Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

We Live Together and Have Three Different Definitions of Silence

How to Set Rules for Sharing a Home with Adult Roommates



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INTRO

It is 10:17 p.m. One person is sitting on the sofa watching a TV series, with dialogue loud enough to be heard, presumably, in the neighbours' apartment as well. Another has just finished a phone call because they have finally found a moment to catch up with their family. A third is standing in the kitchen, enthusiastically stirring something in a saucepan and firmly believing that cooking after ten at night is perfectly normal because, after all, people have to eat. Meanwhile, a fourth person, if they happen to be a guest, is beginning to wonder whether they have walked into a shared apartment or onto the set of a documentary about several unrelated species living in their natural habitat.

Eventually, someone says:

- Could we keep it down a little?

Silence falls. For approximately seven seconds.

Then comes the reply:

- But it's not even loud.

And that is precisely when the real problem begins.

Sharing a home with other adults sounds perfectly reasonable. Everyone has a life, a job, responsibilities and personal habits. Everyone should understand that they are not living alone. Everyone is mature enough to clean up after themselves, ask before inviting five friends over and avoid treating the shared bathroom like their private wellness centre. In theory, everything looks wonderful. In practice, it turns out that adulthood does not automatically guarantee compatible personalities, matching standards of cleanliness or an agreed definition of a quiet evening.

One person believes silence begins at nine in the evening. Another insists there is absolutely no reason to behave like someone in a library before midnight. A third is convinced that silence simply means no shouting, and that television, music, speakerphone conversations and hairdryers do not count as a problem. Each of these people may sincerely believe that their approach is perfectly normal. And each may consider everyone else completely unreasonable.

The problem is that sharing a home is not a competition to determine who is the most normal person. There is no committee arriving with a reasonableness meter to award the winner the right to decide when the kitchen can be used. There are simply several people who need to share the same rooms, appliances and spaces while somehow maintaining the feeling that they still have lives of their own.

That is considerably harder than it might seem.

An Apartment Is More Than Square Metres

When several adults decide to live together, they usually discuss the basics: rent, bills, deposits, moving dates and how expenses will be divided. Sometimes cleaning comes up as well. Someone suggests a rota, someone else says that everyone can simply clean up after themselves, and a third person nods as though they have just witnessed the signing of a historic peace agreement.

What people discuss much less frequently is what everyday life together will actually look like.

Can you invite friends over without giving everyone advance notice? Can your partner stay overnight several times a week? Does sharing a fridge mean sharing food? Is it acceptable to leave dishes in the sink for a few hours? Can someone use the living room while another resident is

working remotely? What counts as a reasonable noise level? At what point does being a guest turn into becoming an additional permanent resident?

These are not minor details. They are precisely the situations from which most everyday tensions arise. Not necessarily because people want to make each other's lives difficult, but because they enter a shared space with different experiences and expectations they have never consciously examined.

In one home, shoes left by the front door are considered mess. In another, they are simply shoes. For one person, washing the dishes on the same day is an obvious standard. For another, dishes can comfortably wait until the following morning. One person needs a closed door to feel they have privacy. Another treats an open door as a natural invitation to walk in and have a conversation.

None of these differences necessarily indicates bad intentions. But when nobody talks about them, they quickly become a source of irritation.

Why Do Adults So Often Struggle to Agree on Simple Rules?

Because many people assume that others should already know how to behave. Surely you do not have to explain to another adult that they should clean the kitchen after themselves. Surely you do not need to remind someone that midnight is not the ideal time to organise a concert. Surely nobody needs to establish that toilet paper does not magically appear in the bathroom through the spontaneous efforts of nature.

Unfortunately, this belief has one fundamental weakness: every person has their own list of things they consider

obvious. And very often, that list does not match the lists belonging to the other residents.

On top of that, conversations about rules can be uncomfortable. Nobody wants to begin living together by introducing regulations that resemble the operating manual for a correctional facility. Nor do we want to come across as argumentative, excessively demanding or incapable of accepting that other people have a right to live normally.

