How to tell a nosy roommate to step off

Hi Alice,

I'm a junior in college, and I live in a suite with five other girls. We are all best friends, except for one girl. None of us like her because she says anything that pops into her head (she told one of my suitemates, who is battling an eating disorder, that she looked pregnant), and she is constantly trying to find out gossip about us. After a night of fun, she will come into all of our rooms, and pump us for info (she hasn't gone out with us yet this year). She thrives on knowing gossip about anyone and everyone. My question is: how can we tell her to mind her own business and shut her mouth? Also: how can we tell her that we don't want her to live with us next year? Thanks for your help!

?A student who has had enough!

Answer

Dear A student who has had enough!,

What you and your suitemates are struggling with is likely to sound familiar to many. Living in close quarters, perhaps with someone you don't know very well, can cause all kinds of stresses and communication breakdowns. In thinking about how to remedy your situation, there are a few things to consider.

The cohabiter in question may simply be annoying, without much chance for change, but is there anything about the way you and your best friends are acting that might be exacerbating your suitemate's nosiness? Your suitemate's behavior could be motivated by all kinds of things. Perhaps one of them is her disappointment at recognizing that she is not counted among your group of best friends. Imagine how lonely and frustrating it might feel to always be excluded. Sometimes it can be difficult to hide when we feel left out, and this might be part of the reason behind her over-eagerness to hear everything she missed.

There also may be ways in which you and your best friends act clique-y ? creating a situation in which your suitemate's gotta beg for information or say rude things so as to act as though she really doesn't like you. Showing some interest in her life and picking some comfortable topics to talk with her about might go a long way in satiating her thirst for information and to be involved. It's difficult and draining, but if you and your friends make a concerted, honest effort to be more inclusive of your suitemate, perhaps she will lay off a bit.

What bothers you the most about your suitemate's behavior? Her desire to be included in your
activities? Her tendency to gossip? Comments she's made that seem tactless? Of course, the responsibility doesn't lie completely with you. Your suitemate also needs to adjust her behavior. How do you tell her this? Coming right out and reading her a laundry list of her annoying behaviors probably won't be very effective. For some people, simple, consistent messages typically work. For example, one of you can take her aside and quietly explain, in private, that it hurts you to hear her say things about your friend and that you'd really appreciate it if she'd try to be more understanding. The key here is being clear and yet sensitive.

If the more subtle approaches are ineffective, you may need to sit down with her and simply explain how her comments and behavior make you feel. While it may be tempting, avoid the urge to confront your suitemate all together, ranting about all the things she's said that piss you and your friends off. Make sure to give her a chance to respond, and keep an open mind? she may have no idea that she's getting on your nerves. Also, make sure you don't model gossiping by disappearing into one of your rooms, without her, and whispering about all of her personality flaws.

What would you like to see happen for the remaining time left this year... and next year? Hopefully talking with your suitemate will help make the way for a more comfortable living situation for the rest of the year. If things are still prickly, your RA (resident advisor) or other Residential Life staff can help you strategize and develop some options. You may choose to have a mediated discussion, explore schedule adjustments that would minimize contact, or try to ignore what you find intrusive and learn to let it slide. If, when it comes time to pick housing for next year, you still feel that living with her won't work, it's important to be honest about this. It's possible that she'll be thinking the same thing... but maybe not. You can use the same direct, honest, sensitive approach as explored above to have a discussion. While her feelings may be hurt, you can feel good knowing that you've been tactful and true to your own needs.

Good luck!

Alice!

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