

00:00:01 Maribeth Griffin

So hi, and thanks for tuning in to this episode of Gab & GROW.

Today we're gonna be talking about something scary... How to talk to your roommates.

So why is that so scary?

Well, we're going to get to that in a minute, but for now I want to introduce folks who are going to be helping us on this journey, so joining us here in the studio, along with Pete Puccio, who's our magnificent engineer, are two people who know a bit about this subject and talking to people.

Jacob Rock, who is an RA in Litchfield Hall. Hi, Jacob.

00:00:33 Jacob Rock

Hi! How's it going, Maribeth?

00:00:33 Maribeth Griffin

It's good, yeah, good, good! And Andrea Pereira - did I say that right?

00:00:40 Andrea Pereira

You did. Thanks!

00:00:42 Maribeth Griffin

Oh, thank God. So I'm gonna call you Dre for the rest of this 'cause it's just so much easier for me. Who is our new Rd in Newbury Hall. So welcome to the welcome to Gab & GROW.

00:00:52 Andrea Pereira

Yeah, thanks for having us.

00:00:53 Jacob Rock

I'm excited.

00:00:54 Maribeth Griffin

So you know I talked earlier about this idea of talking to your roommate being scary. And it is for a lot of people. So do you have thoughts about why it's so scary?

00:01:07 Jacob Rock

Well, from the perspective of... say it's a freshman just moving in, I think that first meeting each other in those first impressions is feeling or being uncomfortable. Uh, worrying they might not like you or you worried or convinced you're not going to like them. And just sharing a room.

Yeah, that could probably be a scary idea.

Yeah, you had all summer to think about it. Think about it. And I think from the context of, say there's a problem going on past the meeting stage, and it's just in every context not many

people enjoy confrontation or having those tough conversations. So I think I'm pretty fair on why it can be an uncomfortable and scary situation.

00:01:48 Andrea Pereira

Yeah, I think all of that and kind of just going into the unknown, especially speaking more so for first year students and don't know this person or perhaps the majority of students moving in won't know who they're living with for the first time and so, if you've had the privilege of living in your own room for the majority, if not all of your life, going in and then having to share some really, really close quarters with an absolute stranger could be quite terrifying.

I remember thinking back to my first year, ah, moving in with a roommate. I had no idea who she was.

Uhm, she didn't have any form of social media, which I don't know why it was more scary to me.

Then having to look her up and find something outrageous and just thinking, "Oh my gosh! Is she gonna be weird? Is she gonna be friendly. Is she going to absolutely hate me and make sleeping miserable? Is she going to stare at me while I sleep?"

I don't know, but... and I've always had my own room, so yeah, or for the majority of my life, I should say have had that privilege. So just sharing your most intimate space with someone. Yeah, it's scary. OK.

00:03:04 Maribeth Griffin

Yeah, you know I've been around for a while so when I when I went to school there was no such thing as social media or phones that you carried with you where you went or computers even. So, so we had no information on roommates and I moved in. Sharing my room with her that night.

And, not a five person suite - a five person room, so there were five of us thrown together in this room. And then you talk about some of the things like you know people staring at you while you're sleeping. Happened to me.

One of my roommates, she was just odd and she, when two of the roommates would go to class in the morning, she would like, get out of their bed and go sleep in - get out of her bed and go to sleep in their bed. Yeah, he just said we had weird things going on so, you know. It can be really odd and difficult to just adjust to some of those things. You know, finding your way there.

You know, as we're doing this, our students have already moved into the halls and you know they're getting -

This is probably going to air next week, and you might be listening to it way down the road, too, but, um... You know, like you said, they may know some things about their roommate because they got that information beforehand and they were able to, you know, spy on them through the joys of Google and Facebook and Instagram and Snapchat, and you know, the other millions of things. And you know a lot of times people think, "Well, this is going to work!" and sometimes people will go, "This is not going to work at all," and they've made their minds up well before, you know, they even get here so.