So instead of saying directly what bothers us, we start sending subtle signals. We close cupboards a little more forcefully. We sigh while cleaning. We move someone else's belongings to the other end of the kitchen counter. We leave a message in the group chat that sounds perfectly neutral on the surface, while secretly hoping its recipient will feel sufficiently guilty to change their behaviour without being asked.

This is passive-aggressive communication in its shared-apartment edition. Nobody has actually said what the problem is, but everyone can sense that something has happened. The atmosphere becomes increasingly tense, and an ordinary kitchen sponge starts carrying political significance.

The truth is that rules are not evidence of a lack of trust. They are a way of reducing misunderstandings. Well-established agreements protect both the person who needs peace and the person who does not want to ask permission every day simply to use the apartment normally.

Sharing a Space Does Not Mean Sharing a Life

One of the most important things to understand is the difference between sharing an apartment and creating a family, a friendship or a community built around identical

habits. You may like each other, get along well and enjoy spending time together. You may also treat each other with nothing more than ordinary kindness and respect, without wanting shared dinners, conversations about life or organised weekend trips.

Both arrangements can work.

A roommate does not have to be your best friend. They do not need to be interested in what you do after work, know the history of your relationships or participate in every shared activity. They do, however, need to understand that their decisions affect other residents and that shared space comes with a certain level of responsibility.

It is equally important to understand that privacy does not end at the door of your own bedroom. It also concerns your time, your rest, your personal belongings and your right not to participate in someone else's plans. You can live behind a wall from another person for three years and still have no desire to talk to them over breakfast. That is not a failure of the relationship. It is simply what happens when you share a home with another adult.

Living together should allow everyone to function without constantly negotiating every single movement. That does not mean, however, that everyone can do whatever happens to cross their mind. One person's freedom ends where it begins to genuinely interfere with the lives of others.

You do not need perfect roommates. You need clear agreements.

This book is for people who want to share a home without feeling as though they are participating in endless peace negotiations every single day. It is for those who have already experienced their first disappointments, minor

conflicts, unsuccessful attempts to organise a cleaning rota and conversations that ended with the classic phrase: "Fine, never mind."

We will not pretend that one pleasant conversation will suddenly make everyone cooperate perfectly. Not every conflict can be resolved through compromise, and some lifestyle differences may simply be too significant to reconcile comfortably. Sometimes the rules will need to change, sometimes a firm conversation will be necessary, and sometimes the honest conclusion will be that living together no longer makes sense.

But there is a great deal you can do before things reach that point.

You will learn to recognise which problems result from a lack of clear agreements and which stem from a genuine disregard for other people's needs. You will discover how to discuss money, cleanliness, noise, guests, privacy and responsibilities without turning every conversation into a personal courtroom trial. You will see how to create rules that are specific, realistic and fair to everyone, rather than producing a document that nobody will bother reading after the first week.

Most importantly, you will learn to talk about problems early enough. Without collecting grievances for three months and without expecting another person to develop telepathic abilities just to figure out why you have been responding to them exclusively in monosyllables since Tuesday.

Because successful shared living does not mean that everyone behaves identically. It means that different people

can function in the same space without constantly taking away each other's comfort.

You do not have to share one definition of silence. You simply need to agree on when each definition applies, and when everyone should turn things down a little.

And if you manage to reach that level of understanding, perhaps one evening you will sit together in the living room, each person doing their own thing, with nobody holding a grudge against anyone else.

It will be a beautiful moment.

Of course, until someone asks who ate the last yoghurt.

Chapter 1 - One Shared Home, Separate Worlds: Where Do Unplanned Conflicts Come From?

