
Daily Egyptian Staff

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Follow a few extra safety precautions
By Kate Kemp courtesy of rentnet.com

Just because the complex you’ve moved in to seems safe doesn’t mean you shouldn’t follow even more safety precautions. The following is a list of safety dos and don’ts to help you keep your apartment extra safe:

DO:
- Let a neighbor friend know when you are going out of town so that he or she can keep an eye on any suspicious activity going on around your apartment. You and your neighbors can have a buddy system. He’ll watch out for you when you’re gone and vice versa.
- Report bad lighting, overgrowth of landscaping (if it looks like someone can hide in it) and broken locks. Your property manager is responsible for providing you with working locks and a safe outdoor environment, but you are responsible for letting him know about any problems with these things. Landlords and managers have a million things to keep an eye on, and they may be too busy to notice a tampered lock, etc.
- Be alert when walking to or from your apartment late at night, as well as when using common rooms such as the weight room, laundry room, etc. Some people feel more secure when they have some sort of defense weapon with them. From alarms to pepper spray, there’s plenty to choose from.
- Report suspicious characters to the management. This is not to say you should report every person you don’t recognize, but there’s a difference between not recognizing someone and recognizing a potential threat.
- Lock your car door. Even if you’re only running inside to grab a jacket, you need to keep your car secure. Does the movie “Gone in 60 seconds” mean anything to you?

DON’T:
- Leave a note on your door or mailbox indicating your absence. That includes notes like “Honey, I’ll be back in ten minutes…” Ten minutes is long enough to steal all of your jewelry.
- Advertise that you live alone. Use initials on your mailbox and for your telephone listing. Criminals look for easy targets. Don’t make yourself one.
- Get on the elevator with only one person unless you know them. Once you’re on the elevator, stand near the control panel. This will prevent anyone from stopping the elevator between floors.
- Leave valuable objects out that can be seen through your apartment window or out in your car. Burglars go window shopping, too! Don’t put your valuables on display.
The Bare Necessities

What you need for your new apartment
By Courtney Ronan courtesy of rentnet.com

You’re a twentysomething fresh out of college. You’ve landed a job, and the world is your oyster. Tonight, you’re spending your first night in your new apartment.

Or perhaps you’re newly single and suddenly striking out on your own for the first time in years. For example, you lose your electricity, and suddenly, it hits you that you should have purchased a reliable flashlight.

Take some time to assemble a home “first aid kit,” for lack of a better term. This kit will be your collection of necessities. The average first-time homeowner/renter never considers their importance until they’re needed desperately -- and right away.

As mentioned, you’ll need to get yourself a good flashlight, and stock up on batteries while you’re at it. Keep it in your nightstand drawer or under your bed, where you can reach it easily in the event of a power failure.

You’ve probably experienced an incident similar to the one I did when, in the middle of a power loss during an electrical storm, I made my way to the front door of the house ... forgetting the presence of a baby gate keeping a new and yet-to-be-housestrained puppy confined in the kitchen. I flew over the baby gate and landed on the living room rug, clenching a skinned knee that I couldn’t see in the pitch-black darkness. I had a good laugh about it later -- on my way to the hardware store for a good flashlight.

You’ll also need a few tools. No, you don’t have to be Bob Vila. Everyone’s got to have a few basic tools that believe it or not, will come in handy. You may consider purchasing a cordless power screwdriver for your little fix-its around the house.

These screwdrivers, which usually allow you to use either a Philips or flat-head screw, give you the option of inserting batteries or charging them in a unit on your wall. They’re easy enough for even the most novice do-it-yourselfer, and most of them give you the flexibility of using screws, nuts and bolts of all sizes (for sale separately) and snapping them in and out of the screwdriver as needed.

A hammer and nails are a must. You can’t use push pins forever; they’re not particularly attractive, as they often cause your pictures to tilt, and they won’t hold heavy pictures on your wall (not longer than a few minutes, anyway). You can purchase a small hammer at your local hardware store or even your favorite grocery store. You’ll use it more times than you think.