You know how does that work? For, for helping students through that, you know, especially if they thought things were going to work and it's maybe not as easy as they thought. Or, you know, if they've come in with an idea that it's just never going to work and you're working through that? I mean, you have to do a lot of that with students.

00:05:13 Jacob Rock

Yes, uh, my first thought would be, and we might be past this point for them, but, I feel like a lot of times, and again, not just with this exact context, but they come in these situations with a negative mindset. And we hinder the possibility of ever having a good experience because pretty cut it out.

00:05:29 Maribeth Griffin

It's weird.

00:05:31 Jacob Rock

We already established that this isn't going to work. You know they're not gonna like me in this context, or I'm not going to be able to like them. I'm not going to share a room and you just, you take out the possibility of maybe having a great relationship with your roommate and having a great time. And obviously, like social media, I mean, Dre could probably agree, isn't always an accurate representation of who someone is as an individual.

00:05:53 Andrea Pereira

Never is!

00:06:01 Jacob Rock

And so I guess you try to, if you already have that pre-judgment, which is completely - I think we all have that - to show up, put that in the back seat and get to know them. Have conversations. They might be awkward at first, but you know, just get through it and just try to keep your judgments kind of the back seat and just get to know them.

00:06:22 Maribeth Griffin

Yeah, I think, one of the things that that we've been doing the last few years to really - (we've been doing it for a long time, but I think we've tried to formalize it in the last couple of years) is to, right away through doing roommate contracts and things. And I know you've had some experience doing those.

00:06:39 Jacob Rock

Mixed, ah, mixed review again, with me. Yeah, it covers a lot. Some of you have probably never seen one before. They have the freshman one in Midtown and the Westside ones. And did they pretty much go over everything. I feel like a common problem we run into is they write down what they think is, like, the best answer and not so much more stuff to understand, "Yeah, we're going to clean every day."

"We're going to get the trash. We're gonna dust." I know you're not dusting. Come on.

00:07:13 Maribeth Griffin

We do have like 3 students who will do that every day.

00:07:15 Jacob Rock

Yeah yeah, true, that is true. Some like to keep it nice and neat, but. The vast majority. Uhm, I think it's even more if they communicate more while doing that and really took advantage of it. I think it's a great segue into another person and actually establishing boundaries and not just saying what you think you know the RA's looking for or the RD's looking for.

00:07:39 Maribeth Griffin

Yeah, I think it might be a good idea too, you know. We're trying to do this with people right at the start of things 'cause you want to kind of get a baseline to go from.

But when you're in your first couple days at school and you're trying to do this all and you don't know what your schedule is like and you don't know what your workload is going to be like, you can say, "I plan to, you know, put my clothes in this hamper and clean off the floor every every day." I'm going to do that and then you know it gets to be 3 [o'clock] and you're doing papers and getting ready for those first tests and things. And that's not quite so easy, so, being able to come back to it then and say, you know, "I realize that I'm maybe not living up to this, so, can we talk about it?"

00:08:26 Jacob Rock

Uh, completely, understandable, and some, some residents do, but again, most don't use it as a tool like I think we intend to. And just one thing I know, a few residents from last year even stress clean. You know they're having a busy week, and I know one resident. I think it's like every Thursday. Thursday was her day to clean. Right away, she'd get dinner and then she would clean. So if you somehow really just that way and maybe do it that way. it worked for her, and she was really adamant about getting done with stuff. Yeah, whatever works.

00:09:04 Andrea Pereira

Yeah, I think that would probably be my biggest tip bit about the roommate agreements because we do them so early on in the semester. I think they're due October 15th for everyone involved. Or something like that, so they have probably a month to figure it out.