Imagine moving into an apartment with two other adults. Everything looks promising. Everyone works, everyone has their own activities, and everyone insists they are easy to live with. During the first conversation, a few sentences emerge that sound like guarantees of a peaceful future: "I'm a pretty quiet person", "I don't have any weird requirements", and "As long as everyone cleans up after themselves, we'll be fine." Everyone smiles. Someone orders pizza. Someone suggests watching a film together. It seems you have just managed to find the perfect roommates.

Three weeks later, things look a little different. One person is irritated because someone keeps leaving mugs on the kitchen counter. Another believes a mug is hardly a problem until it starts developing its own biological civilisation. The third cannot understand why everyone is so concerned about the kitchen when it will only be used again tomorrow anyway. There is another problem in the living room: someone works in the evenings, someone watches television, and someone else would simply like to sit in peace and quiet. Everyone still considers themselves a reasonable person. Everyone also has an increasingly impressive list of arguments against the others.

So what actually happened?

Nobody changed their personality. There was no sudden outbreak of bad intentions. The introductory stage of getting

to know one another under relatively controlled circumstances simply came to an end, and the stage of everyday coexistence began. That is a fundamental difference. During the first meetings, we mostly see behaviours that someone consciously chooses in a particular situation. Sharing a home, on the other hand, reveals habits that we often do not even notice in ourselves. The way we put things away, our daily routines, our tolerance for noise, our attitude towards guests, our privacy boundaries and our definition of cleanliness.

Our own habits seem natural because we have lived with them for years. We do not have to make a conscious decision every day about whether we take our shoes off when entering the house or leave them by the door. We do not analyse whether taking a shower at midnight is a sensible idea. We simply do what we have always done. It is only when someone else starts using the same space that we discover our private version of normality is merely one of many possible versions.

A Home Does Not Come with One Universal User Manual

It is worth starting by accepting an uncomfortable truth: people do not move into a shared apartment with a completely blank slate. Everyone brings experiences from previous homes, family customs, earlier relationships with other tenants and their own ideas about how everyday life should work.

Someone who has lived alone for years may consider it natural to inform other residents about every larger gathering planned in the apartment. Someone who grew up in a large household may be accustomed to friends dropping by without much notice and to a shared kitchen being a place where something is always happening. Someone else

may have previously lived with people who failed to respect their privacy, which is why they now need very clearly defined boundaries.

None of these people necessarily has to be difficult to live with. Each may simply be responding to reality through the filter of their own experiences.

The problem begins when we treat our habits as universally binding regulations. Instead of saying, "I'm used to people letting everyone know in advance when they're having guests over", we say, "Normal people don't invite others over without warning." Instead of explaining that we need a quiet evening, we declare, "Some people simply don't know how to respect the basic rules of living together."

Notice the difference. The first statements describe a personal need. The second pass judgement on someone else's behaviour. A roommate who hears that they are not normal is unlikely to enthusiastically analyse your needs. They will probably start preparing a defence.

That is why the first step towards improving shared living is learning to separate facts from interpretations. A fact might be that guests stayed until one in the morning yesterday. An interpretation might be that your roommate respects nobody but themselves. A fact can be discussed, and you can agree on what to do next time. An interpretation starts a conflict about someone's character, which is considerably harder to resolve.

When something bothers you, try to identify the specific behaviour first, followed by its consequences. "Your phone conversation in the living room lasted until midnight yesterday, and I couldn't fall asleep" is much more useful

than "You always behave as if you live alone." Even if you are tempted to say the second sentence, the first one gives you a genuine chance of solving the problem.

Small Things Stop Being Small When They Happen Every Day

Sharing an apartment has one particular feature: minor inconveniences happen in a place you cannot simply leave for good. If someone at work says something irritating, you can end the meeting, go home and relax. If someone regularly occupies the bathroom when you need it, the problem is waiting for you again the following morning.

That is precisely why seemingly insignificant situations can acquire disproportionate importance. A single plate in the sink does not have to be a disaster. But a plate left there every day by the same person can become a symbol of a much larger problem: an unequal division of responsibilities. One unexpected visit from a friend may not bother anyone. Regular visits during which the guest uses the apartment like an additional resident, however, can affect everyone's sense of privacy and even the cost of maintaining the household.