Another indispensable: a utility knife with a reversible, retractable blade. The reversible blade allows you to have a new blade when one side becomes dull, and the retractable blade is an imper- 
vative safety feature. Utility knives come in handy for everything -- from cutting carpet and vinyl floors to opening boxes. You’d be wise to purchase either a glue gun or “super glue,” which is sold under a myriad of brand names, none of them necessarily more effective than another. Homes contain countless opportunities for glue; the door on your bathroom medicine cabinet, for example, contains a magnet that, when it falls off (and it will), you’ll have to glue back on. A simple dab of industrial strength glue will hold you. A staple gun is also a good investment for quick household repairs (for example, stapling the edge of carpeting to the floor).

A sewing kit is another must. Oh sure, you say you don’t sew; nor do you have the desire to learn. You’ll just take it to the tailor, you say. If you do, you’re likely to spend far more than necessary. Learn to sew a button. It’s not difficult. Keep a basic sewing kit -- needle and thread; you’ll need, as well as a good pair of scissors -- in a drawer where you can locate it in a pinch.

How many home appliances you’ll need depends on how domestic you are, of course. So you may not need a pasta machine, bread maker or juicer. How about an iron? First-time apartment-renters straight out of college and while some of us are happy with the basics, just as many of us high-main-

tenance types will require a long list of other indispensables along the way as you settle into your new digs. And while some of us are eager to discover a long list of other indispensables along the way as you settle into your new digs. And while some of us are happy with the basics, just as many of us high-mainten-

ance types will require a long list of “necessities.”

The above-mentioned items come in handy regardless of your degree of handiness. As you settle into your rou-

tine, you’ll quickly discover which extras you’ll need above and beyond the basics.
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Set up the lease one of three ways
By Kate Kemp courtesy of rentnet.com

Once you have decided to move into an apartment with one or more roommates, you will need to determine how your rental payments will be handled. There are three ways you can set up the lease and determine how the rent will be paid:

* All roommates sign the lease, and all are then "Jointly and Severally Liable" for rent and damages
  * One person basically becomes the “landlord” of the apartment by renting one or several rooms of the apartment to other people through what is called “subletting.”
  * You and your roommates create your own contract.
  * Subletting is complicated, but it is a great way to have legal backup in the event that you have irresponsible roommates. For example, Joe, Frank and Bill move in together, and they all sign a basic lease (making each party “Jointly and Severally Liable.” Joe and Frank are responsible roommates, and have their payments ready on the first of the month, but Bill is broke. Frank and Joe, then, must come up with Bill’s rent money since they are all on the same lease together. If they only submit their portion of the rent, the landlord can legally evict all three tenants - even though Bill is the only tenant at fault.
  
  However, if Joe, Frank and Bill had been subletting the apartment — Joe is the sublessor, Frank and Bill are the sublessees, Bill could have been held legally responsible. In this situation, Joe would basically be the landlord of their apartment. He would be responsible for all landlord duties - one of which is collecting rent from his sublessees (Frank and Bill) and turning it in to the landlord of the complex. If, as a sublessee, Bill failed to pay his rent, Joe could evict him from the apartment, or take the rent out of his security deposit, and Joe and Frank would be free to stay in the apartment without being punished for Bill’s unpaid rent.

Continued on page 9...
Making Rent Payments with Roommates

Some complexes do not allow subletting. If this is the case in your complex, it is wise to protect yourself and your roommates by designing a written contract that spells out your obligations to each other, such as what portion of rent each will pay, responsibility for damages, division of payment for utilities, duration of the rental period, responsibility for finding a replacement upon early termination, and payment of rent until a replacement is found - which may be better in the long run because in subletting, one person must take on more responsibility as landlord and this could cause battles for power in the household.