But things change, and for me the biggest thing honestly, in all of life aside from food and water, (I tell this to people) is communication. Nothing is going to work if you're not communicating with your roommate, and I think the best position to have on the roommate agreement, and you kind of mentioned this, Maribeth, is that it needs to be revisited. So saying, "Let's do this", and then "Let's go back to this in a month" or again in two weeks, or whatever. Let's constantly revisit, because right now, things can be going swell, and you know I clean every Thursday, but life happens and things aren't always getting [done]. So, communication and understanding that it might not always be up to par, but things are always open to amendments and you can amend the roommate agreement if you're both up to that. Figuring out the ebb and flow – it's not a one and done contract.

00:10:17 Maribeth Griffin

Right, I think that's the, that's the thing. I mean when we when we think about it, we think there's a contract and it's done, and this is what we're going to have to live by. But like you said, life gets in the way. Things change. You know you may have to pick up a class, or you may lose something. Maybe you pick up more hours of work. There are all kinds of things that are going to impact what you said you're going to do, and so we don't do enough talking, sometimes, you know. And that idea of communication with people – it's, I think it's much harder for people to just have one-on-one conversation today. Communities.

00:11:00 Jacob Rock

I think I agree with that too. I mean, you send a text or, you know, you could do from a computer screen or your phone. And I, I think I wouldn't know from a year ago, I think we did that too. I think a lot of people nowadays are scared of those uncomfortable situations and they just, I mean it's fine to be scared of them, but they really just want to have them.

I've already had multiple residents kind of have some small issues with their residents and I was like what have you spoken to him about it? He was like, "No, I don't have the patience." Which is completely understandable, but, you know what happens? If you can have a conversation and it's a simple fix, yeah, it's important-sounding. We think we can talk about it.

00:11:43 Maribeth Griffin

And we're on baseline.

00:11:45 Jacob Rock

Yeah, and but he's but he's adamant about it. He doesn't have a conversation and now it's like I think...

00:11:51 Maribeth Griffin

Yeah, I think we, we put so much emphasis on it being a *confrontation* rather than a *conversation*.

00:11:58 Andrea Periera

I was going to say that.

00:12:00 Maribeth Griffin

Were you really?! Yeah, but I think that's that's it. You know, we just have this idea that if somebody is doing something that annoys us or something, to talk with them about it is going to be a, you know, a confrontation and a fight, right?

And and frequently, you know, and I'm I've been doing this for housing for over 30 years. Most often your roommate has no idea what's irritating you.

00:12:31 Andrea Pereira

Everything that's coming out of your mouth and like, I'm waiting to say everything that's coming out of your mouth and it reminds me of I was going to share a story about my first year roommate. And she was an architecture major and so, which equates to very little to no sleep on most nights for her and going into the studio. And I know that she would be working our room often.

She put her bedside light on and I remember every night I would lay there and little 18 year old me.

00:13:00 Maribeth Griffin

Is that light shining in your eyes?

00:13:03 Andrea Pereira

It wasn't even shining in my face. She positioned it pretty well to be out of the way and I would just look at it and see everything. Why didn't she turn that light off, or like, leave the room? And it got so bad, to the point where I'm like, "I need to confront her on this," right? Like big that word, confrontation, and I brought it up to her, and it was probably like a two second conversation, too, like "Oh my, Dre." And she said, "Oh, you usually fall asleep with it." So just turned it off or it she started doing work in like the common area.

Yeah, and I was just like, wow – I think about those sleepless nights, when I was literally seething – I was so upset about it, and she had no clue because I would just lay there and not say anything.

00:13:50 Maribeth Griffin

Anything well, and that's that's the thing we worry so much about it and then it starts to annoy us and and we've never said anything about it.

I had a roommate my sophomore year. Still one of my best friends and her mother would call every Wednesday morning. *Every Wednesday morning!* She went home every weekend, but her mom would call her every Wednesday morning at like 6:15 in the morning and she was on the top bunk and she used to keep herself, like, folded in a cocoon in the bed. She would literally like slide down from the top into the bed so she couldn't get out very easily when the phone rang.

