

# **You're Not Doing This Alone!**

*The CoAbode® House-sharing Paradigm for Single Mothers*



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This eBook is meant as a guide and resource for those who wish more information regarding CoAboding, or house-sharing for single moms. All activities and ideas disclosed may be, and should be, modified to fit the reader's own personal needs. The information contained is practical and designed to enhance the reader's own housing agenda, and should not be construed as legal or medical advice. CoAbode® has created this resource as a genuine help to those who seek it.

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## Acknowledgements

This book has evolved over many years. During the slow and often interrupted evolution of this book, we have collected insights, strategies, and personal stories about successful house-share experiences. For that, I acknowledge all of you single mom matches who kindly shared your testimonies and let *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> photograph or interview you for our press opportunities. Without your success stories, other single moms would not have discovered our service.

I also thank those courageous single moms who took the steps necessary to use the service, and be open to an alternative method of improving their own lives and that of their children.

I am grateful to each board member who has served over the years. A special thanks to Cassandra Cheng and Suzanne Mulroy.

I thank my editor, CaLana Love, who in the process of editing this book found her own courage and opportunity to experience first-hand CoAboding with another single mom.

Lastly, I would like to thank my son and biggest joy, Cooper, for whom the *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> service would not exist.

**Carmel Sullivan-Boss**  
CoAbode<sup>®</sup> Founder

*“...It may not [be] a village, but (through CoAbode®), single moms are finding it’s easier to raise their children when they share a home. The tight economy is a key reason, but single moms are rethinking what constitutes a thriving family.”*

**~ Jeff Zaslow**  
[Time Magazine](#)

## Carmel's Story

Life can be eerie. In the months after my divorce was finalized, it was downright scary for me. I felt as though I was watching the world pass by with the volume button on mute. Society went about its business, but I didn't. I somehow managed to brush my teeth, do the laundry, and pick up the groceries. But I was on auto-pilot, blindly going through the motions. Sometimes I'd reach into the fridge for a juice and wonder how it even got there. I'd notice that I had driven miles on the freeway but had forgotten where I was going. I wonder how my then seven year-old son, Cooper, took in my post-divorce "blue" period. What did he make of his mama somnambulating around like a lost ghost stopping only to hug him – or hold on to him for dear life?

The cold reality of my new situation eventually chased my hazy paralysis. After going from seventeen years in a happy, prosperous marriage to lonely days of singlehood, I was plagued with worry and doubt and I did not want to raise my little boy on my own.

A deep, relentless sense of doom pervaded everything I did. For the first time in my adult life, I felt utterly powerless and alone. At night, I'd wait for Cooper to fall asleep, then curl up in a fetal position and cry. I fretted about where I could go and what I could do. The fear was so vexing at times that I retreated into meditation - something that used to be pleasurable, but had indeed become my escape.

It was during a prolonged meditation that a clear, intuitive thought pierced through the fog. It was filled with peace and joy, but mostly with pure intention. I received a clear message; "Find another single mother with whom to share."

Bolstered by this message, I went in search of a house big enough for two families. When I found the house, I began interviewing single moms and placed a notice with a local rental service. The ad said, "Single mom seeks same to pool resources and share a house with a garden. Let's work together to create a safe environment for our children."

I got eighteen responses, and I knew that something good was happening. As I started to have conversations with the respondent moms, it became obvious that this good went beyond me alone. All of these women were looking for a way to connect, not just to prevent loneliness but a way to reduce the financial burden of going it alone. These single mothers were reaching out to someone who understood what they were going through. But I only had one house. What would I say to the other seventeen?

After chatting with several of these moms over coffee, it occurred to me that some of them may have more in common with each other than they had with me. Two of them had three year old boys. One mother had a sixteen year old girl and lived close to another who had a fourteen year old girl. It made perfect sense to put them in contact with each other! So I did. They were indeed grateful.

If eighteen single moms were looking to share with another single mom in my small neighborhood, how many hundreds must there be in the greater Los Angeles area? How many thousands in California? How many millions in the United States? I did my research and found that there was no resource where single moms could find each other to house-share. That familiar intuitive feeling came over me again. Why don't I take the initiative and create a way for single mothers to connect, to find each in order to pool resources and build healthier, happier, more secure home environments?

I designed *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> to be an online service exclusively for single moms to connect for house-sharing and friendships. Within a year, I had a full service website operating. Today we have tens of thousands of members who are CoAboding all over the United States.

The feedback from *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> single moms is so inspiring. They rejoice in doing half the shopping, half the cooking, half the cleaning, and getting twice the house they could have afforded alone. Recently divorced women tell me how they've been able to hold on to the family home by bringing in another single mom to help share the financial burden. Instead of dwelling in a sad and lonely place, they have a friend to laugh with and a shoulder to cry on when the bad memories creep back.

The most touching, however, are the testimonies about what these single moms have achieved for their children. I hear about warm kitchens full of laughter. I know stories about two year-old boys who presume to be the brothers in the house. They tell me of teenage girls who share their school bus seats with their new surrogate sisters, thankful that they have so much more to return home to than they ever had before.

The response to the idea of single mothers sharing houses has been phenomenal. It is amazing to think that my own feelings of loneliness and fear lead me to ask, "What should I do with my life, and how can I help others while doing it?" I am blessed with this incredible opportunity to lend a hand to so many others! It may take a village to raise a productive member of society, but, single moms can start by uniting in their commitment to their children and willingness to help themselves.



*CoAbode*<sup>SM</sup> Founder  
**Carmel Sullivan-Boss &  
son Cooper**

## **The CoAbode<sup>®</sup> Values**

CoAbode was founded on the principle that two single moms raising children together can achieve more than one struggling alone. Through a variety of community-based programs, *CoAbode<sup>®</sup>* provides single mothers with affordable housing opportunities, specialized support groups, community outreach and involvement, and referrals to vital resources designed to make parenting a child alone easier, healthier, and more secure.

### **VISION STATEMENT**

Our vision is to improve the quality of life for single mothers and their children.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The *CoAbode<sup>®</sup>* mission is to provide support and services that connect women who are raising children alone. Through these connections, single female parent families can pool their finances and other resources to improve their living conditions (for themselves and their children) by sharing a home.



## Why You Can Use This Book

*“CoAbode® is the de novo nonprofit service provider using an innovative program which is unique and creative, and targets an ever increasing niche in our current society - single moms. Your computerized system may prove more efficient and cost effective than the more traditional/conventional systems used by so many nonprofit service providers.”*

~ **Jason Coughenour**, Director, HUD Los Angeles

You're amazing! You have chosen this eBook as a means to strengthen your CoAboding experience – whether you are considering a house-share for the first time, or you've hit a snag in your current place. It is here you will find practical shared housing information and other tools.

Whether you have already moved in, or you are looking to begin a shared housing experience, you already know this endeavor is life-improving, and requires a pro-active approach. This guide offers discussion about the most pertinent aspects about single moms CoAboding. It is also a companion to [coabode.com](http://coabode.com), which features more vital information and resources about housing programs.

You have a busy life. Taking the time and energy to read this material and apply it is a notable investment. This eBook was designed to be an easy to follow guide complete with examples and action steps that you can use immediately. You are encouraged to print the activity sections to create your own journal or workbook, and the tools (contracts, etc.) to help you establish or renew your CoAboding relationship.

*You're Not Doing This Alone!* was created to impact you on a very personal level. It considers your struggles, triumphs, and desires. Expect results as you discover new ideas and perspectives that are designed to enhance the way you live. Enjoy your journey!

## What is CoAboding?

*"When I look back now, I wonder why I didn't do this sooner."*

~ **Pat**, Redondo Beach CA

**CoAboding** is defined as a symbiotic house-sharing arrangement between single moms in which at least two single-parent families merge property, pool resources, and forge relationship to create a better way of life. Many decide to CoAbode to:

- Afford a better house or apartment within a safer school district
- Cut the cost of rent and household expenses to free up much needed resources
- Reduce stress and fatigue from fulfilling daily chores like cooking, grocery shopping, carpooling, homework tutoring, doing laundry, and supervising children so that you are better able to provide for your kids and take care of yourself
- Benefit from the emotional support and strength of another who has also experienced a measure of turbulence and hardship

Traditionally, a blended family has been defined as a family consisting of a couple and their children from the present and all previous relationships. The relational dynamics of the shared home are similar to this description. More people are a part of a blended family more than any other family structure type and, of course, differ from nuclear families in relational dynamics. Blended family members are more prone to experience unexpected situations and revelations because they are forming new relationships with people who have been born and cultured in different times and places.

Around half of today's mothers will spend at least some time as the sole custodial parent. As of 2011, 11.7 million families in the US were headed by a single parent, 85.2% of which were headed by a female.

Maybe it's a season in your life where you seem to be losing – your relationship, job, sanity, or all of the above. These blows can be extra difficult to manage as a single parent. You still have to live, and you have offspring for which to care.

The housing bubble burst. Maybe the mortgagor has not set a foreclosure sale date yet. The courts awarded you the house after the divorce, but the house payments are too much for you to handle, no matter how hard you try to meet the obligation. Loan modifications fell through. With all the distressed properties flooding the market, the short sale option is just as competitive as when the economy boomed in 2007. Deed in lieu couldn't be the only foreseeable solution – could it?

What's a single mom to do? CoAboding is absolutely a viable option.

***Insight***

What's the reason you currently seek or have settled into a house-share situation?

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## Finding the Right House-share

*"We met over coffee, and knew we'd get along really well."*

~ **Sherry**, Washington DC

Any single mom in a CoAboding situation is a brave person because she has taken a heroic leap of faith to unify two families, two households, and two histories. Single moms deserve a great deal of respect for their willingness to explore house-sharing with another single mom and her children. She is determined to make changes for the better, motivated to implement new ways of doing things, and hopeful about what she needs. It takes courage and fortitude to mingle families *and* benefit each person involved simultaneously.

1. If you're currently looking for a *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> housemate, what steps have you taken thus far to find her?

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2. If you're currently roommates with another single mother, what specifically did you do to find her?

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3. Look at your answer in #2. What is extraordinary about your methods? What was lacking?

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4. Do you have any apprehensions about CoAboding? If so, list them below.

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5. Describe your ideal house-sharing situation.

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6. What will your life look like after finding the right house-share opportunity?

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### **Know what you need**

Setting a clear intention is the most powerful thing you can do to get what you want. Being crystal clear about your outcome will drive your thoughts, responses, and results. With this in mind, consider what you need from your housemate. Think in terms of the household, how it could operate, and what benefits your house-sharing would reap. Be realistic in determining what is most important to you, and do not fear asking for that. With that in mind, ponder how you will reciprocate in your CoAboding household.

