

# HOUSEMATES GUIDE

Thanks to supports provided by Indiana's Medicaid waiver program, people with developmental disabilities live in homes and apartments in communities throughout Indiana. Many people in Medicaid waiver residential programs have housemates. However, approximately 1,000 people live alone who receive 24 hour supports, seven days a week.

Living with one or two other people in an apartment or house can reduce costs by allowing individuals to share staff and supports. Indiana's Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) estimates that \$10-\$15 million annually in state funds could be saved if people currently living alone shared their home with one or more housemates. In these difficult economic times, these savings could help prevent funding reductions or even the elimination of programs, and could help hundreds of people still waiting for community residential services

finally get the services and supports they need. There are now over 20,000 people on waiting lists for Medicaid waiver services.

Most importantly, finding the right housemate can lead to companionship and friendship and a life that is more truly integrated into the community.

The Arc of Indiana hopes this guide will help people with disabilities, families, case managers and providers help individuals through the process of finding a housemate who is right for them.



## HOUSEMATE BILL OF RIGHTS

*Developed by The Arc of Indiana, and The Arc Network Self-Advocates and Family Advocates*

All people have the right to make choices in everyday life about where and how they live, work and play, this includes:

- Right to privacy
- Right to feel safe in your home
- Right to be treated with dignity and respect
- Right to choose who lives with you
- Right to select where you live
- Right to make personal choices
- Right to disclose or refuse to disclose personal information, unless doing so or not doing so would put a housemate in danger

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Encouraging individuals to have housemates is an appropriate and responsible policy, provided guidelines and procedures are in place to protect the rights and privacy of the individuals involved. As people with disabilities, families and providers seek to find housemates, the following are important principles and best practices to keep in mind.

- The opinion, needs and desires of the person with a disability should be given the highest priority when decisions are made toward finding a housemate
- Individuals should be able to choose their own housemates
- Individuals already living in a home should be able to stay in their home if a new housemate situation does not work
- Families, people with disabilities, case managers and staff should make use of existing person-centered planning tools to help guide the housemate process
- Individuals should be given plenty of time in different settings to get to know and choose potential housemates
- Families, people with disabilities, case managers and staff should make use of an interest survey that can help individuals find housemates with compatible personalities and interests
- If possible, a voluntary “release of information” form should be used to provide medical and behavioral information that would be important to know in making choices about housemates



## Finding a Housemate – Steps to Take

- Talk to your case manager and/or residential provider. Ask them to help you begin taking steps to find a good housemate
- Ask your providers if they know someone who might be a good match to be your housemate
- Use the “Questions to Ask/Things to Think About in Choosing a Housemate” in this guide to help you think about the kind of housemate you would like to have and to help you make a list of questions to ask a potential housemate
- Go to: Find My Roommate, [www.findmyroommate.org](http://www.findmyroommate.org). This secure web-based tool was created to assist individuals with developmental disabilities in locating housemates



You can register with FindMyRoommate and then create a profile that lists your basic needs and wants, such as location, age range, gender, options for daily-living, dietary needs and more. You can search the site for potential housemates or be found by individuals seeking housemates with the qualities described in their own profile.

The more people who register with FindMyRoommate the more potential the site has for connecting people with each other. FindMyRoommate is a project of TheArcLink and is supported by The Arc of Indiana.

## Questions to Ask/Things to Think About in Choosing a Housemate

Have you had a housemate before?

What, if anything, bothered you about your past housemates?

What things did you like about your past housemates?

Do you want a housemate who is your age, older, younger or does it matter?

Do you want a housemate who will do things with you, or do you prefer to be mainly by yourself?

Are you a heavy or light sleeper? Will it bother you if your housemate makes noise when you are sleeping?

What time do you like to go to sleep and wake up on weekdays and weekends?

Do you care what kind of sleeping habits your housemate has? If you go to bed early do you want a housemate who goes to bed early? If you go to bed late do you want a housemate who would stay up late with you, or do you care?

Do you like it to be quiet most of the time, or do you like to have a television on or music playing?