And I'm somebody who the phone drives me nuts, if it's rung more than once it makes me crazy, and so I would always get the phone and answer it and say, "she'll be here in a minute!" to her mother. And finally in April they both said, "So, are mornings just tough for you?" and I'm like, "You call every Wednesday and she NEVER picks up the phone. Does it maybe not occur to you that she's not out of bed yet and I'm not out of bed yet, and I don't want to answer the phone call? So you know – after that, we were like, "Oh, OK. I can call an hour later." But it took until April because we were just, you know, dancing around, talking about it.

00:15:14 Andrea Pereira

I think about it often too, like if most people are coming from homes where they're living with their families or whoever they may be living with,

I think about when something bothers me at home when I'm home - I live with my parents and my older sister - I'd I think of the comparisons. I'm like, I don't see. I just, I'm like "stop that!"

00:15:35 Jacob Rock

Yeah, that's true.

00:15:36 Andrea Pereira

And I know them and I love them. And, you know, we can very easily just vocalize right in the moment if something is bothering us without a second thought and they're "All right, like I'm like, "Wait who ate my takeout?" And it's so different when it's a stranger 'cause we feel like we have to, you know, tiptoe around, yeah.

00:15:55 Jacob Rock

Yeah, you don't come off as you know, pushy or mean.

00:15:59 Andrea Pereira

Or something. Trying to be polite, but really at the end of the day, just tell them. Just tell someone it's ...

00:16:06 Maribeth Griffin

Not, I was gonna say I think I think we're all humans but we have this impression that you know if we have roommates, we're going to have to like them. And you know, we do a lot to try to match people. We ask you questions on your applications about your habits or, you know, are you clean or messy? Do you sleep late and wake up early? Do you study with music on or the TV or something? So we ask these things and try to match people.

But we don't always have the opportunity to match you perfectly, depending on when you get your stuff in and when assignments are made, you could get somebody who doesn't match with you at all. You know, and so it's just, it's just figuring out that you can still have that conversation, right?

00:16:56 Jacob Rock

It's not mean. I mean you could but.

00:17:00 Maribeth Griffin

When you just wait it, it gets annoying. Now you know there are other things that - we will talk about this in a minute- If it just keeps going on and you've addressed it and things, and there are other things you can do.

And you know there was a - We had some stuff in the residence life guide about - (Which you should all read!) - About living with a roommate and being a good roommate, I wanted to read some of them and kind of, you know, get your thoughts about them. One is clean up after yourself. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know when you're sharing that small space... I was always much neater when I lived in one of my res hall rooms then I was at my home because it was my space

versus the space I was sharing and that other people were in and out of frequently, you know. So, I always thought that was a good one.

Trying to be respectful of your roommate's wishes, especially like if they have a big test coming up to maybe be quieter in the room, or give them some time by themselves.

Don't break your roommate's things.

Don't use your roommate's things without their permission.

Be kind to your roommate.

Don't judge people by their social media profiles.

You know one of the things I think we get a lot of as visitors to the room. Boyfriends and girlfriends sometimes, but sometimes just other people in and out of your room. That's one of those things we talked about in the roommate contract about.

00:18:28 Andrea & Jacob

Yes Yep.

00:18:30 Maribeth Griffin

You know, having those discussions? When is it OK to have people in? Who can come and go? So nobody should be in their room if the roommate isn't there with them. Those kinds of things are there [in the contract]. 00:18:41 Maribeth Griffin

Other things I'm missing on, you know asking? Visitation kinds of questions.

00:18:53 Jacob Rock

How much notice is needed? 00:18:56 Jacob Rock Uh, different rules for significant others versus just regular visitors and such. So it goes into it.

00:19:07 Andrea Pereira

I think - well, visitors is an important tidbit is... Yeah, that's a weird one. It's hard too, especially if you're not living in a suite and you just live in a single room like that is literally, your space. So having someone come in can be uncomfortable, but I always think you know what would I want for myself.