### **Questions to ask your potential housemate**

When you use coabode.com to find a house-sharing roommate, you have a

chance to answer questions about your preferred lifestyle and parenting outlook, as well as consider that of your potential housemate. The initial questionnaire is designed to highlight compatibility and probe topics such as eating habits, parenting beliefs, and the type of space you need. If you haven't registered yet, you can do that at [coabode.com](http://coabode.com)

We suggest you also answer the *Extensive Interview Questionnaire* (see page A in the Appendices). If you combine those questions with your own, you will have a good base of information to make a wise house-sharing decision. To be even more thorough, consider the following:

1. What do you feel are the 3 most important aspects about your housemate?

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2. Of the those listed above, which *must* be identical to your own?

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3. Are you able to accept any lifestyle aspects about your CoAboding partner(s) that are different from your own? If so, what are they?

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4. What's important to you that may not have been listed in the *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> questionnaire? List them below, and keep this close for future conversations with potential sharemates. You may also want to review [coabode.com](http://coabode.com)'s [FAQ](#) (*Frequently Asked Questions*) section for deeper insight.

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*Character is exceedingly important*, especially since your children will spend or does spend time with your CoAboding roommate. Is it ethical or in poor-taste to ask for her references, credit and/or criminal background checks? Actually, using these devices could help you keep undesirable or unexpected situations minimized. To bring this need to the table would be beneficial, but especially if you are willing to offer the same to your potential housemate.

A throbbing question in any house-share situation is, “How can I avoid the housemate from hell?” Get to know your potential roommate before you move in together. Visit her current residence so you can observe her habits and lifestyle. It is also essential to watch your children and her children interact. At least one week spent together prior to moving should give you a good feel for your compatibility level (low or high). One of our success stories took about [three months](#) to properly position themselves together in a CoAboding household. For more tips, consider the suggestions in the “Advice on How to Find the Right Roommate” article on [coabode.com](http://coabode.com).

## Two in One Merging households

*“Economically, we are able to share half the cost of gas, electric, phone, and rent, so we can provide a better life for our children and ourselves.”*

~ **Star**, Oakland CA

If organization is your strong suit, you will probably enjoy finally merging your physical locale with another single mom. If not, find a good notebook and pen, start drawing up your checklists, and keep in contact with your CoAboding partner as you prepare for this exciting transition.

In fact, the first few weeks of a new house-share arrangement are not only transitional, but delicate because you, your children, your share partner, and her children are all processing the new dynamics of what each now calls home. One fabulous way to smooth the changeover is to plan a family meal that’s more celebratory. There is something about eating together that warms our connections with each other and is so very universally human. Make a big deal about this affair. Print out a menu and let the kids help with kitchen prep work. Take the party to the park or fire up the grill in the backyard if the weather permits. Decorate the table – even the common area – with a party theme. Get inventive together and enjoy a time of relationship-building.

### **Settling on terms**

First, take some time to review the sample *Roommate Agreements*, which you can access on the website after you’ve [registered](#) or download from page F in the Appendices. These contracts are written legal documents that define each CoAboding moms’ obligations. Completing the form(s) is also a great way to get to know your roommate. You can share preferences such as whether you are a morning or night person, how often you enjoy having guests over, and when and where you would like to have your quiet time. Discussing all of these issues up front and committing to them on



paper helps you build a great living situation.

It is best to communicate clearly with one another. This means being specific about what matters to you, listening to what matters to your housemate, and possessing a flexible, compromising attitude. Remember, this venture will stretch your creativity at times, which is a valuable virtue that CoAboding single moms need. You may have to ask some hard questions. Terms of a new house-share should be realistic, however, and not impose on either party, otherwise the relationship may become strained. If you already CoAbode, re-visit your original house-sharing contract terms and amend them in case they are not currently optimized.

It's also a great idea if both of you keep a copy of all written agreements. When any sort of conflict arises, you may find the resolution requires deferring back to your original pact. Be sure to also see the *Relationships* chapter beginning on page 14.

### ***Insight***

What move-in details do you want to iron out with your new housemate? Finish or modify the list below to prioritize before you execute a *Roommate Agreement*.

- Date to move in?
- Is there lease or mortgage?
- How much should each mom contribute to each utility, maintenance bill?
- How to collect money to pay bills, distribute to bill collectors?
- Who will do the grocery, other shopping?
- What are each kid's child care needs? Will the other mom help? When? How often?
- How will common property chores be divided?

### **Finance and budgeting**

Controlling your budget may be the primary reason you decided to CoAbode, and it certainly is critical. As a double-income household, the ability to pay monthly household bills could be easier, and give you freedom to re-organize your personal finances.

What household expenses will you and your housemate(s) share? The best method is to divide the cost evenly, and devise a way to ensure these bills are paid on

time. For example, your estimated cable bill is \$100, which includes all taxes and fees. Of course, you and the other mom should split it in half. Then decide if you'll each pay your part of the bill separately (online or postal) or if you'll make the payment collectively and simultaneously.

When making financial arrangements, each party should assume a responsible attitude, which will foster trust in your relationship. Neither should take the other for granted, and should be diligently faithful in contributing her financial portion to household expenses. Be reasonable. If only you and your child use the Internet service, that expense is not common, but rather personal.

### **Common space versus personal space**

Personal space is the physical space immediately surrounding someone, and any infringement feels uncomfortable. It is also space designated for the use of an individual within a larger communal area. Be it the garage or your bathroom, each member should be able to respect the home itself in addition to one another's personal space. This requires clear communication about what in the house that (1) everyone can use, (2) the children may access, and (3) is just for the adults.

List parts of the house/apartment (include the yard) that everyone can use.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List parts of the house that you would like to restrict access. Since there is no right or wrong answer, it is perfectly fine to have or not have an answer to this question.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Use discretion as it relates to allowing others use of your personal property. Would you allow your sharemate to use your car or cell phone under any circumstances? Take a few moments to think about this issue, and jot down your thoughts.

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Looking at common and personal space and property is important. If you are open and honest about this simple yet sometimes prickly subject, you will be able to avoid conflicts later that can strain your *CoAbode*® relationships.

## House rules

Everyone should be made aware of, acknowledge, and perhaps visually inspect the house rules. The house rules should be a collaboration and address everyone's concerns as fairly as possible. Moms should consider discussing the matter before involving the children. Establishing cornerstone expectations first makes it easier to incorporate the children's input since you concur and can communicate them on one accord.

Add light-heartedness to your new regime and create a poster together. You can use a large piece of poster board and write out each house rule. Both adults should review it to make certain none are missing. Then hand the sheet over to the children to color and decorate. They can work on the project together, and the moms can use the time to reinforce the purpose of the poster.

What ground rules do you think should be established? Choose the most applicable topics below to discuss:

- Chores
- Children's curfews, homework times
- Hours and days other family, friends may visit the home
- Children's allowance (money earned for doing chores)
- Favoritism
- Television, Internet schedules and preferences
- Freedoms, restrictions
- Rivalry, completion
- Grocery shopping, meal preparation
- Conflict resolution
- Unreliability
- Planning for events, celebrations

Can you think of any others? If so, list them below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Relationships

*"It's a match made in heaven...[e]motionally it's been great to have someone that's going through the same experience that you are. CoAbode® has definitely changed my life for the better. My new roommate and I sit up at night after the kids fall asleep and laugh and joke about some of the trials and tribulations we go through, and don't feel so alone."*

~ **Helen**, South Florida

Anyone choosing to blend two single mom families is on a mission to have a fit and fulfilling experience. Relationships are rewarding. Building relationship entails creating time together. Whether you have a short-term lease agreement, or you become best friends forever, you and your new housemate(s) will have a chance to develop your partnership every day.

We are part of a team at work, in school, in the community, and especially at home. Let's look at some key factors to determine the strength of our relationships:

- **Respect:** Not only esteeming the other person's worth as a person, but also expecting to earn respect from others
- **Shared experiences:** This is how relationships truly grow – sharing moments and events, from joyous to difficult.
- **Trust :** Trust is born from respect and shared experiences. It is essential in good relationships, and typically accumulates as each party favors and cherishes the others' responses and interactions
- **Reciprocity:** Good relationships require a healthy balance of give-and-take. Any extremes (for instance, one only gives and one only takes) will throw the relationship's best potential off-kilter, and thus crippling the home's harmony.

### PHASES OF RELATIONSHIPS

Non-marital relationships can draw from what psychologists term "stages of relational development". It is an advantage for you to understand these phases to better

know where you may stand in your budding or maturing *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> relationships. This will also give you a richer perspective from which you communicate with others.

### **The Enchantment Stage**

You have interviewed her and she's interviewed you. You had three play dates, a few coffees, and marvel at how much you have in common. You both like each other, adore one another's children, and see the best in each other. So it's official! You've decided to CoAbode.

Psychologists teach that this "euphoria" is also a physical response to the endorphins of the brain that are triggered by the connection of hearts and minds. It is a real response to new relationships, and can cause the individual to minimize, and sometimes rationalize, negative character or situational red flags. Similarities and good experiences are typically emphasized, and a great deal of bonding takes place.

During this "fantasy" stage, "both children and parents are typically [insistent, although not necessarily forceful] about their...wishes for what their family could be like. It is in this phase each member articulates their wants and needs.

"The enchantment stage is necessary, but temporary," Hopefully the [sharemates] are appropriately committed [but this stage is] a chemically induced taste of the relationship's potential [so]...it will not last forever." How long the enchantment phase lasts seems to depend on how much time roommates spend together and how much emotional baggage each brings to the relationship. The more time we spend together, the more we observe each other, we learn more about each other's negative and positive behavioral patterns. Here the next stage begins to evolve.

### **The Power Struggle Stage**

The more you get to know her personality, you notice how her character strengths and flaws affected you and your children. Character defects usually stem from deep emotional wounds, scars, or dysfunctional emotional cultivation. As days and weeks elapse, perhaps it seems as though where she was once open and embracing, your sharemate shuts you out and want things her own way. Perhaps you have changed how you cooperate in the house, resisting what may not be your preference,

and hiding your true feelings. These kinds of thought, emotion, and conduct imply she needs to reconcile with the changed household dynamics where she once was secure in operating per her own prudence, which was not formerly required to consider a sharemate and her children.

When breakdown like this occurs, the relationship and the *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> environment, momentarily loses its serenity. This causes stress and fear. Roommates may feel a sense of buyer's remorse, regretting the decision to move in together. Perhaps you question whether you should have spent more time with her before merging households. Arriving at this juncture does not indicate the house-share is a failure. In subsequent sections, you will find sensible ways to turn your home and relationship to tranquility.

Know that this phase is considered normal, although the intensity of the struggle can depend on the intensity of the friendship. Also note that this stage is not mandatory, and there are relationships that do not necessarily experience this kind of tussle and toil.

### **The Fork in the Road Stage**

In this phase, CoAboding members vividly realize what the new family looks like in reality. Differences between real facts and ideal desires become clear. If your relationship has progressed as described above, you are both at a place where each needs to decide whether to stay or find another home.