Joe, Frank and Bill could set up a contract stating exactly how much rent each party is responsible for:

I, Joe Blow will pay $250.00 rent money on the 15th day of each month by 5 p.m.
I, Frank Dunn will pay $250.00 rent money on the 15th day of each month by 5 p.m.
I, Bill Schnill will pay $250.00 rent money on the 15th day of each month by 5 p.m.

Signed:
Joe Blow
Frank Dunn
Bill Schnill

They could then get this document notarized for legal verification. In the event that one of the parties did not pay the $250.00 on the fifteenth day of a certain month by 5 p.m., the other two parties could take legal action against him and avoid a bad mark on their rental history record. Notarization usually costs about $10, and notaries are easy to find. This simple contract could save you and your responsible roommates from any legal problems in the future.

So, in order to avoid any future disasters with irresponsible roommates, you need to decide how things are going to be handled once you all move in together. Just make sure that all agreements are written and legally verified. Oral contracts don’t impress Judge Judy!

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It might give you an edge when dealing with a new landlord.

By Courtney Ronan courtesy of rentnet.com

Landlords are a finicky lot. If you’re a pet owner, you’ll find that the reception you receive from a prospective landlord depends largely upon his or her prior experiences dealing with pet-owning tenants. If the landlord’s encounters have been negative, you’re not going to be met with enthusiasm.

What landlords (and neighbors) don’t want are animals which are loud, unkempt, venomous, dangerous, ill-treated, or endangered. In the context of pets, such terms as the “jaws of death” and “highly toxic” will not re-assure anyone. There are safety, liability, and other issues with such animals that everyone can reasonably understand.

But if you really want the apartment — if your pet is more than teeth, venom and dirt — and if you’re willing to plead your pet’s case, you can take several measures to convince the landlord that both you and your pet are responsible, “well-trained” and are capable of maintaining the good condition of the apartment.

Pet-owning renters are drafting resumes and portfolios for their pets these days. Sound eccentric or just plain crazy? Well, if you’ve ever owned a pet, you probably understand. For families as well as singles, pets are family.

Sometimes they’re children; other times, our protectors, but in every case they’re our confidantes and friends. And so those of us who wouldn’t dream of parting ways with our pets just to land a good apartment are willing to do whatever it takes to convince a wary landlord... even if that means we give the impression that we’re just a tad loopy.

So, go ahead and draft a resume for your pet. Approach it as you would your own resume, printing your pet’s name at the top.

Continued on page 11
Instead of “Education” and “Computer Skills,” create such categories as “Personality,” “Experience” (living in other multi-family properties) and most important, “References.” What better reference for your pet than a former landlord who will substantiate the argument that you kept your apartment in good condition and that you and your pet left the unit just as you found it?

Avoid getting carried away under the “Personality” category. You’ll turn off your prospective landlord with lengthy descriptions of your pet’s “cute” characteristics. Instead, list the important behavioral points: Your pet is house trained (litter box-trained, or in the case of dogs, trained to go outside two or three times daily without using your carpet in desperation), quiet, good with people, etc.

If your cat has been trained to use a scratching post, don’t forget to mention that point, as well. And because savvy landlords are wise to the fact that damage from claws is a legitimate concern of property managers. Don’t forget to list your pet’s breed and weight, as well. And because savvy landlords are wise to the fact that damage from claws is a legitimate concern of property managers.

Another category you might consider including on your pet’s “resume” is “health.” Is your pet’s vaccination record up to date? Has he had any serious health conditions? Has he been treated for fleas or worms? How often do you have him groomed? Remember, there’s nothing worse than renting an apartment formerly rented by someone with a dog whose odor still hangs in the air.

In addition to listing your previous landlords as references, include your former neighbors if they’re willing to validate your claim. And if you’ve repeatedly used the services of a pet sitter while on business or pleasure trips, list his or her number, as well. If you’ve placed your pet in the care of a trusted friend of family member while you’ve traveled, list their phone numbers, as well.

