



September 27, 2009  
Circulation: 168,508  
Impressions: 443,176  
VPM: 97,318

SHARED SPACES

# Making the best out of roommate hell

Many problems can be eased in lieu of cutting ties altogether

By **DONNA ROLANDO**  
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

The honeymoon is over – yes roommates do go through a honeymoon phase where they gloss over differences – and you have decided there's no alternative but to break up. There may be some things you'll want to consider before calling it quits and shouldering the cost of an apartment all alone.

According to Rent.com, the fastest way to make it to a roommate's blacklist is by leaving the kitchen or the living room a mess all the time, said Peggy Abkemeier, president of Rent.com. Other relationship-threatening gripes, which came to light in a new Rent.com survey, are: using belongings without asking, blasting music, having a significant other visit all the time,

talking on the phone 24/7, and eating someone else's food.

Although a breakup can be the outcome of any dispute, Abkemeier noted that many of these problems can be worked through simply by talking about them and not letting something trivial grow into something insurmountable.

Michelle Borden, associate executive director of NewBridge Services in Pequannock, said: "It's a shame when it gets to that [a breakup]," because very often roommates can avoid a rocky road by discussing their expectations and lifestyles and setting ground rules before they move in together.

"Sometimes it's a matter of communication – that you're honest about what's bothering you. Try to focus on communicating and coming up with ideas," she said.

## How to avoid common roommate issues

Peggy Abkemeier, president of Rent.com, offers the following tips on how to keep roommate tensions at a minimum:

1. **Know your roommate's living habits** up front.
2. **Communicate** your needs and expectations to each other and always be thoughtful.
3. **Give a little:** A bit of compromise is required in all relationships.
4. **Respect each other's privacy and property:** Bedrooms should generally remain off limits to the other roommate, and personal property should not be borrowed without permission.
5. **Commit to clean:** Some people are inherently tidier than others. Be sure to discuss expectations for home maintenance and cleaning prior to moving in together.
6. **Make a plan:** Before moving in together, decide how bills and rent will be paid.

Even if roommates are at the breaking point, Borden said, there might still be a chance to smooth over their differences, especially if the conflicts are minor.

"Sometimes it's not about wrong or right, but about what's going to help us stay here [in the apartment] so neither of us has to take on a situation we can't afford," said Borden, such as one of them getting stuck paying the rent alone.

More serious issues that might

justify a breakup are those dealing with safety, she said. Perhaps the roommate is inviting friends into the home that make you feel uncomfortable. If you've talked about it without remedy, Borden said, "you may have to decide to talk to the landlord or law enforcement."

The reason for drawing in the landlord, she said, is that "in the long run they're responsible for making sure it's a safe environment.

"Again it's a matter of looking at, 'Is this a problem that can be solved by talking to the other person?'" she said.

More serious issues might also include theft or drug use, things best left to the police, she said.

The bottom line is no one wants to pay for an apartment where they cannot truly be at home.

In "The Naked Roommate Blog," Harlan Cohen talked about the roommate honeymoon – that

"initial time of unconditional love when the roommate can do no wrong." As the weeks pass, "being kind and courteous to a roommate from hell matters less and less. ... That's when the venom spills, and it doesn't have to be that way."

Because tenants often have a lease to consider, the timing of a breakup should not be overlooked, according to MyFirstApartment.com. "Definitely don't draw it out any longer than it has to be," the article suggests, yet for the sake of sanity, avoid breaking up with a roommate in June when your move isn't until October.

Of course, the timing of your move may have a lot to do when your lease is due to expire. "Truth in Renting," available through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, describes how to break a lease if a move is inevitable.

E-mail: rolando@northjersey.com