To find another may seem like the most relieving resolution, but things to consider:

- Is there a lease or other contract in place that stipulates the conditions under which a mom can leave the shared home?
- Is it a good idea to incur another change that the children will have to cope?
- Do you have the resources (time, energy, money) to move again?
- If the other mom moves out, how will you off-set the time before another mom moves in?
- What if you run into the same problem with the next housemate?
- Are you truly being reasonable? Is your desire to move unchecked emotions or a real threat to your improved lifestyle?

Probably the most practical and effective decision just may be to respectfully hash out your emotions and issues with one another. It is an opportunity for the both of you to grow as individuals, and set an example of good relationship for your children. There are times when abandoning the arrangement may be feasible, for instance if there is abuse (physical, emotional) or other habitually harmful behavior. However, if this is not the case, in the face of conflict you should decide to be courageous and roll up your sleeves (see *Conflict & Resolution* below).

### **The Process Stage**

Sharemates who choose to go through the process of revamping their relationship, and thus the home life, will find themselves engaging in new activities, researching and reviewing new material, thinking honestly, and feeling differently. *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> moms can move forward in addressing how the family functions and is structured, confronting the differences in each member's perception of the new family, and influencing other members to reorganize so home life can continue to improve.

The goal is to make joint decisions about new rituals, rules, and roles. The primary focus is to find the family's unique middle ground - is shared experiences, shared values, and times when everyone cooperates well together. Another focal point is balancing this new middle ground while honoring past and other relationships (see *Basic Communication* below).

The process phase means learning new skills, and by doing so, learning how to transform (especially) anguish and hurts to healing and restoration. You will discover and develop attitudes and how to proactively use them. You can ascertain wisdom and the art of taking your time. Solid growth and lasting healing is a slow process and should not be hurried. This does not necessarily mean that it will take an unfathomable amount of time for you to recover from power struggle damage. But you should expect to pay close attention to the other party and give much empathy in order to attain even higher levels of respect and trust between roommates.



## **The Goal Stage**

It is in this higher stratum of respect and trust that your relationship strengthens, begins to truly withstand opposing stimuli, and propels the housemates to a certain degree of safety with one another. It is personification of the old adage “through thick and thin”. You have, perhaps, not only experienced one another’s faults and failures, but have been able to see past them and into the real person with whom you have chosen to share your home space. The relationship, and each personality, has advanced.

Also, the single moms and children (age appropriately) are working well together. Boundaries have been expressed and are clear, and the CoAboding adult roles have been lucidly defined. Thus, the blended family identity emerges because the family accepts itself for who it is, there is a strong sense of the middle ground, and the children feel secure.

## **BASIC COMMUNICATION**

Communication is *fundamental* for intentional growth of the relational connection between two or more people. To communicate is to exchange ideas, thoughts, and emotions verbally or in print. It is also necessary so two or more people can coordinate perspectives and actions to achieve common goals.

Below is a powerful technique we encourage you to incorporate into your blended environment. It highlights *active listening*, which is a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but - more importantly – comprehending and acknowledge the complete message being sent.

### **To hear or not to hear**

There was two single moms with ten children. Every Sunday evening, the family set aside at least two hours to sit in a sharing circle together. It was set forth that this time and space was safe, that nothing discussed was to be disclosed to anyone outside of the family. They all took turns sharing about her or his week’s house-share experience without interruption or fear of repercussions. The first time around the circle,

everyone stated something negative - something that they were unhappy about, that they wanted to be different, or that was wrong to them.

As each person spoke, everyone actively listened, and there was no need to respond or address what was said. The second time around, everyone shared something positive – something that they were happy and really liked or that really worked for them.

The next three times around the circle dealt with three specific issues already pre-determined to be discussed. There was a box in the kitchen with an attached pad of paper and pencil set. Whenever a negative issue came up for someone during the week, that person wrote it down and put it in the box. Then, before circle time, one of the moms randomly drew three topics from the box.

Everyone got equal time to convey their thoughts and make suggestions as it related to the issue at hand. They used “I” statements, a way of speaking in reference to self rather than finger-pointing so as to decrease defensiveness and engage openness (i.e. “I feel you didn’t listen...” as opposed to “You didn’t listen...”).

Last, the final time around the circle was a time of gratitude. Family members made a one sentence remark about something for which they were grateful.

Every participant had a chance to safely express his or her views about issues that are important to him or her. Think about how pinnacle that is. If you have an issue but no one addresses it or listens to your concerns, how would you feel? Angry? Hurt? Insignificant? Do these emotions factor well into relationships, especially those at home?

This circle time was about connecting and listening. No decisions were made. What was essentially necessary was time to express what was truly on everyone’s minds. By practicing this exercise, the family was able to begin each week with a clean slate, not having to carry forward mounting resentments or frustration about any situation.

Discuss with your housemate a meeting like this one, and its plausible purpose for your household. You can add various dimensions. One family included an ice cream maker that each person would crank while sharing. By the end of the session, all enjoyed the fruits of their labor together.

Share with each other what you'd like your circle time to look like. What did you decide? Describe it below.

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### **More on active listening**

Active listening is designed to ensure you hear the other person and that the other person knows you hear what they say. Be forewarned that active listening requires concentration and determination. You will benefit because you will become a better communicator and develop better relationships. According to mindtools.com, there are five key elements of active listening:

**Pay attention:** Be deliberate. Remind yourself that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message from the speaker. Give her your undivided attention. Acknowledge the message with non-verbal communication, like looking directly at the speaker. Put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare your rebuttals or objections while she is talking. Avoid being distracted by things that may be happening around you. Note her body language. When in a group setting, refrain from side conversations.

**Show that you're listening:** Use your own positive body language and gestures to convey your attention. Nod occasionally. Smile. Use other positive facial expressions and posture that is open and inviting. Encourage the speaker by appropriately interjecting small comments like "yes" or "OK".

**Provide feedback:** Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. Reflect what is being said and ask questions. Start with, "What I'm hearing is..." or "It sounds to me like you are saying...". Finish your statement by paraphrasing from your own perspective, rather than repeating word for word. If she agrees, you are both on the same

wavelength. If she does not agree with what you've said you heard her say, then she should be allowed another opportunity to clarify her thoughts aloud. This time, ask questions to clarify certain points, like "What do you mean when you say..?" or "Is this what you mean..?" Periodically, summarize the speaker's comments.

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and then ask for more information. Say, "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I am taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is...Is that what you meant?"

**Defer judgment:** Interrupting is a waste of time because it frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message. Always allow the speaker to finish her complete thoughts. Never interrupt with counter arguments.

**Respond appropriately:** Active listening is to be respectful and patient while gaining information and perspective. Attacking the speaker with your emotional defenses only turns the discussion into a wrestling match. Be candid, open, and tactfully honest in your response. Assert your opinions politely. Treat the other person as you would want to be treated.

### High road to find the middle ground

A Yahoo.com bulletin once posed the question, "What does the phrase 'home is where the heart is' mean to you?" Here was the voted best answer:

"When I walk into my home I feel peace. I feel I am in the most safe environment that I could be in. There are no worries or problems within the walls of my home. It is the one place that I can truly be me. My family is here and love and comfort surrounds me. To know that this is the place where my family and myself have established together and that we all have our special space within our home and spaces where we can come together is why our home is where our hearts are."

Of course, your answer will be subjective too, although you still may agree with the writer above. How do you think the atmosphere in your shared home should be? Describe it below.

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If you currently share a home with another single mom, does your answer above accurately describe where you live? Yes No

No matter your answer, why did you answer that way?

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### **The Unanimous Exercise**

What is your CoAboding mission and vision?

Carve out some uninterrupted time for every member to be together. Choose a place where you can all actively listen, and preferably where there are no distractions. Let everyone know in advance (1) how long you will be together, and (2) to bring their open minds and hearts.

Sit in a circle and have paper and writing utensils available. State that since you are a family, you need a house mission statement. Explain that a vision statement describes the core objective as a house family, and a mission statement describes how things will get done in the house according to shared values and beliefs.

For example, “To communicate and respond with one another with a supportive attitude no matter the circumstances” is a vision statement. The mission to pair with that could be, “We will be active listeners, responsible for our own actions and chores, and considerate of one another’s personal space and property.”

Ask everyone to spend 15 minutes completing these statements:

- In order to live harmoniously as a house family unit, we should .... (vision)
- To fulfill our vision, this is what we should all do as members of the family...(mission)

There are no right or wrong answers, and no one has to write any particular number of items. However, ask everyone to keep their pen on the paper for the entire fifteen minutes.

When time is up, have everyone take a break, stretch, etc. for about five minutes. After everyone is seated again, allow each person to read (and everyone else to actively listen to) their answers from a place of openness, interest, and discovery.

Next, ask everyone to mark which of their ideas that they feel are most meaningful. Hand out sticky note pads, and ask that each person put each highlighted idea on separate sticky page. As you attempt to phrase your mission first, and then vision, you can move the sticky notes around to notice which points seem to go together and form your sentences. Length of the statements is not as important as the fact that they are functional and fit your CoAboding family.

Be creative in how you display your mission and vision. Visit your local art store to get some ideas. Have every house member present as you post your statements in a common area of the house.

Sometimes, especially when conflicts bare light, it can be hard to remember why you decided to house-share in the first place. Your vision and mission are reminders. Imagine an activist who promotes world peace through non-violence education. She would not achieve any of her goals if she chose to open a gun shop and sell weapons because that approach is counterproductive and is at odds with her values.

This example is extreme, but interestingly, many house-sharing families do this very thing. People merge with the vision of having a peaceful and loving home, but attack each other with sarcasm and blame rather than open, honest listening and receiving. At times, a house member may want what is good, but her focus may be on what she feels is not right, needs changing, or what she feels has caused her unhappiness.

## **CONFLICT & RESOLUTION**

There are times we see one of the kids or our housemate behave in ways that we don't approve, and we respond negatively. Sound familiar? It has been called having

the “the diseases of attitude”, and they include indifference, indecision, doubt, worry, over-caution, pessimism, and complaining.

Are you power struggling with your house-share partner? Do you walk around the home timid or avoiding behaviors you feel may cause the other adult(s) to respond negatively? A popular recovery program defines insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. You may need to be empowered with new ways of relating to one another so that communication can improve, and therefore, the quality of life for all in the shared home.

If conflict riddles your house-sharing experience, it is a sign that you and the other person are not connecting in your relationship. Remember that your primary key to good relationship is good communication. It is likely, therefore, that the relationship you have with the other house adults suffer from a lack of good communication.

Now what do you do? Start by asking yourself:

- What would better communication look like?
- How would you know that your house-share family is communicating at the level you envision?
- What would be different than it is now?
- How would life in your home change?
- Do you hear yourself nagging a member of the house about the same thing over again?
- Do you spend a lot of time and energy focusing on being upset about what someone else in the family is or is not doing?

The cause of our anguish and pain is not necessarily the other person’s action. The root of our negative emotions stems from our attachment to particular outcome – typically the outcome we’d like to see but that has not manifested. When we are attached to the idea that something needs to be different than what it is, we cause ourselves suffering. So how do you let it go so you can pave the way to a better share relationship?

