

Homeshare

Introduction

Like everything else in life, the more you prepare in advance, the greater the likelihood of success in homesharing. This section includes a number of questions and checklists which are designed to help you:

- Decide what you need and what you can offer
- Clarify the things that are important to you in a homeshare match by thinking through your own habits and preferences
- Define your expectations.

The more precise and specific you can be, the better! The best matches are made between people who have needs, hopes and expectations which are complementary. The only way to achieve this understanding is by carefully evaluating your needs and preferences, and then communicating them clearly.

You will find that some items in the checklists are not relevant to you, so just select those which are, and reflect on them.

General Preparation

Write a list of the situations where you have shared your home in the past – whether with family or other people.

- What worked in that situation and why?
- What didn't work and why?
- What is important to you in a future homesharing match?

Deciding what you need

The following checklist will give you an idea of the type of needs many older people have, but the list is not exhaustive. For younger people reading this list, think about what you can offer to meet these needs. Write "Yes" or "No" beside each item and then go into more detail, being as precise as possible.

For example: under "Cooking" – you, as a potential householder, should think about the kind of food you like and how many meals per week you would like someone to cook for you. Younger homesharers should ask themselves if they can offer cooking, how often, and what kind of meals they can prepare. Clearly, a householder who likes haute cuisine will not be satisfied with a homesharer who can produce only eggs on toast!

- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Shopping
- Laundry
- Companionship
- Sleepover
- Presence in the evenings/weekends
- Outings
- Care of pets
- Gardening
- Home repairs
- Driving
- Help with using a computer
- Rent

Clarifying your habits and preferences

This checklist will help you clarify things that are important to you in a homesharing arrangement. By discussing them in advance with a potential homesharing partner, unnecessary conflicts can be avoided.

Smoking

- Are you a smoker?
- Could you live with a smoker?

Food

- What are your eating habits?
- Do you have particular dietary preferences?
- Do you prefer to eat alone, or share a meal together?

Life stage

Do you prefer to live with:

- A single female?
- A single male?
- A couple?

- No preference?

Culture/religion

Do you prefer to live with someone from a particular cultural or religious background?

Type of relationship

Do you feel more comfortable in a landlord/tenant type of relationship (i.e. more detached and formal) or are you looking for a friendly companion to share your life?

Music and TV

- What type of music do you prefer?
- What are your TV habits and what kind of programmes most interest you?

Activities and interests

Do you have particular interests or activities you would ideally like to share?

Animals

- Do you want to live in a house with animals?
- If so, which kind of pets do you feel comfortable with?

Personal characteristics

- Are you the kind of person who can assert your needs and communicate clearly, or do you bottle things up and then explode? (Clearly, a good homeshare relationship will depend on the ability to discuss and resolve the inevitable problems and issues as they arise).
- Are you sensitive and responsive to other people's feelings?
- Are you flexible and able to make compromises?

Evaluating the accommodation offered

For both parties, this is an important issue and again, the more precise you can be, the better. The following checklist is not exhaustive but includes many of the items which can help you to evaluate the accommodation on offer.

- Size of room?
- Unfurnished room?
- Furnished room?
- Single/double bed?
- Wardrobe?
- Chest of drawers?
- Lamp?
- Mirror?
- Linen?
- Bookshelf?
- Storage space?
- Study desk?
- TV?
- Heating?
- Lockable room?
- Use of washing machine/clothes drier?
- Use of garden?
- Own/shared bathroom?

Sharing a home

There are a number of other issues, apart from needs and preferences, which you need to consider when thinking about sharing a home. By discussing and agreeing them in advance, you are more likely to develop a harmonious relationship from the outset.

Privacy

- Which areas of the house will be shared and which will be private?
- To what extent will the "shared" spaces be available for the homesharer's use?

Tidiness/cleanliness

What standards do you set for tidiness and cleanliness in the home?

Telephone

- What are your needs for telephone use?
- What "house rules" should govern the use of the phone? (e.g. one line or two separate ones? payment of bills? use of phone for local and international calls, use of the internet? use of own mobile phone only? etc.)

Guests

- What "house rules" should apply to friends visiting the home?
- Are overnight stays acceptable? If so – same sex only? Boyfriends/girlfriends?

References

Do you have at least two personal referees you could give to a potential homeshare partner, to give them confidence that you are a person of integrity?

Deciding the financial arrangements

Many homeshare matches are based entirely on a "barter" arrangement – an exchange of help and support for accommodation. Many others involve accommodation in exchange for part rent and part service.

Each homeshare match is unique and is based on what on what the older householder needs and what the younger homesharer can offer. If you are arranging a homeshare match through an existing programme, the co-ordinator will guide you as to what is considered a fair exchange in that locality.

You should also consider the cost of utilities (e.g. water, electricity, gas), and agree in advance whether these costs will be shared, or paid for by the householder.

Writing a contract

Most homeshare programmes recommend that the two parties prepare and sign a simple contract. This sets out the nature of the agreement – what is needed, what is offered and the length of the trial period (usually one month).

In the future, this website will give further information for those people who want to arrange their own homeshare matches, including a simple homeshare contract. In the meantime, however, please contact a programme near you, or Homeshare International, if you would like a pro-forma contract.

[Please click here for Programmes Worldwide](#)

Homeshare works!

Michelle Sanson from Australia writes about her time as a homesharer in London:

I was really glad to find Homeshare in London. I'd gone there as a law student in 1996 and I was on a limited budget. I was hoping to live with a family, or older person or single parent, and help out in return for accommodation. I'd lived with my grandmother before, and so I knew what it was like living with older people. Like all people, they have eccentricities and idiosyncracies!

I was pretty keen to be matched with a couple because I didn't want to be with someone who was very alone and wanting to spend hours talking, as I had my law studies to do in the evenings. I was matched with a man who was 88 years old and was nearing blindness, and a lady who was 85 years old and had dementia. I had my hands full!

My part of the bargain was to cook the evening meal, check the place was secure at night, and occasionally clean or do washing or tidy the garden. In return for this I got a warm attic room with ensuite in Battersea Park. But I got a lot more than that. Living with older people is so amazing because they have a wealth of stories to tell from their lives, and from when they faced similar situations to things I was facing right then and there! I now have a new saying - if you want to know something about architecture, speak to an architect. If you want to know something about life, speak to an older person.

Homeshare is a real challenge. It teaches you patience and understanding. It teaches you not to be so over-concerned with your own little existence. It gives you the wonderful opportunity to give someone a hand, to help them keep something very precious to them: the ability to stay in their own home, the place of their memories, their life experiences, the place they feel comfortable, in the neighbourhood they know well. It allows them the dignity to have only the amount of help they need, without having to be needy to get it, because they have something to offer in return. In fact, they have more to offer younger people than they realise.

And by the same token so do younger people. An older person with limited mobility does not get out much, especially in the London winter, and having a homesharer with daily news and bits and pieces from the shops brings colour, excitement and change to an older person's life.