You may consider attaching copies of your pet’s vaccination record, which lists the dates of his most recent round of shots, as well as a report from your veterinarian that validates the good health of your pet.

While some – particularly those without pets – may view this exercise as eccentric, it’s a smart move not only because it could help you land the apartment you want despite a landlord wary of four-legged roommates, but because you and your pet have established an early rapport with your landlord that will help build trust and protect you throughout your tenancy.
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Renting a place with others

What one does may affect everyone’s tenancy

A landlord can legally hold all co-tenants responsible for the negative actions of just one and terminate everyone’s tenancy with the appropriate notice. For example, two co-tenants can be evicted if one of them seriously damages the property or otherwise violates the lease or rental agreement.

When two or more people simultaneously sign the same rental agreement or lease — or enter into the same oral rental agreement — they are co-tenants and share the same legal rights and responsibilities. But there’s a twist. One co-tenant’s negative behavior — not paying the rent, for example — can affect everyone’s tenancy.

If one roommate doesn’t pay rent

Co-tenants may decide to split the rent equally or unequally, depending on their own personal wishes. However, such agreements don’t have any impact on the landlord. Each co-tenant is independently liable to the landlord for all of the rent. Landlords often remind co-tenants of this obligation by inserting into the lease a chunk of legalese which says that everyone’s tenancy is independently liable to the landlord for the full rent.

Landlords often insist on receiving one rent check for the entire rent — they don’t want to be bothered with multiple checks from co-tenants, even if each co-tenant pays on time and the checks add up to the full rent. As long as you have been advised of this policy in the rental agreement or lease, it’s legal for your landlord to impose it.

In practice, however, landlords sometimes ignore the legal rule that all tenants are equally liable for lease violations, and don’t penalize a blameless one. If the non-offending roommates pay the rent on time, do not damage the landlord’s property and can differentiate themselves from the bad apple in the landlord’s eyes, the landlord will probably want to keep them.

Agreements and disagreements among roommates

As a general rule, you can’t terminate your roommate’s tenancy by filing an eviction action.

The exception involves rentals governed by the few rent control statutes, such as the one in San Francisco, that allow a landlord to designate a “master tenant” — usually a long-term tenant who was there first -- to perform many of the functions of a landlord. Master tenants have the right to choose — as well as to evict - - tenants. If your municipality is subject to rent control, find out whether the scheme includes a provision for a master tenant.

The more you can anticipate possible problems from the start, the better prepared you’ll be to handle disputes that do arise. Before you move in, sit down with your roommates and create your own agreement covering major issues, such as:

- Rent. What is everyone’s share? Who will write the rent check if the landlord will accept only one check? Space. Who will occupy which bedrooms? Household chores. Who is responsible for what?

Food sharing. Will you be sharing food, shopping and cooking responsibilities? How will you split the costs and work?

Noise. When should stereos be turned off or down low? Overnight guests. Is it okay for boyfriends/girlfriends to stay over every night? Moving out. If one of you decides to move, how much notice must be given? Must the departing tenant find an acceptable substitute?

It’s best to put your understandings in writing. (See the sample roommate agreement, below.) Oral agreements are too easily forgotten or misinterpreted after the fact.

As specific as possible, especially on issues that are important to you. If dirty dishes in the sink drive you up the wall, write it down. If occasional guests are no problem, but you can’t stand the thought of your roommate’s (non-rent-paying) boyfriend hogging the bathroom every morning, make sure your agreement is clear on guests.

Most of this kind of agreement isn’t legally binding — that is, a judge won’t order a tenant to clean the bathroom. Judges will, however, enforce financial agreements, such as how rent is to be shared.

By far the greatest value of committing your understanding of co-tenant rights and responsibilities to writing is that it forces you and your housemates to take your co-tenancy responsibilities seriously. To underlie this commitment, it’s always wise to include a clause requiring co-tenants to participate in mediation before one of you breaks the agreement by moving out or running off to court. Our sample roommate agreement, below, includes such a clause.