A common type of dysfunctional attachment is desiring the other person to change, and then feeling righteously indignant or frustrated when they do not conform to our demands. Let's pretend that your carpool friend is always late, and you get angry every time she is. Can you control what your friend does or does not do? No. What's angering you is that your friend does not value being on time as you do, and you feel powerless to control having to pay the consequences for being late.

But did you stop to consider that if your friend is constantly late, and you have to endure the evil eye from your boss, or a docked paycheck, that you should explore other methods of getting to work? Is there someone else who can pick you up? Perhaps there's a bus route to take. You may want to upgrade your savings plan for a car. Contemplate whether you put up with your friend's tardiness because you don't want to do a little extra work. Would you have to get up an hour earlier to catch the bus?

When you let go of your attachment, you are free to make better choices. Change happens when you are able to use your frustration with another person as a reminder to focus on your own attitudes, responses, and accountability.

Has your teenager ever repeatedly thwarted you by making plans with you but then changing them at the last minute? Stop making plans with her. Start making plans for yourself. Allow her to discover that if she chooses to treat you this way, you will be less available for activities. You will have your own plans (for a bubble bath, a massage, coffee with the girls). She will learn to value you and your time because you began valuing you and your time.

When you feel disappointed with your children, roommate, or even yourself, journal the answers to the following:

1. What do I want that is not happening?
2. What do I wish were different?
3. What is right about the situation?



4. What is within my control to do differently?
  
5. What do I need to change in order to be happy?
  
6. Is it in my control to change the previous answer? Yes No If yes, how? If no, what can I change about myself instead?

You and your housemate can take advantage of conflict and process through it. Ask for one another's perspectives about the facts of the situation, emerging behavioral patterns in one another's response to it, or any other observations. Remember to use your active listening skills.

### **Using a third party**

Some instances call for a third party to help resolve your conflicts. When there is an undeniable need to solve a household issue, yet none of the roommates can or will compromise to implement a solution, a neutral set of ears and perspective should enter the talks.

One who is neutral will be a person who can actively listen well to each party's views, and be able to fairly weigh the reality of the situation and best case scenarios when suggesting ways to resolve the challenge(s). This person's decision-making ability should not be influenced by partial preference for any roommate involved.

How do you find such a person? Even if you are unable to see eye-to-eye about your conflict, there may be someone that you both know and trust to help. Assess as to whether you will need more than one neutral party on board, but remember that the more people involved requires more standpoints to consider, longer discussions, and therefore a prolonged conclusion to your dispute.

## Anger management

Carmel Sullivan reminds us that “the secret that changed my life - freedom comes when you understand that what looks like anger directed at you is often *not about you* at all.”

Do any of these sound familiar?

- “We keep fighting about the same thing over and over and I’m ready to give up.”
- “We keep hitting the same wall, and she threatens to leave if I don’t do something about the situation.”
- “If I don’t do what she wants, I’m afraid she will leave me with two rents to pay.”
- “I’m starting to get bitter because she doesn’t listen to me or understand my feelings.”
- “They all voice their emotions, but I’m not allowed to have mine.”
- “I’m waiting for her to figure it out and leave.”

Read the story below.

A father went to pick up his son at school the day it released for a long holiday weekend. Prior to that, the child’s mother (recently divorced from this father) had notified the school that this father does not have permission to take the child out of school. When the father tried to take his son, the secretary told him that permission to do so was denied.

The father became furious. He started yelling and demanding that he be allowed to leave with his son. He would not calm down, and the head administrator had to come see what was going on. The office staff sought her approval to contact police to have the father removed. However, she chose to ask him to sit down with her.

In a low voice, she asked him to share why he was so upset. He too lowered his voice, and began to share that impeding him from access to his son was unjust. She said, “Your time with your son is so precious and important to you that it must be devastating when you are robbed of the chance to spend quality time together.” The man’s anger dissolved into tears, which fell from his deep sense of loss about the visitation and custody battle with his ex-wife.



The staff looked on in amazement. A man who only moments before was enraged, now wept with a woman he barely knew. After he left, a staff member asked the administrator how she was able to calm the father. She replied, “Compassionately listened to his pain.” She chose to use a communication technique called *mirroring*. She met his grief with calm and understanding.

Anger itself is a healthy, natural human emotion. It is “a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a perceived wrong.” Interestingly, anger is a defense mechanism, and often hides other emotions such as fear, loss, hurt and abandonment. You have experienced anger, and you will experience anger again. Acting out of anger, rage or revenge, however, is dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. It is a feeling that detrimentally impacts other CoAboding family members.

We learned how to be angry from those who influenced us most during our childhood and adolescent years. Sometimes, our examples were not the correct ones. It is each adult’s responsibility to know how to manage anger aptly. If you struggle with anger, first, be free in knowing it is not wrong to be angry. What is unethical is to harm other people, property, or yourself when you are angry. Second, learn how to process through your anger. You may shake or are unable to speak rationally when you seethe. Let the other party know that it is necessary for you to calm down and think about the situation before discussing it. Managing anger is a conscious effort to control self. It is wise to learn various methods of diffusing your anger, and putting what works for you into practice.

Other forms of anger include sarcasm, criticism, and withdrawing (disassociation or stonewalling). To be sarcastic is to be scornfully severe or taunting. Sarcastic responses are scathing and irreverent, and a dysfunctional attempt to position themselves advantageously in the present situation. One who uses sarcasm may be intimidated, yet hides behind indirect confrontation cloaked with an intention to appear humorous.

Criticism means to condemn, pass judgment upon, or find fault with another person. It is a common poison in relationships. Emily Bouchard asserts that you may have some complaints about the people you live with, but there’s a world of difference between a complaint and a criticism. While a complaint addresses a specific action or problem, criticism is an attack on the person’s character or qualities. Bouchard states

that the problem with criticism is that when it becomes persistent, it yields to the other far deadlier habits of contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

Are you about to complain or criticize? First, use a three-second rule. Before you utter a single word, be it a response to what someone says or a thought you have, wait for at least three seconds. This gives you time to decide (1) whether saying anything is even necessary, and (2) what the best verbal or behavioral response could be if one is necessary.

Voicing complaints about your house member's *behavior* is best. Remember that when it comes to expressing anger, people have varying opinions about the best way to do so. What seems an acceptable form to one person in the household may be seen as inappropriate by others.

When you listen with compassion, you decide to look past the surface emotion of the other person and into the cause of it to properly counter the behavior exhibited. Many people divulge very little of why they are, for instance, distraught. But, you can practice (1) observing body language, (2) remaining mindful of your own physiological status, and (3) resolve in helping the situation. Be willing to be disliked. Release the need to be accepted or approved by anyone else.

There was a young 25 year old member of a CoAboding family that was badly frightened as an infant. She is frightened by conflict, tends to take such personally, and chooses to leave the presence of a conflictive person. Her behavior carries her back to the time she was a helpless infant, unable to speak or defend herself. She retreats into an invisible shell, where she refuses to communicate at all.

Are you someone who escapes from anger by going within yourself? Do you have someone in your household who withdraws completely in the face of anger? Have you noticed that some or all of the children disappear when conflicts arise?

Think of the most recent conflict you've had. Make two columns on a sheet of paper. On the left side, and to your best recollection, write what you felt the other person said or did to you. On the right side, try to determine why you think the person behaved in that manner. Start by peeling your observations like an onion, using what you know about her to develop your description.

Here is an illustration:

<p>Me:</p> <p>I remember that the last conflict we had stemmed from her disapproval of my toddler child finding her purse and taking everything out of it - yet again. She was highly agitated, saying she understood that he was “only a baby, but you need to control him.” She was hasty cleaning up her purse, then she stomped upstairs, ordered her child to come with her, and slammed her bedroom door.</p>	<p>Her:</p> <p>She definitely seems uncomfortable with anyone, including an innocent child, touching her purse without her express knowledge. She doesn’t mind when my son crawls all over her lap or curiously reaches for what’s in her hand. But her marriage ended because of domestic violence issues. She said one day her ex-husband rummaged through her purse and gym bag screaming accusations of betrayal at her. She may be protective of her new-found freedom to have something she can call her own and for someone to intrude upon that, including a toddler, may bring up bad memories and make her mad.</p>
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*Another person’s anger is about them, and not about you.* The situation that chafes her emotions is only a trigger. Angry conflict can be a double-edged treasure. The purse incident surfaced raw feelings and troubled, unhealed areas for the roommate. But it is an opportunity for her to recognize and face this to purge herself of these harmful sentiments and begin healing from the mayhem in her past. For the active listening mom, it is also a chance to grow because it is important for her to be fully present for her roommate, treating her with respect and love through her pain, and accepting what she is revealing about herself through her strong reaction to the purse episode. The mom’s capacity for patience, and perhaps other virtues, will increase as she continues to uphold her responsibilities as a good house-share member in the face of this conflict.

Steer clear from becoming a victim to another person’s anger. If you internalize her anger, or take her angry behavior personally, you risk becoming unnecessarily preoccupied and consumed by it. You are on the losing side of a power struggle, and you may even begin to believe that her anger is justified. To continue developing the relationship, the key is to understand why she’s angry, not excuse it.

Step back from the situation far enough to give her the room to take responsibility for her own emotions. When your children or house-share partners allow themselves to be angry in your presence, they are actually comfortable exposing their emotional position to you. This is a vulnerable place. Offer her a safe place to possibly begin restoration and react candidly with tactful wisdom and support.

## **Anger Assessment**

Do strong emotions cause you fright or cause you to take flight? Perhaps your child exploded in a temper tantrum when you turned the TV off for the night. Or your roommate snapped and bristled about the lack of grocery replenishment. Having a courageous mindset about the emotional outburst in front of you could very well transform the situation for the both of you.

How long does it take you to go from zero to ballistic? Do you often regret some of the things you say and how you say them, especially to those closest to you. You may be one who suppresses your true feelings until your conscience can't contain them anymore, and then you rage at the slightest prod. Become your own biggest encourager, and learn how to express your emotions in healthy and safe ways.

(Bouchard, [Byron Katie](#))

Journal your answers to the questions below. It's a good idea to come back and respond to these questions about every three months.

- How do you initially respond to conflict? Fight? Flight? Other?
- Do you stay at the site of conflict physically but mentally withdraw? Why?
- Do you attack when you become furious? Why?
- Are you judgmental, focusing on the irrationality of the person in front of you? What does this accomplish for you?
- Do consider yourself a victim or sink into self-pity?
- Do you become apologetic and a peacemaker after conflictive dispute?
- When you are in a confrontation, can you articulate words?



Now learn from the last conflict you can remember. Be honest with yourself, and answer the following:

- How old did I feel when I faced that conflict?
- What was happening around me, in my mind, to the other person?
- Do I remember what I was thinking? What was it?
- Did I learn anything from that conflict, then or now?
- What did I decide to believe about myself as a result of the experience? About the other person?
- In the past, how did I want the other person to treat me differently in a similar situation?
- What do I need to feel safe?
- What else comes to mind as I complete this exercise?
- How do I want to behave in the face of conflict?

