No one cares about drunken, messy hall mates, or do they? [1]

Alice,

If no one in my dorm seems to care if students come in drunk, creating noise and messes, what can I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

One of the challenges of college life is sharing your living space with other people, many of whom have different ways of living than you. It can be especially frustrating when these patterns cause friction or resentment. You mention that no one seems to care if students come in drunk, creating noise and mess. However, you might not be the only one bothered. Others may not have said anything because they believe they’re alone in their irritation or perhaps they’re afraid of potential social repercussions of speaking up. While some noise and mess are to be expected in communal living spaces, it sounds as though the frequency and level in your hall is pushing you over the edge. As a member of your residence hall community, you are entitled to a safe, habitable space to sleep, study, socialize, and thrive.

To start, you might consider speaking with other students in your residence hall to find out if they have similar concerns. You can also explain your observations and reactions to your resident adviser (RAs) or hall director for your residence hall. These staff members are there to support a healthy living environment and they will help you figure out some strategies to manage your concerns. For example, you might work with your RA to post some signs or call a floor meeting to discuss community living, creating a community agreement or ground rules for what you want to see happen or not happen on your floor, reminding residents that certain hours are "quiet hours," or making students aware of how to contact custodial staff if one is needed.

If there is someone in particular whose behavior is troublesome (i.e., your roommate), you could speak with her/him directly. Sometimes, people just need to be made aware of how you are feeling in order to adjust their behavior. If you choose to confront a particular person, try to catch them at a good time when they are not with other people or otherwise busy. You could also ask them to set aside time specifically to talk about your concerns and how you both can work together make improvements. Being assertive and honest with your feelings is key here. If you feel uncomfortable with this approach, your RA will most likely be able to help you talk
with the person. These folks may also be a great resource to approach if you’re worried about a hall mate’s alcohol or other drug use. Or, if someone you know seems to have problems with her/his alcohol or other drug use, you can contact your university’s counseling service or alcohol education program for assistance. You can also check out Help for friends who drink too much [2] for additional tips.

It may take some patience and negotiation on your part, but hopefully you’ll be able to reach an acceptable compromise. In the future, you may want to investigate some of the different housing options available; many residence halls offer substance-free or special interest floors or suites. While these living situations may not be problem-free, engaging in a little constructive confrontation and discussion may help you work towards building the living environment you want.

Alice!
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