Right, like my first year roommate had her boyfriend sleeping over a lot and I was so annoyed by that. Like who is this strange man? I don't know. Sleeping in a bed like 6 feet away from me, but then when it came time to when I wanted *my* significant other over, I was doing the same exact thing so make sure to not hold double standards right? What would you want for yourself?

00:19:51 Maribeth Griffin

And again, it's having that conversation about it so that you you know you've talked about it and you know what people's... and - and you might not know that right away. You might not know that until somebody boyfriend or girlfriend's been there for, you know, a weekend or

something. And then, yeah. Like, I'm not as comfortable as I thought I was going to be, you know. What do I want, and is that reasonable? And start thinking about yourself.

And then, have that discussion with your roommate, too. So you know, let's say we've heard all these suggestions and things, and we've tried talking, and we've tried – you know, this stuff, and it just isn't working. And it's more than five days, maybe so, so you know what? What, then? What can students do?

00:20:43 Jacob Rock

So if the RA doesn't already know about it, I would encourage talking to them about it to be more than willing to listen and try, they maybe problem solve. If the solutions they suggest you've already attempted; maybe they can go in if this isn't one of them that you already tried and you have roommate mediations with the RA and we kind of guide the conversation and like how we can go about fixing it and all that and addressing the problem.

Uhm, I guess if that doesn't do it then we can talk to the RD and then possibly look into a roommate switch. But I think more often than not, like we keep saying communication and effort on both parties could really fix a majority of issues instead of jumping straight to I want out of here. There's multiple avenues.

00:21:30 Maribeth Griffin

I think sometimes that's it's easy and we think it's going to resolve things and it doesn't always resolve things 'cause you're probably going to have some of the same issues with the next roommate that you have, and you still have to have those conversations and things.

You know we've talked a lot about first year students here, but these things are also the same kinds of issues that that returning students have. You know, they're still – they're still, even though in most cases they've chosen their roommates – you know it's very different living with two of you in a room, and then all of a sudden you're with four or five people in an apartment.

And you know – we talked a little on another episode that we just did about living on your own about the cleaning and, you know, all those things so you kind of geometrically advance those issues that come up when you add so many more people into the mix.

00:22:24 Jacob Rock

Right, it just multiplies the same issues we've been talking about. And a lot of people maybe having lived with each other, but your best friends and I think you see this a lot, where you think it's gonna be great?

00:22:35 Andrea Pereira

Yeah, yeah.

00:22:35 Jacob Rock

You get along so well and then you live with that person - like "I hate you!" Yeah, we just just have different living habits and stuff like that. Or maybe you were freshmen living together and maybe you didn't communicate, communicate well and you let some problems slide and then

now we get into this next year or 3rd year or whatever it is and you're living the suite together and it kind of reaches a breaking point.

And so it's just I think it all goes back to just setting boundaries and communicating. It's the best way to go about it.

00:23:09 Andrea Pereira

When you reach that breaking point, I've seen it happen a lot, and especially for people who choose their roommates. I often see people go the route of passive aggressiveness, so "Oh, you didn't take out the trash this week. I'm going to tie it up and put it by the door so it just stinks up the whole apartment for a few days." and I've seen a few different approaches to this, I think.

00:23:28 Andrea Pereira

The best one that I've witnessed, my own friends doing with myself is, obviously we don't want to reach that point where things are just a little chaotic and you want to move out, but if you do that, you have to – you HAVE TO move out. There's no beating around the bush anymore. You have to have that *all roommate*, or just two roommates-, suite-, whatever meeting and sit down and really get to the bottom of it.

You can have your RA there for supervision or mediation, but you need to start getting methodical and perhaps I've seen people make schedules and post it up and holding each other accountable. So rotations on who's taking out the trash, rotations for certain chores - and make sure you do them, because then there are even more issues. When they had that scheduled, but someone was skipping out on the toilet cleaning, or said they did, but clearly they didn't.