### **Discharging harmful emotions**

Psychologists call the ability to openly express heavy emotions, like anger or grief, *discharging emotion*. It is an emotional release, and when done in a safe environment, allows the burdened individual to become liberated from issues and feelings that may have hindered healing or the ability to achieve a healthy emotional balance.

Even if your safe friend, relative, or counselor is not available, there are other ways to evoke discharge. Suppressing, or holding back your negative emotions, will cause them to accumulate and emit explosively. Choose, then, to write down your every thought while in the moment. Or you can engage in a physical activity such as running or gardening, and let your exact thoughts surface so that you can process them as discussed in previous passages.

## Beyond anger

Survey the conditions surrounding you and determine if you are in danger. Is the other person so angry that she will cause immediate damage to you, the children, or the shared house? Do *you* feel like you want to hurt the other person? From either standpoint, decide to act as an empowered adult and act with reason. Remove yourself and your children from any situation that threatens your safety and well-being. Remove yourself if you are the threat, and take into account that you will most likely regret becoming aggressive with another person. This is simple, sometimes not easy, but always necessary.

It is not advisable to attempt relationship-building with a personality that is rash. This is because imprudence cannot properly process good communication, nor can it connect to another on a personal level. You, your housemate, or both of you may need to seek professional help if you have already committed to CoAboding together and have encountered rage issues. You can find assistance within counseling sessions, recovery programs, and specialized classes.

You may have deeper anger issues if you:

- Constantly argue, defend yourself, or withdraw from conflict resolution
- Formulate thoughts based solely on your own perceptions, and without validating facts or considering other aspects
- Think irrationally, perpetual use of terms such as “always” or “never”
- Have difficulty controlling your body or destructive behavior

Take some time now to explore what you consider to be appropriate versus inappropriate ways to express anger. Make three columns on a sheet of paper:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
List all the ways in which people can express anger (right or wrong in your opinion)	Now determine if you believe whether each of these ways are indeed right (R) or wrong (W)	Have you ever expressed anger in these ways? Next to each item, put yes (Y) or no (N). Then note if each type of expression resolved the conflict you faced?



Can you relate to the story below?

My roommate's three-year-old daughter was playing at my feet while I was working in my home office one day. She left one of her battery-operated toys under my chair and went to do something else. As I continued to work, the toy began to make noise. I got irritated and frustrated with her, and told her my office was not her playroom. I was clearly annoyed, gesturing to all the trinkets that she'd left all over the floor in the previous hours.

She began to cry, grabbed up the noisy thing, and ran for her mother. My vexation shifted to sadness and disappointment in myself. I was so involved in my task, which wasn't even a major priority, that I missed the chance to spend even a few moments to engage my little house-share family member. Why was the need for my space to be tidy and kid-free more important than taking time to connect with her?

Then I remembered how meticulous my mom was about my childhood home. There was a place for everything. The more stressed she was about something, the more she would focus on cleaning. The day I encountered the noisy toy, I was stressed about moving to a new state and far away from my own family.

## **The good news**

At anytime, you can interrupt your own negative response. You do have that ability. Even if you make the mistake of responding inappropriately, you can make the decision to apologize and start over. Being aware of your emotions, therefore understanding yourself, can help you efficaciously communicate with consistency and compassion.

## **Conflict and Anger Control Techniques**

### *Breathing*

When you notice that an external stimulus (for instance another's behavior or undesirable circumstance) triggers your emotional response, breathe. Immediately cease whichever activity you are doing and inhale deeply and exhale slowly. Then identify your feelings.

Keep breathing.

Move inside yourself and think through why you are responding in resentment. Be your own investigator to find the root cause that reveals why your emotions want to ensue this power struggle.

Continue deep inhales, slow exhales. Keep breathing.

Repeat this until you are tranquil, and can speak and behave rationally.

#### *Focus on the MEANING, not the WORDS*

Be an active listener and totally hear the core message from the speaker. Do not get bogged down with which words she uses, but concentrate on the heart of all her words collectively. Remember that the other person is doing her best to express her hurts and frustration.

This is a good way to diffuse power struggles and potential arguments because you become solution-oriented (earnest search for clarity, and resolve) rather than problem-oriented (looking for what is amiss). Also, she appreciates your effort and sincere response to her trepidation.

#### *Visualization*

Olympic athletes and marathon champions have daily moments of visualization to enhance their performance and achieve their goals. Use this, in addition to other techniques that work for you, replace old habits of fear and anger by establishing fresh ones immersed in peace and determination.

Be still. Close your eyes. See yourself as you desire. How do you see yourself with your house-share family? Are you able to look other's in the eye and ask for what you need? Nothing is impossible.

## *Attitude of gratitude*

You'll remember that one of the "diseases of attitude" is complaining. When you complain, you focus on what is wrong, and you may influence others around you to do the same thing. By shifting your perspective to the good in all situations and people, you discover that your attitude dictates the outcome of any challenge or the progress of any relationship. It is a fabulous way to help create a loving, peaceful household.

Stretch yourself. Allow yourself to feel genuinely grateful through a negative experience. Use what you've learned as a calm active listener and push to see the opposite of the offense before you.

There can be many issues and episodes that crawl under our skin during the course of a single day. For you, it may be the shoes left in the entryway. Your housemate may cringe when the dog is not walked. The loud evening traffic may drive the kids bonkers. But instead of moaning at your sink full of dirty dishes, spend a moment grateful that you have dishes. Better yet that you can afford the dish detergent, the light bill, and the water bill to even wash the dishes. Still yet, you have a nice roof over your head and food to put on those dishes! Are you grateful that you can stand on your healthy legs and put those plates in the your dishwasher?

It is amazing how quickly you will realize the true gifts in your life. Notice that your energy shifts from dread to anticipation.

### ***Try This***

At the end of each day, preferably right around your bedtime, take time to review your day. Inventory the day's events and consciously find all the blessings, opportunities, and lessons learned. Take some time to be grateful about these things. Smile about them. Cherish them. This exercise helps refuel you for the next day's agenda.

Take this a step further. Many say prayers of gratitude when something wonderful, special, miraculous, surprising, or timely happens. Be grateful in *every* moment throughout the day, especially when conflict broaches. You will become more

agile in diverse situations, and be able to constructively interact with more personality types. This is because you will be able to connect and communicate from an outlook of success rather than one of emotional volatility.

To illustrate, imagine that your roommate's teenage son storms in the house and makes a snide remark at you. If you first stop, then become aware in your emotions, and have appreciation that he is home safely, you will be able to adjudicate if his behavior disturbs you and why, and why he has chosen to act as he has.

However, if your reaction is defensive thinking, antagonistically questioning his treatment towards you, and retaliating with your own verbal and physical gestures, deeper connection and healing is typically lost. You are both dissatisfied, misunderstood, and hurt. Please note that his behavior is not acceptable. But since you can only control your own actions, it is your attitude that will make the difference in your overall experience with him.

### ***Think About It***

Answer the following honestly. Mull over the questions in your mind, or write out your answers in your journal.

1. What kind of results have you gotten from complaining?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think you may lose if you choose to be grateful rather than complain?

## **YOUR OTHER RELATIONSHIPS**

You and your roommate(s) should discuss how your relatives (like Grammy and Aunt Celia) and friends (like the other soccer moms and sorority sisters) may impact your *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> lifestyle. Hopefully, they will add to the harmony you are working so diligently to form. But also be certain to discuss the impact that all your other significant relationships may have on your shared household and set any necessary boundaries (and perhaps rules) in order to protect each family member. Other people may include,

but are not limited to:

- Ex-spouses, children's fathers
- Boyfriends, dates
- Relatives, friends who have a tendency to take more than give
- New neighbors

# Kids Will Be Kids

## Children's issues & CoAboding

*"They are very sibling-like...one minute they love each other. The next, they can't stand each other."*

~ [Alison](#), Atlanta GA

### Children and change

Most children like routine. Adjusting to a new family structure, new residence, or new peers (let alone all of the above simultaneously) can be quite a test for many kids. Of course, each child is different and, obviously, his reaction to change will vary as well. Your son may be depressed for weeks after a best buddy moves away while your daughter adapts by keeping in touch but still makes new friends.

How your child handles life changes like death, divorce, and moving will depend on his temperament, personality, and your family's circumstances. He or she may become clingy, moody, irritable, angry, sad, anxious, afraid, less sociable than usual, or a combination of any of these. Younger children may regress or take a step backward in behavior. For example, your child may wet the bed again or go back to playing with toys she outgrew months ago. According to child psychologists, as children adjust, these negative behaviors typically tend to disappear.

### Helping your child deal with change

CoAboding moms can best help their offspring by staying aware of what their children are feeling and body language, and by acknowledging that their reactions are normal. You can talk with your child, in age appropriate terms, about what she is feeling. Be an active listener (see *Basic Communication* on page 18) and offer extra attention, compassion, and encouragement. More specific ways to prepare and support your kids through change:

- Simplify your schedule as much as possible to be physically and emotionally available for your child.
- Talk about what is happening and what it means for all house-sharing members. Spend equal or less time discussing cons as you do pros. Mention how hard it may be, how fun the new things will be, and what to expect next. Answer as many of your children's questions as you can.
- Acknowledge your child's worries and fears. Allow her to feel angry, sad, and confused during times of change. Empathize and identify with your her emotions, reassuring her that her feelings are normal and acceptable.
- Be proactive in familiarizing the kids with the forthcoming changes. Visit the school before the first day of class, show her the neighborhood online, or set play dates with your new housemate.
- Involve your child in decisions about the change. Let him decide how to arrange his bedroom furniture, or select his school supplies. Since kids tend to understand that they have no control over the major changes in their lives, involving them gives them a stronger sense of security.
- Help your child mark the occasion. Do something special to recognize the change. Make a keepsake book or plant a tree. Try to keep goodbyes light-hearted and brief.
- Maintain as many family routines as possible. Aim to keep other changes in daily activities to a minimum.

If your child was not able to accept transition in the past, she may have difficulty again and so needs extra support. Determine if your child needs to visit her school psychologist, guidance counselor, pediatrician, or other professional assistance. Also, clue in teachers or child care providers about the changes going on in your family life.

Children who live between the two homes of divorced parents may have extraordinary feelings of shame, guilt, loss, abandonment, rejection, and pain, and often times with the inability to fully express them. Keep in mind that because you have no

control over what happens at the other parent's home, you should consider making your time and home life as upbeat, nurturing, and effectual as possible.

Do your best to pin point your special needs child's responses to the changes. Focus on how well he understands what is going on. Ascertain suitable actions in order to address any level of discomfort or confusion he may experience. Bear in mind he perceives change as a crisis, which is important to bear in mind as you unearth the best coping remedies.

