
Dear Alice,

This is more of a coping question. I am a first-year who applied for a single room over the summer and was denied. I figured that everything would be okay nevertheless. I tried to look at the situation as a character-builder. Well, that is not the case. My roommate is very depressed. I talked to the RA on my floor, but she didn't take any action, except to talk with her. Unfortunately, my roommate is so ashamed of what's happening that she denied the facts, and the RA believed her. No one except me has realized yet that she is sleeping most of the day and all of the night, and that it is indeed a real problem. I have expressed my concern to her and encouraged her to go to counseling services. She went a couple of times and then started canceling appointments left and right. I have worried about her, but I have no backup whatsoever, so there is really nothing I can do to help at this point. We get along relatively well otherwise.

Right now, the concern I have is that her depression is pulling me down, too. I literally have not been alone anywhere for more than two to three minutes in weeks. I wanted a single because it's a requirement that I spend some time by myself, and I'm going crazy these days. The lights are always out in the room, and I've noticed that I'm sleeping more than usual myself as the situation has progressed. Also, I am having to deal with some personal issues of my own this semester, and I simply don't have the energy to take care of someone else who desperately wishes that I would do so. Any ideas would be greatly appreciated.

?Wish I Were a Loner

Answer

Dear Wish I Were a Loner,

There seems to be two levels to your problem: (1) getting help for your roommate, and (2) getting relief and support for your self. Your concerns are certainly legitimate, and the events you've described call for more action than brief conversations, or ones that don't go anywhere.

You said that you spoke with the resident adviser (RA)? how about the residence hall director (RD) or residence life coordinator (RLC)? Are there any other friends, hall mates, advisors, deans, or relatives of your roommate who could help out? people whom your roommate respects and trusts, and who might even accompany her to resources on- or off-campus?
This might help your roommate feel supported while taking some of the onus off of you. You may also want to find someone to serve as an outlet for your own emotions in dealing with your roommate, and a structure that will work so that you can take care of yourself, and get some alone time soon.

You may want to try calling your school's counseling service just to get their advice on what to do in this tough situation? they might have suggestions for what you could say to your roommate; words that might encourage her to get the help she needs. They also may be able to provide you with some strategies for coping with your roommate and dealing with your own personal issues.

There are several other options that you might want to consider for getting help for your roommate such as: your campus's peer support and referral service/hotline, a mental health hotline, or your school's health and counseling service. Go Ask Alice! is another resource, particularly Friend is depressed [2] in Alice's Emotional Health archive [3].

Whether or not your roommate decides to take action on her mental health, you can ask her to come to an agreement with you about having alone time in your room. Maybe you can trade off evenings alone, or schedule a block of time when you know she'll be at class or the library. It's perfectly reasonable to need down time; both of you may benefit from an agreement that allows each of you to be alone sometimes, and also encourages each of you to be out of the room at other times. When you approach this conversation, it may be most effective to use 'I' statements, like 'I am the kind of person who needs some alone time, and it would be helpful to me to have time alone in the room?'.

Speaking of you, looking to some similar resources might help you to draw some more comfortable boundaries, allowing you to concentrate on your own needs. Try taking some time to focus on your priorities? and consider how to continue taking care of your roommate while also taking care of yourself.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health [4]
Blues & Depression [5]

Related questions

Feeling suicidal... Help! [6]
Straight 'A's' for the roommates of students who commit suicide? [7]
Seasonal depression and light therapy? [9]

Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [10]
Nightline (Morningside/Barnard) [11]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [12]
Published date:
Feb 01, 1994
Last reviewed on:
May 27, 2015