So having that conversation and I don't like to use the word strict, I don't want to use that 'cause it seems - I don't want it to sound like militant. Yeah, you have to be a little bit strict.

00:24:25 Maribeth Griffin

Just holding each other accountable, right?

00:24:26 Andrea Pereira

You have to absolutely make that schedule if it really comes down to it. And if you've exhausted all other efforts, you need to start being more direct. Skip the passive aggressiveness. It never works. It just causes a lot of resentment amongst what could have been a really great group of friends.

00:24:42 Maribeth Griffin

You know there are a couple things I want to touch base on. Then we're quickly running out of time, but one of the things I want to emphasize to all of our students is that, uhm, you know it's your job, living here, to take care of these situations. You know, a lot of folks turn to their parents to really help take care of it, and they're not living here. They're not part of it, [but] they are great at being able to listen to what's going on. Being able to give you some advice, maybe helping you kind of work your way through what your conversation wants to be in things, but it's you who has to do the hard work of it.

And it IS hard work. And it's difficult and sometimes scary to do this. Your RAs and RDs can help you, you know, practice those conversations. I can't tell you the number of times that we've had students stopped in and say "I need to tell my roommate this. You know, what's the best way to do it?" So we talk about strategies, and, you know... but at the end of the day, You have to find out how to do it and and that's what we're here to help you do, and that's what your parents are here to help you do, too.

So take advantage of those things and then, you know, one of the other things - and you kind of alluded to it before, Dre, was, you know, working with beings, and you have these same kinds of issues with your family. When you live with [people], somebody irritates you, somebody was supposed to do the laundry and didn't do it. Somebody was supposed to do this and you just have that conversation, and so you kind of have to look at your issues with your roommates or even other people on the floor if they're allowed at night or something - just asking someone to turn the noise down. You know, *you* can do that. You don't have to call the RA to do that. You can do that yourself. Just say, "I'm trying to sleep. Would you mind turning the noise down?"

And if you approach things just with that kind of attitude, usually people are fairly responsive to you and will do it. And you know sometimes it's just letting a bad moment pass, and then talking about it later. Sometimes it's just talking about it then and speaking up for yourself and not being afraid just to say something. If something is bothering you, 'cause like I said, usually folks don't know it's an issue until you tell them it's an issue. So take a minute to talk to people.

Right. You guys have anything else you want to say before we wrap things up?

00:27:07 Jacob Rock

Here I think just to stress what we've been stressing in the whole podcast – communication is key. I've also emphasized just being understanding of your roommate or suitemates. Maybe evaluate yourself to, you know like why is this bothering me? Is there anything I could be doing differently? And just being kind.

I think my favorite part of this whole conversation was not wording it as confrontation. Just as a conversation. And it doesn't have to be this big deal, you know, as simple as just a little conversation and the lights turned off now, and Dre can go to sleep.

00:27:39 Andrea Pereira

Pretty good.

00:27:42 Maribeth Griffin

Which is what we all want at the end.

00:27:45 Andrea Pereira

And I would just say recognizing everyone's humanity. Yeah, don't hold resentment. If someone told you to turn the noise off, pretend your sister asked you – then what would you do? Would you go to bed that night thinking, "I can't believe she said that earlier!" No, you would completely forget about it. Remember their humanity, and hopefully they'll remember yours as well.

00:28:06 Maribeth Griffin

Well, I think that's going to wrap things up for this episode. So, we also just did another episode on living on your own and what's that's like. So those are coming up together, and you might want to check out those episodes 'cause there's a lot of good advice in them.

If you have any questions that came up from today's discussion, or you have topics you want us to talk about, you can always email me at griffinm@wcsu.edu.

Jacob and Dre, thanks so much for being on the podcast with us. (Music comes up over talking.)

00:28:36 Jacob Rock

Thank you.

00:28:39 Andrea Pereira

Thank you.

00:28:39 Maribeth Griffin

And if you're listening, please tune in again. We've got a lot more to talk about and that'll be it for Gab & GROW.