The other children in the home should be told (age appropriately) about the special needs. Coach them about how to relate to her, and even how to be of assistance to her or her mother. Bonding time between the special needs child and the other house children is unpredictable, but children are remarkable socializers. What is most important is that the CoAboding moms set a supportive climate in the home where every child feels included and valued.

## **Discipline**

When it comes to correcting children, do you need to be right? Do you feel as though you must be respected by them because they are the children and you are the mom? Maybe you think you must fight every battle with them because letting the issue go means letting a chance for them to develop character slip by. Does your contentment in your relationship with any of the house-share kids hinge on whether or not they act exactly as you expect? Are your adult demands really more important than those of the younger set?

Sometimes parents forget that kids need their own ideas, feelings, and thoughts expressed and recognized. Respect, the first brick in relationship building, is pertinent concerning kids, too. Adults should expect to give respect to children to earn their respect. You are the example, so they will learn how to respect you – from you.

Be liberated from needing the children to understand your perspectives. They think like children, not like adults. Do your best to be aware of your own responses to their rebellion, power-struggling, and conflicts, and process through your negative responses to their adverse behavior in private.



Another challenge for house-sharing families is parenting beliefs and skills. You should have discussed this matter prior to moving in, and there should be cohesion as it relates to discipline. You could already have identical values, but you should adapt disciplinary measures suitable for each juvenile personality type in the house and befitting the offense. Many parents are uncomfortable about another adult correcting their children, and if this is how you feel, make certain your housemate understands your wishes for dealing with your child when you are not present. Other moms define or set limits as to how much the other parent can correct her own child. Many appreciate that another grown-up is available for their kids, especially if they must be at work or tend to other obligations.

### ***Think About It***

Consider the scenarios below. Do you agree (A) or disagree (D) with the discipline described? Why or why not?

1. You lecture your son about his dirty dishes in the sink.
2. Your housemate punishes her daughter for talking back and being disrespectful.
3. You bite your tongue as her son curses at you.
4. She tells you that you should ground your child for not calling when he was out past curfew.
5. Do you discipline your children differently than your housemate? If so, in what ways?
6. In what ways do you both discipline similarly?

Remember to show *all* the house kids your love, appreciation, and approval for who they are no matter what they may say or do. Be willing to give an abundance of what you ideally would like from them, but do not expect or demand it. When children do esteem you, it is rewarding and should be treasured.

### **Quality time**

CoAboding families grow best when they include one-to-one time. One-to-one time means that the moms should have some recreational time alone together. Also, children need reliable time alone with their own parent, without the other house parent(s). If possible, schedule some low-key time alone with your housemate's children for more chances to get to better acquainted and interface.

### ***Think About It***

1. Do you have apprehensions about relating to your children? Your housemate's children? List your concerns about your relationship with the *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> kids.

2. Circle the response closest to the truth for you.

a. When one of the kids is angry or upset with me, something is wrong.

True or False

b. I need my roommate's kid(s) to like me. True or False

When a child is angry at you, it actually reveals that she trusts you enough to be real and honest in your presence. Chances are you are relating well with her, even if it doesn't seem like it at times.

If you can be willing to be disliked, then you can drain the need for approval. When you are not controlled by anyone else's opinion of you, you are free to be you. Like yourself. Take care of yourself. Children (and adults) will be naturally drawn to you and will want to be with you simply because of who you are.



## Competition

Conflict amongst children is normal. It only becomes problematic when one child bullies or dominates another. On the surface, you have two or more kids who are “at war”, bickering constantly and never interacting peacefully. Although there may be many reasons for this, the standard theme is that one house-share child has somehow fallen victim to the other and believes she gets less love, attention, or rewards than the dominating child.

Ideally, a family unit is supposed to be a safe place where everyone feels loved and of equal status to the other members. In reality, some of the children may be jealous of each other. Kids have a right to their emotions, and there is probably little you will be able to do to stop competitiveness between them. You absolutely *can*, however, empower each of them with genuine regard and positive reinforcement. You and your housemate must learn how to administer such an environment and concurrently reduce the chaos between the younger house members.

Help the children learn to manage their negative feelings. The earlier children grasp emotional self-control, the better their communication skills as they grow into functioning adults. Demonstrate and teach them how to **T-H-I-N-K** before they speak. Is what they are about to say:

- True?
- Helpful?
- Inspiring?
- Necessary?
- Kind?

If the answer to any of these is “no”, they should not speak. (Antibullyotics.com)

Some ideas to minimize conflicts and broker peace in your home.

- *Hold both kids responsible for their behavior.* Decree a house rule that if fighting among the children occurs, *everybody* pays the consequences.
- *Introduce a “bickering table”.* Bickering is the constant, petty, verbal fighting among kids. Schedule between fifteen and thirty minutes each night for the arguing children to sit down and – yes - bicker. They cannot



touch each other, but they are *required* to bicker for the entire allotted time. It's surprising at how quickly they'll stop bickering, because they will feel silly trying to come up with things to argue about. They may even begin to laugh hysterically. But even if they run out of things with which to quarrel, make them stay at the table the whole time. Emphasize that if they don't bicker during the day, they won't have to go to the bickering table in the evening. This becomes a great motivator for kids to avoid squabbling with each other.

- *Stop refereeing your kids' fights.* As long as it's not a bullying situation, don't play referee. Don't become the judge of who's right or wrong. Don't try to decide who is the worst antagonist. Instead, inform them that there is no fighting in the house and of what the consequences for their behavior will be. Let them know that they must learn to walk away from each other and that if they are not willing to do that, they will both be held responsible for the consequences.
- *Defuse jealousy.* If one of the children is envious of the other, downplay it. Don't magnify the jealous comments or tête-à-tête, and make a habit of pointing out the children's good qualities. When they receive compliments from you, they experience your affection. This is called 'hypodermic affection', and it is an effective way to build up your child's confidence and decrease jealous feelings.
- *Remember to talk about how we are supposed to treat each other.* Pull out the house vision and mission statements, and have the children take turns reading them aloud. Then ask each child to rephrase what they have read to substantiate how well they truly understand them. Discuss what friendship is and what it means to help each other.
- *Model the behavior you are teaching them by supporting each other's parenting efforts.*



## Life Happens

Have you made contingency plans in case life happens? How does you or your housemate losing a job, being hospitalized, or becoming engaged to marry affect your CoAboding system? How will you recover or revamp the household expenses, duties, or child care arrangements?

Do you have emergency procedures in place? Have you thought about, and taught the children, what to do in case of a natural disaster? School incident? Home fire or burglary? Work or auto accident? It is wise to hope for the best and be prepared for any possibility.

Make [practical safety procedures](#) and financial preparations. Pick a place in the house, away from the children, to keep emergency cash on hand. You can open a savings account together, each contributing a certain amount each month. Be certain to generate a solid, mutual understanding about the cash or bank account's access and use.

Remember that as a *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> member, you have other fantastic house-sharing, parenting, and women's issues related advice and information at your fingertips. Click the [Resources](#) link on the [coabode.com](http://coabode.com) homepage, for extended resources.

## For More Inspiration...

The *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> house-sharing framework was created with your success in mind. Over the years, we have received a myriad of fabulous stories about how single mothers all over the country have gone after a better life for themselves - and their children – together.

### ***Alison & Sheila, Atlanta GA –***

In October 2011, the four of them made it official. Now the makeshift family eats breakfast together every morning. A few nights a week after the kids are put to bed, Sheila Hays and Alison Sherrill hang out in the den and chat or watch TV. [A]s often, they go to their separate rooms and relax. Occasionally, one of them goes out with friends, leaving the other in charge of the sleeping kids. Both kids spend weekends with their fathers, who are supportive of their ex-wives' living arrangements. Despite age and gender differences, [their children] Dorian and Reagan have bonded. "They are very sibling-like," says Sherrill. Alison can't remember exactly what her 4-year-old daughter Reagan was doing...

Finish reading their story [here](#).

### ***Danielle, Washington DC***

I was stressed. I was moving to a new town that I was ecstatic over, but everyone kept asking if I knew how expensive it was to live near Washington DC. I really didn't. Then I read about *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> in USA Today. I stayed up half the night during my first web visit reading people's profiles and imagining the possibilities. But even in all my hoping and dreaming, I never thought things would be THIS good. I met my roommate..."

Read the rest of [Danielle's testimonial](#).

## Looking for My Housemate

You already know that *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> is a national organization that provides its house-sharing venue to members in many cities around the United States for free. Our service is designed to allow mothers in need of housing to connect, meet, and together look for a place to house-share. Or moms who already own a home can look for a roommate.

The sooner you find each other, the sooner you can begin helping each other. Below describes the best way to search for moms in your area.

- From the [coabode.com](http://coabode.com) homepage, click the BECOME A MEMBER option to register and complete the profile. You can always edit your profile later by selecting MEMBER LOGIN and then EDIT MY PROFILE from the menu on the left.
- You will receive an email confirmation notice to verify your email address.
- Then go to MEMBER LOGIN.
- Click SEARCH MEMBERS. Enter your zip code and mile range preference. We recommend you choose at least the 30 mile radius because potential roommates may be willing to move to your neighborhood. It's also possible that you'll encounter new housing opportunities that you had not considered before.
- A list of moms' (by username) appears with key information points such as how much rent she is willing to contribute, how many children she has, and when she last updated her profile. Click on the username to read her profile. Take your time and review as many on the generated list that seem to fit the parameters for which you need.
- Choose the CONTACT option on the profile page in order to let the mom know you're interested in house-sharing with her.
- Fill in the email form. This is a private email system complete with your own *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> mailbox, which you can use to send and receive messages until you are ready to share your personal email address.

- When another *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> member contacts you, a notification is sent to your personal email address linking you to your *CoAbode*<sup>®</sup> mailbox. We recommend that you check your mailbox regularly, too. **Please** respond to all emails. You can choose COURTESY DECLINE if you feel the contacting mom does not seem compatible.

***You must be pro-active.*** Contact each mom that you feel may be compatible to you, whom you think could be a well-suited partner in both finding and establishing your shared home, as well as playing a positive role in the shared household. Your chances of finding a good match decrease if you wait for others to contact you. Any member found not using the service in good faith is immediately removed from *coabode.com* listings.



# Appendices



# The CoAbode<sup>®</sup>

## Extensive Interview Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a fantastic tool for you because it helps you organize the information you should want to know in order to make good decisions about your future house-sharing partner. It may also jog your memory about some important discussion you should have with the CoAbode<sup>®</sup> single moms you meet.

You decide how to use this instrument. You may decide that not every question we've suggested is important to you, so you won't use those. Perhaps you determine that you only want to ask some potential roommates specific questions below, and for others you'll bring up conversation about different questions from this same questionnaire. You can also go our website to complete this questionnaire and save it for future use.

### Daily Routine

#### **Do you work outside of the home?**

- No, I work from home.
- I work outside the home a few days a week.
- I work outside the home 5 days a week

#### **Comments (BOX)**

#### **What time do you get ready for work in the morning?**

- I have to get ready for work at 6 or earlier every morning.
- I have to get ready for work at 7 every morning.
- I have to get ready for work at 8 every morning.
- I work different times during the week.
- I do not work in the mornings.