Over time, we stop reacting exclusively to the situation in front of us. We also react to the memory of previous situations. When you see another collection of dishes in the sink, you no longer see just the dishes. You see every previous occasion when you cleaned up after someone else and every conversation that failed to produce any results.

This is how frustration accumulates. The process is not always conscious. Sometimes you can no longer explain exactly what has upset you. You simply know that whenever you hear the refrigerator door opening, you experience an inexplicable urge to move out.

It is useful to distinguish between three levels of problems.

The first is an isolated inconvenience. Someone forgot to take out the rubbish once, occupied the bathroom longer than usual or left their belongings on the shared table. In this situation, an ordinary conversation or a simple reminder is usually enough.

The second level is a recurring pattern. The same person regularly fails to fulfil their responsibilities, ignores agreements or occupies shared space without considering anyone else. Here, you need a conversation about the rule itself, not about one isolated incident.

The third level is a lack of mutual respect. Someone knows that their behaviour makes life difficult for others but refuses to change anything, mocks the concerns being raised or deliberately crosses agreed boundaries. This is no longer an ordinary difference in habits.

Distinguishing between these situations helps you avoid two extremes. The first is turning every minor inconvenience into a major argument. The second is tolerating absolutely everything until you start feeling that you have no say in your own home.

Why Do Some Conflicts Start over Things That Shouldn't Matter?

Imagine one person leaves their shopping on the kitchen table. Another moves it aside because they want to prepare dinner. The first person comes back, notices that their belongings have been moved and asks why someone touched them. The second replies that there was nowhere else to put the chopping board. A few more sentences

follow, each taking the conversation further away from the original problem.

Five minutes later, the discussion is no longer about shopping. It is about who respects whom, who behaves selfishly and who has been incapable of cooperating from the very beginning.

In situations like this, the object of the disagreement is often just a trigger. Beneath it lies an unmet need, an unresolved issue or an earlier experience. Someone wants to have control over their belongings. Someone else needs an empty kitchen counter. Another person may feel that the shared space is gradually being taken over by one resident.

That is why it is worth learning to ask yourself a simple question: what exactly is irritating me here?

Perhaps it is the lack of space. Perhaps it is a sense of unfairness. Perhaps you feel you have no control over how a space you also pay for is being used. Or perhaps the problem really is just the shopping left on the table, and all you need to do is agree on where such things should go.

Not every conflict has a hidden meaning. Sometimes a kitchen counter is simply occupied. However, before starting a discussion about mutual respect, it is worth checking whether you are trying to solve an organisational problem by accusing someone of having a bad character.

The First Diagnosis Instead of the First Argument

Before you start changing the rules of shared living, take a closer look at how the apartment actually functions. Not how it should function according to your expectations, but what happens on an ordinary day.

For several days, pay attention to situations that create tension. You do not need to keep records like a commission

investigating a building collapse. A brief note on your phone will do. Write down specific incidents, how often they occur and what consequences they have.

For example:

- The shared kitchen is regularly occupied during the hours when several people need to prepare meals.
- Guests stay overnight without informing the other residents in advance.
- One person does most of the cleaning in shared areas.
- Evening conversations and music disturb people who have to get up early the following day.
- Personal belongings regularly occupy shared surfaces.

Pay attention to one more thing: is the problem genuinely shared, or does it concern only your personal expectations? This matters because not every individual preference should automatically become a rule for everyone.

You may like having a perfectly organised kitchen, but that does not mean everyone else must arrange products in the refrigerator according to the height of their packaging. You may prefer absolute silence while working, but if you work in the living room, you also need to recognise that other residents have the right to use it. On the other hand, someone who wants to organise loud gatherings cannot simply assume that everyone must adapt to their plans.

A good diagnosis takes everyone's needs into account.

