.

Method 3 of 4:

Keeping the Peace

1. **Be kind to your roommates because you're all in this together.** Chances are, you're all feeling a bit stressed right now. Unfortunately, it's easy to accidentally take out your emotions on the people around you. Do your best to treat your roommates with kindness and patience. Additionally, try to be understanding if they lash out at you. [14]
 1. It's likely that you're going to have slip-ups. If you say something you know was hurtful, apologize to your roommate. You might say, 'I'm sorry I yelled at you over the cereal. I was taking my stress out on you, and that's not fair.'
 2. **Designate a private space for each roommate.** There are probably going to be times when you and your roommates need to be alone for a while. Talk to your roommates about creating private spots for each person. Then, respect these areas as each other's personal sanctuaries. [15]
 1. If you have your own rooms, you might just make your rooms off-limits to others unless you invite each other inside.
 2. If you don't have individual rooms, you might designate a corner or specific piece of furniture for each person.
- Tip:** Use headphones, earbuds, or ear plugs to block out distracting noise from your roommates, if necessary.
3. **Confront potential conflicts before they lead to a fight.** Now is not the time to bite your tongue if you get frustrated about something. Bring up issues as soon as they happen so you can air them out. Talk about the situation and decide how to resolve it together. Doing this will help you avoid a big blow up later. [16]
 1. For instance, let's say a roommate leaves their dirty dishes laying out. Say something the first time it happens. You might say, 'I know you were tired yesterday, but we agreed we'd all wash our dishes at the end of the day.'
 4. **Take responsibility for your own moods and actions.** The coronavirus outbreak is a super stressful situation, and it's likely that your life is very different right now. Unfortunately, a common way people cope with changes like this is looking for someone to blame. Do your best to avoid assigning blame to your roommates when you feel frustrated or upset or when something goes wrong. Instead, focus on what you can do to deal with the situation. [17]

1. For example, let's say it's your roommate's turn to go get the groceries and they return without an item you wanted because the store was out. Your reaction could be to get angry with the roommate and to suspect they didn't look hard enough. However, it's likely that they're telling the truth, so try to focus on letting go of your desire for that food and on deciding what you can eat instead.

Method 4 of 4:

Isolating a Sick Roommate

1. **Put the sick roommate in a private room for self-isolation.** If a member of your household is sick, the CDC advises housing them in a private room so other members of your household are less likely to get sick. Provide the sick roommate with food, water, and over-the-counter pain relievers while they recover. However, don't go in their room unless you must.^[18]
 1. If you do go in their room, wear gloves and make sure they're wearing a face mask. It's best for you to wear a paper gown that you can throw away when you go out, but this might not be possible.
2. **Allow well roommates to use a shared kitchen and bathroom first.** The CDC recommends that a sick household member use their own bathroom. However, this isn't always possible. If you're sharing spaces, arrange so that each healthy household member does their business first. Then, let the sick person use the shared space.^[19]
 1. For instance, all healthy roommates might use the restroom in the morning, then allow the sick roommate to go.
3. **Disinfect all surfaces after the sick roommate uses a shared room.** Spray or wipe down all surfaces any time the ill roommate goes into a shared space. You might douse surfaces in a bleach spray or Lysol, or you could clean the area with a bleach wipe. This will minimize the risk of the virus spreading to other household members.^[20]
 1. When in doubt, always disinfect. It's better to clean too often than to clean too little.
4. **Don't share dishes or laundry with other members of your household.** The COVID-19 coronavirus spreads through respiratory droplets from an infected person. That means the sick roommate's dishes and laundry will likely be contaminated with the virus. To limit your risk of exposure, don't share these items with your roommates.^[21]
 1. Wash your dishes in hot water and detergent to disinfect them. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for washing laundry and use the highest temperature recommended for the item.^[22]
5. **Wear a face mask while you're sick to limit the spread.** While face masks won't protect you from the virus, they can protect others if you are sick. The face mask will catch your respiratory droplets so they won't be in the air or on surfaces around you. Wear your face mask until your doctor says you've recovered.^[23]
6. **Pass on any caregiving activities to someone else during your quarantine.** If you're ill, it's important that you don't care for others, including pets. You may accidentally spread the virus to someone else. Ask someone else to cover your caregiving responsibilities until you feel better.^[24]
 1. As of March 2020, there is no evidence that you can give COVID-19 to your pets. However, the CDC recommends you not care for your pet while ill just in case.^[25]

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