See a sample roommate agreement on page 17.

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Renting a place with others

What one does may affect everyone’s tenancy

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Sample Roommate Agreement

Courtesy of rentnet.com

Alex Andrews, Brian Bates and Charles Chew are co-tenants at Apartment 2, 360 Capitol Avenue, Oakdale, Kentucky, under a year-long lease that expires on February 1, 2008. They have all signed a lease with the landlord, Reuben Shaw, and have each paid $300 towards the security deposit of $900. Alex, Brian and Charles all agree as follows:

Rent. The rent of $900 per month will be shared equally, at $300 per person. Alex will write a check for the total month’s rent and take it to the manager’s office on the first of each month (or the next day if the 1st falls on a holiday). Brian and Charles will pay their share to Alex on or before the due date.

Bedrooms. Alex and Brian will share the large bedroom with the adjacent deck; Charles will have the small bedroom. A co-tenant agrees that the co-tenant will promptly clean up after himself in the kitchen. No one will leave dishes in the sink for more than 24 hours, and everyone will promptly clean up when asked.

Utilities. Everyone will pay an equal share of the electricity and gas bills. Alex will arrange for service and will pay the bill. Within three days of receiving the bill, Charles and Brian will each pay Alex one-third of the total.

Phone. Alex will arrange for phone service and will pay the monthly bill. Within three days of receiving the bill, Alex, Brian and Charles will identify their own long-distance charges and Brian and Charles will each pay Alex one-third of the fixed charges.

Food. Each co-tenant is responsible for his own food purchases. Cleaning. Charles will clean his own room; Alex and Brian will clean theirs weekly. The household chores for the rest of the apartment — living room, dining room, kitchen and bathroom — will rotate, with each co-tenant responsible for vacuuming, dusting, mopping and bathroom maintenance on a weekly basis.

Each co-tenant will promptly clean up after himself in the kitchen. No one will leave dishes in the sink for more than 24 hours, and everyone will promptly clean up when asked.

Vacation Periods. During mid-term and final exam periods, no co-tenant will have overnight guests or parties.

Leaving Before the Lease Ends. If a co-tenant wants to leave before the lease expires on February 1, 2008, he will give as much notice as possible (and not less than one month) and diligently try to find a replacement tenant who is acceptable to the remaining co-tenants and the landlord.

Security Deposits. The co-tenant who leaves early (voluntarily or involuntarily) will get his share of the security deposit returned, minus costs of rent, repairs, replacement and cleaning attributable to the departing tenant, when and if an acceptable co-tenant signs the lease and contributes his share to the security deposit. If an acceptable co-tenant cannot be found, the departing tenant will not receive any portion of his share of the security deposit until the tenancy of the remaining co-tenants is over and the security deposit is refunded (or not) by the landlord.

Dispute Resolution. If a dispute arises concerning this agreement or any aspect of the shared living situation, the co-tenants will ask the University Housing Office Mediation Service for assistance before they terminate the co-tenancy or initiate a lawsuit. This will involve all three tenants sitting down with a mediator in good faith to try to resolve the problems.
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Pleasing Your Case for Pets:

By: Courtney Ronan
Courtesy of rentnet.com

I was spending the evening with friends, a married couple who had just moved into an immaculate, upscale apartment community in North Dallas. Their two ‘children’ were a good-natured cat and a very large, yet friendly dog who claimed the apartment’s second bedroom for herself.

That’s certainly a creative solution to a common dilemma. Most apartment complexes who do allow pets have weight and size limits. But for some of us apartment-hunters, it seems to be Murphy’s Law. You find the apartment of your dreams: spacious, great layout, all amenities included, reasonable rent, easy commute to work and local resources. There’s one catch, however. You can’t have pets.

