I don't want to sexile my new roommate [1]

Alice,

My girlfriend and I both go to the same college and have been sleeping together for a while now, which has been easy because she has a room of her own. However, because of the way university housing worked out for next year, both of us are going to be living in doubles with roommates. We would like to continue sleeping together, but I realize that having a roommate could make this difficult. Should I approach my future roommate about the situation, and if so how should I go about doing so?

Thanks,
Sleepless in a double

Answer

Dear Sleepless in a double,

Across college campuses each semester, students are cast from their residence hall rooms in search of alternate sleep space by roomies who just want the closeness of being with their partners together privately or who’re busy gettin’ busy. Based on what you’ve written, your principles seem in check, as indicated by your desire not to make your as-of-yet unknown roommate one of the countless "sexiled." To help you form a stronger relationship with your girlfriend, while at the same time ensuring domestic tranquility with your roommate, you may find it helpful to speak with your new roomie in advance to come up with a roommate agreement. Doing so may help you define what is and isn’t acceptable in your living space and help ensure both of your needs are being met.

A mutual understanding about roommate rights and responsibilities is something that evolves over time and takes ongoing discussions. You may find it helpful to start the dialogue before moving in together to talk about what considerations you’d like from your roommate and what concessions you’re willing to make in return regarding all roommate matters. This can include degrees of acceptable messiness, how you’ll both handle food, renting or buying items for the room (e.g., fan, refrigerator), volume of music, guidelines for visitors, study habits, naptime, etc. Once you have expressed these and listened to your roommate’s considerations and concessions, the two of you can come to agreements about what works for both of you. This is where you can express your desire to have sleepover privileges with your partner amongst other particulars regarding your impeding cohabitation. Odds are your roomie will have some special requests, too. As you discuss the details, the more you’re willing to give, the more
you're likely to get. If you start off by demanding that your girlfriend be allowed immediate and unlimited conjugal privileges, you could have your roommate heading for the hills (or more likely, to the Resident Advisor or Housing Office).

Since you'll now be sharing a double, you may want to talk with your new roommate specifically about when you can each have your own privacy. Everyone needs time away from their roommate to study, meditate, contemplate, clip their toenails, have sex (either solo or partnered), or hang out. Once you learn about each other’s habits and desires, you can begin to negotiate a privacy routine. This can include specified time for each of you to have time in the room without the other present. Some people make and keep to a schedule. Of course, there may be unexpected or unplanned need for private time in the room for you or your roommate. In these situations, perhaps you two can agree on a code or sign on the door to let the other know not to enter until a specified, reasonable time that's noted somewhere on the door, such as a message board or a note taped to the door. For example, some people indicate to their roommate that they need privacy by hanging a sock or tie on the outside of the doorknob. You can work with your roommate to figure out a system that works for both of you.

All of this being said, having a right to privacy doesn’t include the right to have another person stay over every night or the expectation that your roommate vacates whenever you want private time with your girlfriend. Your new roommate expects and is paying for a double; it’s not appropriate for you and your girlfriend to make it a triple, especially without their consent. If you log the occasional overnight (with your roommate’s permission), it’s reasonable to expect that you will return the favor and give your roomie equal time and respect.

You can also prepare for this by talking with your girlfriend about these upcoming changes. If you’re used to sleeping together every night, how do you think the new living situation will affect your relationship? What parts will be difficult or challenging? Are there any benefits that you see from sleeping apart more regularly? Are there other times or places when you can count on being alone together? You can each think about ways in which both of you can create additional time to be with one another. Perhaps you can plan to take a trip together over a break or for a long weekend. You may also want to share these negotiation tips with her so she can navigate this with her roommate too, which may provide a little more flexibility for both of you.

If, after careful consideration and conversation, you and your girlfriend decide that you need to be sleeping together every or even most nights, perhaps another room on campus is available that allows couples. If not, then it might be time to look at pooling your resources and getting a place together off campus that will allow for unlimited and uninterrupted pillow time.

Alice!

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