It is also helpful to establish how often a particular situation occurs and how serious its consequences are. If your roommate invites friends over for an evening once a month, that is different from having several visitors every day. If someone occasionally leaves a mug behind, that is

not the same as systematically leaving the entire kitchen for other people to clean.

It is worth noting whether the problem has already been discussed. If it has not, perhaps the other person simply does not know that their behaviour is bothering you. If, however, a rule has been clearly established and someone regularly ignores it, the conversation will also have to address responsibility for shared agreements.

When Should You Start the Conversation?

Ideally, while the problem is still small enough to discuss calmly. Do not wait until simply seeing your roommate triggers an internal monologue packed with arguments.

You should also avoid starting an important discussion when you are at your most irritated. A conversation about someone regularly occupying the bathroom should not take place through a closed bathroom door while you are already running late for work. In that moment, it is easy to say something that does nothing to solve the problem but provides material for another three weeks of tension.

Choose a calm moment and describe the specific situation. You could say:

"I'd like to talk about how we use the kitchen. A few times recently, I've been unable to prepare a meal because the counter was occupied by your things. I don't want to turn this into a huge issue, but we need to agree on where we keep things we're not currently using."

That is not an attack. It is information about a problem and an invitation to find a solution.

However, do not expect every conversation to end in immediate agreement. The other person may have a perspective you have not previously considered. Perhaps

they have nowhere else to store their shopping. Perhaps they use the kitchen at different times. Perhaps they have not even noticed that their belongings regularly occupy the shared counter.

Give them an opportunity to explain their side. Then look for an agreement that addresses the actual difficulty rather than simply confirming your original expectations.

The first chapter of living together should not become a story about who is the most demanding, the most tolerant or the most civilised. It should be an attempt to understand why several people who, on paper, have no particular problem with one another start feeling irritated by the ordinary use of a kitchen, bathroom or living room.

Once you stop treating every difference as evidence of bad intentions, it becomes easier to identify the real source of tension. And once you know what the problem actually is, you can finally discuss a solution instead of conducting an endless trial against the person who has once again left a mug on the table.

Chapter 2 - My Normal Versus Your Normal: Why Can't We Agree on Even the Simplest Things?

Sharing an apartment has an extraordinary ability to reveal differences that we might never notice in any other kind of relationship. You can have known someone for several years, regularly meet them outside the home, go on trips together and consider them an exceptionally reasonable person. It is only when you start using the same bathroom that you discover your ideas about shower time differ by twenty minutes and your respective attitudes towards towels could easily become the subject of a separate international conference.

Previously, you saw that person in situations with a clearly defined beginning and end. A shared lunch lasted two hours. A meeting ended when everyone went home. A weekend trip followed a planned schedule. Now there are no clear boundaries. Everyday life repeats the same situations, and each person brings their own standards into the arrangement.

One person believes cleanliness means having no visible objects on the kitchen counters. Another has no problem with currently used items remaining on the table. A third only starts cleaning when things become genuinely unpleasant to look at. All three can look at exactly the same kitchen and see completely different apartments.

This is not merely a matter of taste. Different definitions of everyday concepts affect how people use space, how responsibilities are divided and whether they feel they are

being treated fairly. If these differences are never discussed, everyone will assume that the others know perfectly well what they mean.

Words That Seem Obvious Are Not Obvious at All

Some of the biggest misunderstandings arise from seemingly simple words and expressions: clean, quiet, quickly, late, often, occasionally, together and after yourself. They sound perfectly clear until you actually have to establish what they mean in practice.

Take the word "clean up". For one person, it means washing the dishes, wiping the counter, cleaning the hob and taking out the rubbish. For another, it is enough to put away their own belongings. For a third, cleaning means bringing the room to a condition where there is no immediate reason to call the health inspector.

Every person may be convinced they have done their fair share. Every person may also feel that everyone else is doing too little.

The same applies to silence. If you tell your roommates that things should be quiet after ten in the evening, you may receive three different interpretations. The first person will turn off the television. The second will decide that turning the volume down by two levels is sufficient. The third will continue talking on the phone because, after all, they are not playing music.