That includes not only dogs and cats, but also hamsters, gerbils, birds, anything that has wings or more than two legs. While such policies are probably fewer in number these days, landlords whose apartments are artfully designed, fewer in number these days, landlords

While such policies are probably

There’s one thing that has

The SPCA can help

Most of us pet-owners have enough stress to take Fido out on a regular basis or keep a clean litter box for Sylvester, but that doesn’t stop pets from acting out when they’re lonely or bored. And many of them exhibit a remarkable regression in good training habits in the event of a move, which can be a very stressful event for them.

A new home means that your pet is being introduced to a completely different environment. The layout is different, the scents are different, even the water is different. So it’s understandable both that a pet might react negatively under such stress, and why a savvy landlord might opt to forbid pets on his or her property. If you’re moving into an apartment, surely you feel better knowing that a dog with bad habits didn’t live there before you arrived.

But for those of us who do have well-behaved pets, are these policies fair? Sure, we can look elsewhere, but today more than ever, people realize the positive impact that pets have on our lives. They reduce stress and lower blood pressure, provide companionship, teach responsibility, cheer us up and can even help us meet other people.

How to plead your case

Rather than throw a towel over Fido and attempt to smuggle him into a no-pet property, you might want to consider pleading your case to your prospective landlord. Most local branches of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals maintain a list of landlords and Realtors who help prospective renters and homeowners who own pets. The SPCA can help you locate specific properties that rent to pet-owners, and some branches even list specific apartments for rent (and whether they’ll accept cats and dogs or just cats), along with a contact phone number for your convenience.

The Massachusetts Chapter of the SPCA recommends that prospective renters “market” themselves as responsible pet owners while they’re apartment-hunting. What does that mean? For starters, it means avoiding any property that clearly states a “no-pet” policy. You’re not going to change the policy or twist anyone’s arm to make an exception. Your best bet is to open your local newspaper or apartment guide, or utilize your local resources, of which will tell you whether or not pets are accepted on premises.

Try smaller complexes

When you start making phone calls, call smaller properties — those that probably have a landlord as opposed to a management company — before the large ones. Your chances of success are better at smaller properties.

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Mention your pet only when asked. In other words, you don't want to start the conversation by asking, "Do you accept pets?" rather than stating "I'm calling to find out about the apartment for rent." It's not being dishonest; it's just knowing when to introduce the subject.

And don't make your pet the focus of your conversation with your prospective landlord; you don't want to give the landlord the impression that he or she should be wary about you and your pet.

If the landlord never asks you if you own a pet during your phone conversation, bring it up when you go see the unit and meet the landlord in person. Be completely honest (no puppy pictures allowed). The landlord will appreciate your honesty. Waiting until moving day to spring Fido on your landlord will get your relationship off to a very bad start, and it could end your relationship with Fido in a big hurry.

When you meet your prospective landlord in person, bring along "letters of reference" from your former landlord or apartment management company, as well as your veterinarian and fellow neighbors, which state that you're a responsible pet owner.

The San Francisco SPCA offers a "pet resume" service, a clever way of showing off your pet's attributes and good behavior. You may consider creating your own while you're on the hunt for a new apartment.

You can even offer to have your prospective landlord meet your faithful pet at your current residence, so that he or she can see in person how well-behaved your pet is, and how well you maintain your current property.

And you may consider offering to put down a "pet deposit" if the landlord hasn't already established one. Last but not least, tell your landlord that you will pay for any damage incurred by your pet during your lease -- no questions asked, and put your promise in writing to assure your landlord of your word (make sure you also state in writing how such damages would be assessed, so that you're not overcharged).

So before your landlord questions you about the moving beach towel with four legs who accompanied you outdoors this morning, state your case clearly to every prospective landlord with whom you communicate during your apartment search. Honesty now can save you innumerable headaches later.
The talk all roommates must have

Or the discussion you you should have had before you became roomies

By Courtney Ronan
Courtesy of rentnet.com

You’ve been putting it off for weeks. You thought you could avoid it. The mere thought of it makes you uncomfortable. But then he stepped over the line, and you could no longer avoid the inevitable: the big talk.

