

# OBU COUNSELING SERVICES



## Trouble With Your Roommate?

your roommate after your efforts to directly articulate what is bothering you have brought no results or desired change. Promise that it is then and then only that you will bring the issue to someone else (preferably to a neutral friend, your RA, or hall director for help) - and never complain

to others just to vent your growing animosity for your roommate. Once roommates begin to disparage one another to others, their relationship is over.

### **Most of us will be living with a roommate, of one sort or another, for the rest of our lives.**

It's true - Whether you marry or not, most people don't prefer to live their adult lives alone. So, honing your skills for managing or navigating through conflict is a pretty smart idea. And, how people handle themselves amidst conflict, disagreement, or when frustrated or angry is one of the top predictors of how LONG and STRONG their most important interpersonal relationships will endure!

Here are a few suggestions to help you better negotiate conflict with your present or future roommate:

- Begin the semester with a **"Roommate Contract"** (call it whatever you wish) that you've created together. Most of us are better motivated to follow certain living space guidelines or rules that we have developed and voted upon ourselves. A few content areas to consider targeting might be those relative to noise or quiet hours, lights-out/sleep courtesies, sharing and the use of your personal possessions (such as clothing, food, hygiene products), and room cleanliness, etc.
- Make a **"for your ears only"** agreement relative to disagreements or problems between you. Commit to each other that your complaints or frustrations will be voiced first to each other, and only to each other. Talk with your roommate privately about your concern. Agree to only talk to others about a difficulty with
- **Filters are good.** Our bodies have filters (the liver and kidneys). Engine fuels are run through a filter before entering the combustion chamber, and oil is also filtered as it cycles within an engine. Why? To prevent the system from damage caused by pollutants and harmful debris. Our mouths need a filter as well. "The fool vents all of his feelings, but the wise man hold them back." Prov. 29:11 Don't be the "friend" whose habit is to lambast your roommate while claiming, "I just say it like it is. I'm honest with people." Instead, try your words by this test: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Ephesians 4:29
- **Avoid avoidance!** Don't simply avoid your roommate. Learn to "Speak the truth, in love" to each other. This means expressing your concern kindly, but plainly. If you're unsure of what or how much to say, rehearse with a wise friend or mentor what you've considered sharing with your roommate, to get their feedback on the issue, and ask how they might respond if presented with your proposed comments. Many are so fearful of and averse to conflict that they rarely speak honestly with their close friends and family about their negative feelings or frustrations. They are horrified by the thought that they might irk or stir a negative reaction from someone important to them. As a result, they

are prone to respond only with, "No problem. It's OK, really", when, in fact, they have been offended or feel disappointed, even livid. In the lives of some, this occurs because they have experienced so much unpleasant conflict or seen such painful damage to relationships amidst conflict that they would prefer to avoid it at almost any cost. Others, for a number of reasons, find themselves trying to please everyone, and upset no one - to a fault. If you continue to avoid any potential conflicts, you may end up simultaneously remaining only superficially transparent while withholding your true feelings and perspectives from others. Unfortunately, this isn't a recipe for close relationships. Someone once told me, "If two people agree on everything, one of them isn't necessary." Help one another by kindly, gently identifying blind-spots. Work to overcome your fear of conflict by carefully sharing with your roommate some of the things that are bothering you.

- **Ask the advice of your RA or Hall Director.** Our Hall Directors, in particular, have been appointed to their positions because they have demonstrated a high level of socio-emotional and spiritual maturity and a sincere concern for students and their personal growth. Explain your concern or frustration and ask for suggestions concerning how you might better approach the problem, or determine if outside intervention is warranted. That being said, don't be among those students who expect their parents, RAs, Hall Directors or others to immediately intervene when you have not yet even approached your roommate with your concerns, and your roommate's behavior is NOT a violation of university policy or the Tiger Handbook.
- **Consider using the A-B-C-D method** for communicating your hurt feelings, frustration, or complaint. This approach can help you move productively through a bad experience involving anyone with whom you hope to maintain a positive relationship. When attempting to address a problem, use this format: *"When you said/did (A), I felt (B), because in my mind I began thinking/wondering (C). Please explain to me what happened and (D) why you did or said that."*  
This structure helps the speaker to identify and articulate his feelings clearly, without blaming or attacking. It also helps highlight, for the speaker's own benefit - and for the listener, the self-talk and significant as-

sumptions that are now influencing him/her since the incident occurred. When the other person responds in a manner indicating that their intentions were quite different that what was assumed, we must either accept the authenticity of their statements, or determine how we'll proceed in the relationship if we have good evidence indicating they are not telling the truth.

- If possible, **begin by acknowledging any contribution you may have made** to your relational difficulty. Then identify any other things that may have contributed as well. This approach is preferable to simply looking for "who's to blame". And, it may invite your roommate to follow suite and confess his/her contribution to the situation as well.
- **Begin in the present, with one problem at a time.** Address only the most recent issue, behavior or situation bothering you. Avoid beginning with, "For three weeks now you have been...." Instead, describe the concern or complaint that's come up today or yesterday, and why it's difficult for you.
- Spend some enjoyable **time together OUTSIDE the room.** Go to the game playing this week, go for a hike, go to DeGray lake and rent a canoe or paddle boat for an hour, attend an on-campus concert or theatre event together, see a movie or go out to eat off-campus. Laughter, light-hearted fun, and shared pleasant experiences can take you far in your effort to better enjoy, understand, and appreciate one another.

On another note, it's almost always a bad idea to use Facebook, texting, or some other form of digital media while trying to resolve conflict. Face-to-face verbal interaction is always the preferred method of communication when you need to address an interpersonal problem. All other forms of interaction present too many risks for misinterpreting each other's statements, and throwing fuel on the flame. Many today are prone, when talking via texting, to communicate with harsher tones and more brazen disrespect to others than would be their habit in face-to-face interactions.

#### Need to talk?

- phone: 245-5591
- email: [jarboed@obu.edu](mailto:jarboed@obu.edu)
- walk-in: Evans Student Center - Student Services Office



You are at a critical juncture or crossroads in life, and **the person you'll become as an adult** is taking shape rapidly. We want you to become all you were meant to be, and "We're here to help" isn't just a polite gesture. It's for real. Come by, send an email, or call 245-5220 to set up a time to talk together if you like. You may also check out the Counseling Services website at [www.obu.edu/counseling](http://www.obu.edu/counseling)