The misunderstanding here has nothing to do with intelligence. It comes from using general words that everyone interprets through their own experiences.

That is why, when establishing rules, you should turn general expectations into behaviours that can actually be recognised. Instead of saying, "We keep the kitchen clean",

it is better to agree that after preparing a meal, everyone washes the dishes they used, removes food residue from the counter and puts shared utensils back where they belong. Instead of saying, "We don't make noise in the evenings", you can define the hours during which loud conversations, music and noisy appliances should be limited.

It may seem like a minor adjustment, but it makes an enormous difference. Nobody has to guess what the other person meant. You can actually check whether a specific agreement has been followed.

Cleanliness Is Personal, but the Shared Kitchen Is Not

One of the most common sources of conflict in shared living is cleaning. The reason is simple: everyone has their own tolerance level for mess, while everyone also uses spaces that need to be maintained collectively.

For one person, dishes left in the sink for several hours are not a problem. For another, they are an unpleasant sight that makes the kitchen less comfortable to use. Someone may tolerate dust on a shelf but cannot stand dirty work surfaces. Someone else may regularly wipe the counter but fail to notice that the rubbish bin is already overflowing.

It is worth understanding that cleanliness is not one universal standard. You can have extremely high expectations for your own room while paying little attention to the state of the living room. You can also be the opposite: not particularly concerned about your personal belongings but needing the shared kitchen to be perfectly organised.

The problem arises when someone tries to impose their personal standard on everyone else without discussing whether it is necessary or realistic to maintain.

Imagine a situation in which one female roommate thoroughly cleans the kitchen every evening. She washes the sink, wipes the cupboard doors, organises the spices and rearranges the products on the shelves. The other residents do not do the same because they do not consider that level of cleanliness necessary. After several weeks, she begins to feel that she is doing everyone's work. The others, meanwhile, start feeling as though they are constantly being judged.

Who is right?

Perhaps both sides have legitimate expectations, but neither is discussing the actual problem. The first person needs a more organised space. The others need a standard that does not require additional daily tasks without a clear reason.

The solution is neither to automatically adopt the highest standard nor to agree that any amount of mess is acceptable. You need to establish a shared level of cleanliness that allows everyone to use the room normally.

A good starting point is to separate personal cleanliness from shared cleanliness. Your own bedroom is primarily your responsibility, provided its condition does not affect safety, hygiene or the property itself. Shared areas such as the kitchen, bathroom and living room, on the other hand, require rules that take everyone's needs into account.

This does not mean that everyone has to like the same level of cleanliness. It means that everyone should know what standard applies in the shared rooms.

Silence Is Not an Absolute State

Differences concerning noise can be even more difficult because they cannot always be resolved by simply restricting one particular activity.

One person works early shifts and wants to go to bed at ten in the evening. Another comes home around that time and only then has an opportunity to prepare dinner. A third works remotely, so they need quiet during the day but enjoy watching films in the evenings. Their schedules are not identical, and the apartment does not come with three separate acoustic systems.

In situations like these, it is worth distinguishing between two concepts: ordinary sounds of everyday life and noise that genuinely interferes with someone's rest or responsibilities.

You cannot expect an apartment to be perfectly silent at all times. Doors will open, someone will use the kitchen, a phone will ring occasionally and household appliances will do their job. A shared apartment is not a recording studio, although some residents behave as if every sound above a whisper constitutes a violation of an international convention.

On the other hand, saying "These are perfectly normal everyday sounds" does not justify everything. Loud music, speakerphone conversations, lengthy social gatherings or using appliances in ways that regularly disturb other residents all require consideration of everyone's needs.

The best approach is to establish specific time frames and types of behaviour that need to be restricted. It is important to take the different schedules of all residents into account. If someone works shifts, a rigid rule that requires silence only at night may not be sufficient. You can then