No, not the birds and the bees. I’m talking about the all-important discussion between you and your new roommate. You should have had this talk before you ever signed the lease or moved your belongings into your new place, but the apartment was too good to be true, and when you saw the view from the living room, the two of you threw all caution to the wind and pledged to be perfect roomies.

Then you arrived home one night during your first week of roomies’ paradise to discover a pile of wet towels on the bathroom floor and a mess in the living room. It’s when the night owl brings home his fellow partygoers that the line is crossed. Even if you can’t predict your roommate ever doing such a thing, you must discuss these topics and more— if you want to avoid tension within your 800-square-foot living space.

Before you head to the department store and pick out your curtains or plan your housewarming party, sit down (over lunch, perhaps, to make the conversation a bit lighter) and ask each other the following questions:

**Consumption of substances**

Does either one of you smoke? If one of you does and one doesn’t, how do you feel about this arrangement? If you’re a nonsmoker and you’ve never lived with a smoker, don’t be so hasty to say, “It’s no problem.”

Do you drink alcohol, and if so, how often? If both of you claim to be social drinkers, define what the term “sober drinker” means to each of you. Does one roommate avoid drinking for moral reasons? Is one of you a recovering alcoholic? If so, how would he or she feel if you had alcohol present in your home?

Does either roommate have a history of drug abuse, or does one of you use drugs occasionally?

**Lifestyle habits**

Are you a “morning” person or “night owl”? If you have opposite habits, how will you respect those differences when coming home or leaving the apartment? If you’re the morning person, how do you feel about guests coming home during the wee hours of the morning with your roommate? How much time do you expect to spend at home? Will one of you be working at home full time?

Are you a “neat freak,” a moderate one, or a slob? How about your roommate? If you’re opposites, how will you come to terms with this difference?

How do you feel about overnight guests? If you agree that it’s OK, you’ll also need to agree to a time limit. More than one roommate relationship has been destroyed over a guest that won’t leave.

How do you feel about boyfriends/girlfriends who stay over? How often would you feel comfortable with them staying at your apartment? Establish these rules very specifically, including how much time girlfriends and boyfriends are allowed to hang around during the daytime. Make the joint decision that no keys are to be duplicated for either boyfriends/girlfriends or platonic friends.

Does either one of you own a pet? Does the other roommate have any pet allergies? Do you plan to bring home a pet in the future, either jointly or separately? Will you agree to make the decision together? And when you go your separate ways later, who will assume custody of the pet if you purchased it together?

How do you feel about playing music? The television? How loud? How late is too late? How late is too late for incoming phone calls?

Will you have parties? If so, agree to host them as roommates. Agree that no parties will be held without the other roommate’s consent.

Is quiet time important to you? How often?

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Property and household chores/obligations

How do you feel about your roommate using your possessions? Would you prefer to be asked permission first?

How will you divide groceries? Will you buy them separately and prepare your own meals individually, or will you cook meals together? Do you have any radical differences in eating habits/food preferences (for example, is one of you a strict vegetarian)?

How will household chores be divided? And what will happen if one of you fails to do his/her fair share?

How will you ensure that both of you produce 50 percent of the rent each month and on time?

Perhaps most important, the two of you should discuss what will happen if any conflicts arise between you. Are you going to be able to reach middle ground and establish compromise, or will a battle of the wills ensue?

The best roommate relationships, of course, are those in which either two friends remain friends while living together, or two strangers become friends while being roommates. Roommates can provide a sounding board for each other. Despite minor differences in lifestyles and habits, they can become confidantes if they communicate frequently and uphold their basic responsibilities. Even if the two of you don’t hit it off as friends, however, consider yourselves successful if you’re able to live together and remain pleasant and considerate of one another.

Successful roommate relationships are excellent practice for real-world people skills that we need every day at work and in other relationships, most notably marriage. So, don’t put off the “big talk” any longer. You’ll be better roommates and better friends because of it.

Story continued from page 21

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