

ADHD Roommate

By Louise Levin

When you agree to live with someone, or when financial necessity calls you to troll Craigslist ads looking for a housemate, you are consciously submitting yourself to a shared living situation and all of the domestic concessions, compromises and frustrations that come with it. If you, your significant other, or your housemate has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD), the challenges of household harmony will assuredly be amplified.

ADHD is a neurobiological disorder that affects impulse control, executive function and attention. Task management, organization, job stability, ability to adapt to new social environments and common courtesy are all affected. Though your housemate may seem willfully obstinate, absentminded or unfeeling, his or her erratic behaviors can, more often than not, be attributed to one or more symptoms of ADHD. Below, each of the three basic functions affected by the disorder will be described, along with useful tips to help you on your way to domestic felicity, or at least get you through the terms of the lease agreement psychologically intact.

Impulse Control: Though we all have been known to act upon impulse, the ADHD individual doesn't necessarily need a glass of wine to "loosen up." Perhaps he or she is perpetually "in between jobs," quitting at the first sign of discomfort or discontent. When this affects rent payments, a housemate's mode of existence may seem more dissolute than liberated. Sexual impulses are also erratic, and an ADHD individual may have trouble retaining one partner, rejecting the mundane "sameness" of a monogamous relationship and embracing the fast-paced, thrilling and euphoric lifestyle of multiple partners, drugs, interminable parties and no discernable daily schedule.

If you morally object, it is best to remain silent, but when your apartment begins to feel like Grand Central station rather than a members-only club, it is perhaps best to forcibly lay some ground rules, to keep yourself as well as your housemate grounded. Though it is not your job to regulate your housemate's nocturnal, diurnal or internal biorhythms, it is in your best interest to instigate constructive discussion around unacceptable housemate behavior. Be prepared to hear some criticism of your own lifestyle, and accept that, in any relationship, concessions must inevitably be made.

Executive Function: You asked your housemate to make sure that the rent check was mailed *before* the first of the month. You even left a neon green sticky note on the refrigerator to ensure your words did not fall upon deaf ears. A few days later, you grab the mail and find, to your utter anger and dismay, a past-due notice. ADHD individuals have extreme difficulty prioritizing tasks, keeping organized, and staying on task with projects from conception to fruition.

Generalization: This is perhaps the most overt and frustrating of the "big three," and the root cause of your dreaded pink slip, lovingly signed by an irate landlord who is tired of your checks arriving late, or not at all. The fact that you left a sticky note for your

forgetful mate means that you have recognized his or her behavior, but you aren't out of the woods yet. Again and again, you ask your housemate to lock the door, to keep their errand odds and ends within the confines of their own room and to switch to texting when loud, animated phone conversations hit the 1am threshold. And, again and again, verbal agreement fails to affect any sort of prolonged or sincere compliance.

You fail to realize that, though your housemate promised *never* to forget the carton of milk or *anything* ever again, he or she is not necessarily capable of recognizing the parallel relationships; the missing milk, past due rent check, stained shirt draped across the television and the unlocked front door are all tasks that require a similar action. Your ADHD mate's failure to generalize, or to translate one situation, and accompanying responsibilities, to the next, is the culprit.

You may feel, as offences begin to pile one upon the other, that your housemate is acting willfully obstinate, malicious, manipulative or simply lazy—a grand attempt at psychological sabotage. Take comfort; this failure to generalize is a real symptom of ADHD and can, with a bit of help, be effectively managed. For your own peace of mind, or if your housemate is a significant other or good friend, you may be emotionally invested enough to help mitigate this problem by supporting their consistent efforts with very basic techniques and methods. These techniques are not unlike those used to learn a new language, sport, or musical instrument; to master them, one must “practice, practice, practice.” If not, it's best to mail the rent check yourself and to ask for cash next time you head out to the grocery store.

All of these symptoms of ADHD may comprise your shared living reality, but it doesn't mean that you have to suffer entirely through the term of your living arrangement. ADHD individuals can be wonderfully invigorating, spontaneous, creative and generous; they just have a few behavioral patterns to tweak and often don't mind being reminded of their duties. Make “to do” lists together, but don't get overly passive aggressive with the sticky notes, constructive criticism in the guise of friendly conversation is always the best medicine so don't be afraid to speak up. Who knows? You both may end up liking one another.