Do you have pets? Do you care if your housemate has pets?

Do you smoke? Do you want a housemate who does not smoke or do you care?

What do you like to do for fun? Do you want to have a housemate who would like to do these things with you, or do you care?

- Arts and Crafts
- Play sports
- Watch sports
- Cook
- Be with other people
- Watch television—what kind?
- Watch movies—what kind?
- Listen to music—what kind?
- Play cards or board games
- Play games on the computer
- Shop
- Walk in the neighborhood or parks
- Go to church
- What other things do you like to do?

What other things are important to you in choosing a housemate?

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### HOW TO BE A GOOD HOUSEMATE

Living with other people can sometimes be hard, but it can also be fun. Here are some ideas about how to be a good housemate:

- ♦ Treat your housemate like you would like to be treated
- ♦ Don't do for others what they can do for themselves
- ♦ Clean up after yourself
- ♦ When your housemate wants quiet, try to be quiet
- ♦ When your housemate is sleeping, try not to wake him or her up
- ♦ Ask your housemate for permission to use his or her things before you use them
- ♦ Don't go in your housemate's bedroom unless you are invited
- ♦ Give your housemate privacy
- ♦ Try not to do things that are annoying to your housemate or that make him or her uncomfortable
- ♦ Don't gossip about your housemate
- ♦ Don't break your housemate's things. If you do break something, apologize
- ♦ Of course, you would never take your housemate's things!
- ♦ Don't make fun of your housemate
- ♦ Try to be flexible about things your housemate wants to do that you do not want to do—watching a television show, listening to music, what to make for dinner. Sometimes you can choose and sometimes your housemate can choose

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## ***Why should I consider getting a housemate?***

A housemate can be a friend, someone who is fun to be with, and can help share expenses. By sharing living expenses, such as rent and utilities, you will have more of your personal resources, such as funds you receive through SSI or SSDI, to spend on your personal needs and interests. Finding a housemate can also reduce costs to the state in providing services. This could help other people who are waiting for services get the help they need.

## ***Should I consider the type of services and supports I need in choosing a housemate?***

A key factor in choosing a housemate is finding someone who you get along with and who may need the same types of services and supports. Getting the right services that meet the needs of everyone who lives together is important because it ensures that each individual is living in the best environment possible. Your case manager can help you determine how your needs and services might fit together with a potential housemate.

## ***Would I share services with my housemate?***

The type and amount of each service an individual receives is determined by his or her individual support plan (ISP) and would not be changed by the addition of a housemate with similar support needs. However, a benefit of having similar support needs as your housemate is that those services could be provided by the same direct care staff. Necessary one-on-one services and supports would still be accounted for and addressed in the individual support plan.

## ***What if my housemate has different needs than I do?***

Each situation is different. Your needs will be different than those of your housemate. However, the services and supports required by individual housemates can affect the overall staffing needs of the home. Finding the right match and the right house for you is important.

## ***Are there transportation needs I should consider when choosing a housemate?***

Transportation is important for housemates to consider, both to ensure that service and support needs can be met, and also to facilitate everyday errands and outings into the community. One of the advantages to having housemates is the possibility of sharing transportation, as well as associated costs of meeting transportation needs.

## ***Will I have to share a bedroom with a housemate?***

No, having a housemate does not mean and should not mean that you have to share a bedroom. You will have your own bedroom when you have a housemate. One of the reasons the word "housemate" is used instead of "roommate" is that you are sharing common living areas and expenses in the home but not bedrooms.

## ***What do I do if there is a problem?***

Talk to your direct support staff. Ask for their help in resolving problems you may be having. Sometimes problems can get worked out easily if you just talk about it.

Talk to the Residential Director or other appropriate administrative staff of the agency providing your residential services. Again, ask for their help in resolving problems.

If you have tried and problems with your housemate cannot be resolved, ask your case manager and provider agency for help in beginning to find a new housemate. Remember, it may take time for your housemate to find a new place to live, or for you to find a new place to live. This is why it is important to take time and to ask questions in finding a housemate.



For More Information Contact  
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