#### **Comments**



### **How much are you at home?**

- I am at home most of the time.
- I am at home during the evenings but not usually during the day.
- I am not at home very much. I like to go out a lot.

### **Comments**

### **What is your childcare routine?**

Please select the statement that most applies to you.

- I am a full time mom. I look after my child all the time.
- My child is either at day care or school during the day and then I look after them in the evenings.
- My child is either at day care or school during the day and a few evenings a week they go to a child minders or a family member.
- My child is either at day care or school during the day and at a child minders or family members most evenings.

### **What are the bedtimes of your children?**

- I like my children to be in bed by 7pm
- I like my children to be in bed by 8pm
- I like my children to be in bed by 9pm
- I like my children to be in bed by 10pm
- My children do not have a set bedtime



## Comments

### How would you describe your views on cooking?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I really enjoy cooking. I like to make a home cooked meal every day.
- I enjoy cooking. I like to make a home cooked meal most days. However sometimes I like to go out to eat or get fast food.
- I don't like cooking very much and I don't always have the time for it. I try to make a home cooked meal a few times a week and rely on ready meals or fast food the other days.
- I really don't like cooking and I don't have the time for it. I rarely make a home cooked meal and I rely on ready meals or fast food most days.

## Comments

## Personal

### How would you describe your views on meeting new people?

- I love meeting new people. I am happiest when I am in a big group of people.
- I like meeting new people but I prefer to be with people I already know. I am happiest when I am spending time with a large group of friends.
- I don't particularly like meeting new people. I am happiest when I am spending time with a few friends who I know very well.
- I don't like meeting new people. I am happiest being on my own.



## Comments

### How would you describe your disposition?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I like things to be done a certain way and I am not happy when they are done differently. My way is usually best.
  - I like things to be done a certain way but I don't mind too much when they are done differently. I am open to new ideas and suggestions.
  - I don't have a certain way I like things to be done. As long as they get done I am happy.
- 
- I would consider myself an optimist. I generally have a positive outlook on life.
  - I would consider myself a pessimist. I generally have a negative outlook on life.
  - I can be both an optimist and a pessimist.
- 
- I can be quite irritable. Certain things that people do can really annoy me.
  - Sometimes I can be irritable. Occasionally certain things that people do can annoy me.
  - I'm rarely irritable. It takes a lot for someone to annoy me.

## Comments

### How would you describe your sense of humor?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.



- I love to laugh. I find most things funny and can easily laugh at myself.
- I have a specific sense of humor. I only find certain things funny.
- I don't find many things funny.

## Comments

### How would you describe your anger levels?

- I can be a very angry person. When I have a problem with someone or something I find it very hard to communicate and I can easily lose my temper and start shouting.
- I can sometimes be an angry person. When I have a problem with someone or something I don't always find it easy to communicate. But most of the time I can talk about it without losing my temper.
- I am not an angry person at all. If I have a problem with someone or something I find it very easy to communicate and solve the problem.

## Comments

### How would you describe your views on being healthy?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- Being healthy is very important to me. I like to eat healthy food and take regular exercise. There are certain foods I will not eat like fast food or ..... I like to exercise at least once or twice a week.
- Being healthy is important to me. I like to eat healthy food most of the time, I will occasionally eat junk food. I like to exercise at least once every two weeks.
- Being healthy is not very important to me. I rarely eat healthy food and I do not exercise very often.
- Being healthy is not important to me. I never eat healthy food and I never exercise.



## Comments

### How would you describe your political views?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I am very interested in politics and I judge others on their political views.
- I have an interest in politics but other people's political views do not affect my opinion of them.
- I have no interest in politics.

## Comments

### How would you describe your religious views?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I am a religious person and would rather be around people of the same religion.
- I am a religious person but I have no problem with people from different religions.
- I am not a religious person but I have no problem with people who are religious.
- I am not a religious person and would rather be around people who are not religious.

## Comments



## Children

**Does your child/children have any special needs?**

- Yes
- No

*If you answered No, please skip the next question.*

**Comments**

**What special needs does your child have?**

.....

**Does your child have any allergies?**

- Yes
- No

**Comments**





### **How would you describe your child?**

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- Outgoing, loud, confident, social.
- Shy, quiet, self conscious, prefers to be alone.
- My child is a combination of the above answers.

### **Comments**

### **How would you describe your relationship with your child?**

- Very easy.
- Easy most of the time.
- Can be difficult.
- Very difficult.

### **Comments**

### **How does your child express anger?**

- Talk about it.
- Sulk.
- Cry.
- Scream and shout.
- Hit people or throw objects around.

### **Comments**



## How would you describe your views on child discipline?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I believe that disciplining my child is very important. I set a lot of rules and boundaries that need to be adhered to and if they are not I discipline my child fully.
- I believe that disciplining my child is important. I have rules and boundaries but I believe that children need some freedom to make mistakes and learn from them.
- I do not believe in disciplining my child. I believe that disciplining children doesn't stop them from behaving badly it makes them try to avoid getting caught.

### Comments

## Which methods do you use to discipline your child?

Please select all that are applicable.

- Explaining & discussion. If my child is behaving badly I explain why the behavior is wrong and then we discuss the issue.
- Ignoring. If my child is behaving badly I tell them I will not speak to them until they have stopped the bad behavior.
- Confiscations. If my child is behaving badly I confiscate toys or take away television privileges.
- Timeouts. If my child is behaving badly I make him/her go to the time out location until they have calmed down.
- Spanking. If my child is behaving very badly I will spank them.

### Comments



### **If you have more than one child, is there any sibling rivalry?**

- There is a lot of sibling rivalry. They tend to argue and fight over most things.
- There is some sibling rivalry but for the most part they get along well.
- There is no sibling rivalry. They are very close and supportive of each other.

## **Shared Living**

### **What is your current living situation?**

- Living alone.
- Living with a partner.
- Living with roommates.
- Living with family.

### **Comments**

### **What is your ideal living situation?**

- Living on my own.
- Living with someone that is out of the house most of the time and we do things separately.
- Living with someone that is out of the house during the day but usually at home in the evenings and we can share tasks such as cooking and cleaning.
- Living with someone that is at home quite a lot of the time and we can help each other with all the household jobs and childcare etc.



**Have you ever had roommates before?**

- Yes
- No

*If you answered No, please skip the next question.*

**What were your experiences of living with a roommate?**

- Excellent.
- Good.
- Average.
- Poor.
- Very Poor.

**Comments**

**Would you want a separate phone line?**

- Yes
- No

**Do you allow pets and do you have a pet?**



- I have a pet.
- I do not have a pet but I would be happy to live with someone that does have one.
- I do not have a pet and do not want to live with someone that has one.

### **Comments**

### **How would you describe your views on decorating?**

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I have a very particular decorating style and I am not happy living somewhere that doesn't reflect my style.
- I like a certain style of decorating and would prefer to live somewhere that reflects my style but I would be ok living somewhere that didn't.
- I am not interested in decorating. I am happy to live with any style of decorating.

### **Comments**

### **Do you have any bad habits?**

- I have quite a lot of bad habits.
- I have a few bad habits.
- I don't have any bad habits.

### **Comments**



## How would you describe views on neatness?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I am an incredibly neat person. I like to vacuum and clean every day. I do the dishes immediately and like everything to be put back in its place. I cannot live in a house that is not immaculate.
- I am a neat person. I like to vacuum and clean at least once or twice a week. I sometimes leave dishes in the sink but will usually do them that day. I like to live in a clean and tidy house.
- I am not a very neat person. I vacuum and clean when I notice that things have started to get dirty. I sometimes leave the dishes for days. I am not particularly concerned about the cleanliness of the house I live in, however when it gets too dirty or messy I do clean up.
- I am a messy person. I rarely vacuum or clean and will only do dishes when I run out of clean ones. I can happily live in a dirty and untidy house.

## Comments

## How would you describe your views on sharing within the house?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I am happy to share everything; food, toiletries, cleaning supplies etc.
- I am happy to share most things. But I would rather not share food.
- There are some things that I like to share and some things that I do not. I would rather not share food or toiletries.
- There are few things that I like to share; cleaning supplies and household items.
- I would rather everyone used their own things.



## Comments

## Visitors

### How often do you have visitors?

Please select the statement that most applies to you.

- I often have visitors. They visit for the day and also stay overnight.
- I often have visitors. They usually visit for the day.
- I sometimes have visitors. They visit for the day and stay overnight.
- I sometimes have visitors. They usually visit for the day.
- I rarely have visitors.

## Comments

### Are you currently involved with anyone who will be a regular overnight guest?

- Yes
- No

## Comments

### How do you feel about visitors coming to the house?



- I am happy to have visitors over at any time, whether I already know them or not.
- I would like to be informed of any visitors that are coming over and I would prefer it if I knew them already.
- I do not like visitors and would prefer that there weren't many.

### **Comments**

### **Are you happy having men in the home?**

- Yes
- No

### **Comments**

### **How often does your child's other parent see them?**

- More than once a week.
- Once a week.
- Once every 2 weeks.
- Once a month.
- A few times a year.
- Never.

### **Comments**

### **What is your relationship with the other parent?**





- Excellent.
- Good.
- Average.
- Poor.
- Very poor.

### **Comments**

**How often do your children have sleepovers or play dates in the home?**

- More than once a week.
- Once a week.
- Once every two weeks.
- Once a month.
- Rarely.
- Never.

### **Comments**

### Interests

**What do you enjoy doing in your free time?**

- Watching TV.
- Reading.
- Listening to music.
- Surfing the internet or playing computer games.
- Socializing.
- Playing/watching sport.
- Hobbies.



## Comments

### How much TV do you watch?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- I watch a lot of TV. I am very particular about what I watch and do not like watching something I don't enjoy.
- I watch a lot of TV. I am happy to watch pretty much anything.
- I watch a moderate amount of TV. I have certain shows that I watch each week and that is it.
- I do not watch much TV. I would prefer if it wasn't on.

## Comments

### How much TV do you allow your child to watch?

Please select the statement that you most agree with.

- My child is allowed to watch TV as often as they like for as long as they like.
- My child is allowed to watch TV whenever they want but as long as it is for a reasonable amount of time. If it has been too long I will tell them to stop.
- My child is only allowed to watch TV for a certain number of hours a day.
- My child isn't allowed to watch TV except on rare occasions.

## Comments

### What type of music do you like to listen to?



- I do not like listening to music. I would prefer silence.
- I only like certain types of music and will not listen to it if I don't like it.
- I have favorite types of music that I would prefer to listen to but I am open to other types of music.
- I like all types of music and am happy to listen to anything.

## **Comments**

### **How often is your child allowed to go on the computer and internet?**

- My child is allowed to go on the computer and internet whenever they like, for as long as they like and do whatever they like.
- If it is not for homework my child has set time limits they can be on the computer and internet for. I like to know what games they are playing or what websites they are visiting.
- My child is allowed on the computer and internet only to do homework and school related tasks.

## **Comments**

### **Where do you like to socialize?**

- I like going to bars or clubs with friends.
- I like going to the movies or out to eat with friends.
- I like to have friends round for dinner parties.
- I like to have friends round for drinks.

## **Comments**



## How often do you drink alcohol?

- Everyday.
- A few times a week.
- Once a week.
- Once every 2 weeks.
- Once a month.
- Rarely.
- Never.

## Additional Comments



# CoAbode<sup>®</sup> Roommate Agreement (1)

This agreement, made this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20 \_\_\_\_, is made by and between:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(List all roommates)

\_\_\_\_\_  
The parties above have signed a lease for the following address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, for a term lasting from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
Month & Day Year (00/00/0000) (00/00/0000)

(a copy of which is attached to this document), and plan to reside at this address.

A security or damage deposit in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ was paid to

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Company or individual name, City & State)

The parties wish to share the responsibilities of living together, with their respective children, at this address.

## THEREFORE, IT IS AGREED THAT:

Each of the parties agree to follow the rules and conditions set forth on the attached agreement. Each of the parties agree to pay one \_\_\_\_ (1/\_\_\_\_) of the following expenses incurred in relation to the leased premises (check all that apply):

MONTHLY EXPENSE TYPE	
Water	
Gas	
Food	
Electricity	
Heat	
Cable/Satellite TV	
Phone	
Internet	
Realtor's Fees	
Property Maintenance	
Other:	



If any of the parties pays more than one \_\_\_\_\_ (1/\_\_\_\_) share, the other party/parties agree(s) to reimburse the first party within \_\_\_\_\_ days from the date of payment.

Each party agrees to pay for long distance phone calls she makes.

Each party agrees that one \_\_\_\_\_ (1/\_\_\_\_) of the damage/security deposit is the property of each of the parties.

Each housemate agrees to remain a resident of the premises during the term of the lease, or to continue to pay her share of the rent during the term, unless:

A) The exiting party, at her own expense, locates a tenant to sublet her share, the new tenant being acceptable to the other party/parties in this agreement, and

B) Written consent to sublet is obtained from the owner or manager of the premises

Repairs or improvements to the premises, the cost of which are to be shared by the parties, in excess of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, shall be approved by all in advance.

If pets are permitted under this lease, each pet owner shall be solely responsible for all pet care (including food, veterinarian costs) and damages caused by her pet. This includes, but is not limited to, damages to furniture, carpeting, walls, doors, vehicles, and lawn/garden.

Each roommate demonstrates that they have read, understood, and comply herein by her signature below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date



# CoAbode<sup>®</sup> Roommate Agreement (2)

This agreement made on \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_ is a contract between: \_\_\_\_\_ (Month, day)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Name Name  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Name Name

in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.  
City, County State

I understand that I am entering into a legally binding agreement with my roommate(s). I also understand that we, together, and I, as an individual, are responsible to our landlord, to all companies that service our residence, and to each other.

## TERM OR PERIOD OF AGREEMENT

This agreement is to begin on \_\_\_\_\_ for a term lasting until \_\_\_\_\_  
Month, day, year

\_\_\_\_\_. I fully understand and accept the rules and responsibilities of \_\_\_\_\_  
Month, day, year

this agreement.

## SECURITY DEPOSIT

This security deposit for the dwelling is \$\_\_\_\_\_. My share amounts to \$\_\_\_\_\_. I understand that this amount will be returned to me less the amount deducted by the landlord for unpaid rent, and/or damages. I accept responsibility for damages that I, my pet, or my visitors cause, and I will reimburse my roommate(s) for the part of their security deposit withheld for those damages.

## RENT

The total rent for the dwelling, according to the terms of the lease agreement with our landlord, is \$\_\_\_\_\_ per month. I agree to pay 1/\_\_\_\_ of the monthly rent. This amounts to \$\_\_\_\_\_. The total amount my roommate(s) and I are liable for over the period of the lease is \$\_\_\_\_\_, of which my share is \$\_\_\_\_\_. I understand that we, together, and I, as an individual, are responsible to our landlord for the total rent for the term of the agreement.



**UTILITIES**

I agree to pay 1/\_\_\_\_\_ of the deposits and/or hook-up charges for all utilities.

I agree to pay 1/\_\_\_\_\_ of the monthly utility bills except telephone.

I agree to pay 1/\_\_\_\_\_ of the monthly telephone service charges, plus all long distance calls which I make including taxes and surcharges.

I agree to pay as follows for any additional utilities:

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**MOVING OUT**

If, for whatever reason, I move out of the dwelling, I realize it is primarily my responsibility to find a replacement. I agree to look for a replacement housemate that is acceptable to my present roommate(s). If one of my roommates moves out, I will also attempt to find a replacement roommate. I understand the need to be reasonable in accepting a replacement roommate. If I move out of the dwelling and a replacement roommate has not been found, I realize that I am still legally responsible to my roommates for paying my share of the rent and utility bills.

I understand that I, as an individual, can be held responsible by my landlord and/or the utility companies for up to the entire rent or utility account balance due if my roommate(s) fail to fulfill their part of this agreement.

**OTHER TERMS**

**Re: Food/Shopping**

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**Re: Cleanliness/cleaning responsibilities**

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**Re: Privacy**

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**Re: Sharing personal items**

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**Re: Noise, quiet/homework times**

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**Re: Smoking, drinking, drug use**

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**Re: Parties, entertaining on the premises**

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**Re: Overnight guests**

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**Re: Pets**

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**ADDITIONAL REMARKS**

Attach additional sheets if necessary to address other issues such as security measures, purchasing or renting furniture, appliances, etc.

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As a party of this agreement, I realize that I, as well as each of my roommates and their respective children, have equal rights to use the space (residence) and facilities (community pool, clubhouse, playground) with the exception of the areas we have designated as each one's private space. This agreement is intended to promote harmony between roommates by clarifying the expectations and responsibilities of each roommate to the others bound by this contract.

All obligations under this contract are to be governed in accordance to the laws of

---

City County State

To be effective, it is not necessary to witness or notarize this agreement. Each roommate should sign below and receive an original copy.

The parties have executed this agreement on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.  
Month, day

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Roommate signature & date

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Roommate signature & date

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Roommate signature & date

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Roommate signature & date



# CoAbode<sup>®</sup> Roommate Agreement (3)

## House-sharing Bill Of Rights

We roommates, in order to establish a harmonious house-share, do declare and install that each of us has the right to:

1. Live (work, rest, play) free from unreasonable disturbance from pets, children, guests, or other roommates
2. Expect that all roommates will respect the others' personal belongings
3. A clean environment
4. Continuous free access to one's personal space
5. Expect and attain personal privacy
6. Host guests while respecting the rights of roommates and other community residents
7. Be free from intentional physical, verbal, and/or emotional intimidation or harm

This Bill of Rights is a common sense statement and give us permission to not only ask for behavior that we need from each other, but also serve as a general guideline that roommates can use to act responsibly.

### Roommate Agreement

As roommates, we realize that \_\_\_\_\_ (insert address) will be our home from \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_. In order to maintain harmony, we have discussed and reached decisions on the issues described below. Therefore, we have decided that:

**The times we designate as quiet /children's homework times are:**

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**The times of the day** (specify week days, weekends) **we designate as noisy** (visitors, TV, music, playing indoors or outdoors) **are:**

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**Guests are welcome during the following hours and days :**

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**Overnight guests** (specify relatives, friends, dating partners) **are welcome under the following conditions and on the following days/nights:**

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**Below are the roommates and her respective hours in which she sleeps late** (after am/pm) **or early** (before am/pm), **enters or leaves the home late** (after am/pm) **or early** (before am/pm), **or must work in/around the house late** (after am/pm) **or early** (before am/pm).

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**Considering the above schedule, roommates are expected to:**

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**Rules about house key sharing and locking the door:**

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**When opening windows/doors** (for air circulation) **and running the air conditioner or heat:**

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**Regarding lending out and borrowing personal items** (i.e. toiletries, clothes, supplies, computers, etc.):

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**For using/caring for the large items** (i.e. TV, stereo, fish tanks, microwave, fridge):

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**For purchasing/sharing of food, we will:**

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**Our personal wall space can be used for and decorated:**

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**Having a single landline with call-waiting, acceptable and restricted ways to use it are:**

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**About listening to and erasing messages on the answering machine or voicemail:**

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**The schedule for house cleaning, recycling/garbage disposal, laundry, lawn care, and other household maintenance tasks is:**

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**Regarding habits about our own personal hygiene (showers, etc.) and bathroom use:**

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**About odors (incense, perfumes, air fresheners, litter boxes, etc.):**

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**About personal habits (smoking, meditation/prayer, alcohol consumption, drug use, etc.):**

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**Regarding uses and décor for the household common areas:**

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**Other:**

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Communication is the key to getting along as roommates. A positive communication system is one that involves being honest with each other without being harsh or rude. Being open and allowing the other to share her frustrations in a respectful manner shall be our normal standard. Re-negotiating the above items when needed is a right granted to all roommates. Each mom is expected to exhibit behavior that produces peace for all household adults and children living there.

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Roommate signature and date

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Roommate signature and date

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Roommate signature and date



# Media Gallery

Internet	
Homepage	<a href="http://coabode.com">coabode.com</a>
Blog	<a href="#">You're Not Doing This Alone!</a>
Slide Presentation	<a href="#">CoAbode Single Mothers Home-Sharing</a>
Social Media	
Facebook	<a href="https://facebook.com/CoAbode">facebook.com/CoAbode</a>
Twitter	<a href="#">@coabode</a>
Television	
<a href="#">ABC 7</a> (local)	Good Morning America (national)
<a href="#">Inside Edition</a> (national)	<a href="#">KTLA 5</a> (local)
<a href="#">NBC 4</a> (local)	<a href="#">The Early Show</a> (national)
Radio	
<a href="#">NPR</a>	
Books	
Chicken Soup for the Single Parent Soul	
Articles (Print & electronic)	
<a href="#">Ladies' Home Journal</a>	<a href="#">TIME</a>
<a href="#">USA Today</a>	<a href="#">Examiner.com</a>
<a href="#">Disney's babble.com</a>	Parent
FitPregnancy	<a href="#">Awareness Magazine</a>
CNN.com	DivorceMagazine.com
<a href="#">SingleMom.com</a>	<a href="#">NYMetroParents.com</a>
<a href="#">About.com Single Parents</a>	<a href="#">Minnesota Women's Press</a>
<a href="#">iheartmoms.com</a>	<a href="#">families.com</a>

CoAbode® has been featured in numerous multimedia venues, of which this is the short list. Please check the [Press Room](#) for a complete directory of news coverage.



# Supplement

This eBook was researched and compiled independently by CoAbode, Inc. Contact the organization if you have questions about any of the information contained within the pages of ***You're Not Doing This Alone!***

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