



By: Beth Stebner

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New York is a city of roommates, and many New Yorkers find themselves, at some point or another, living with people they didn't actually know beforehand. (That explains why there are so many websites dedicated to finding decent roommates that are strangers.)

While sharing an apartment comes with the added financial perks like lower rent, shared utility costs, and more bang for your real estate buck, there are other things to consider before signing a lease with your mom's friend's cousin's brother or complete stranger, no matter how nice they seem on paper.

### **Step 1: Be a stranger danger ranger**

Let's face it: If you're in the market for a shared space, you probably have some reservations about stranger danger, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* style. Will your next roomie be like Titus Andromedon and try to filch money off you in between Broadway auditions and keep you up all night singing "Pinot Noir"? First off, you should have an idea of what you're getting into, and what your own hopes are for a future roommate.

If you're the one looking to take in a rando, make sure to play the role of landlord and require a letter of employment, as well as several recent pay stubs and bank statements. That way, you know how much your future roommate is making and how stable their finances are. And though it may sound a tad excessive, you can always ask them for references from former roommates and landlords to get a picture of what kind of person they are.

For those who still need additional peace of mind (and hey, who can blame you, with all the horror stories out there?) you can always play gumshoe and search a potential roommate's criminal history and past evictions via the National Center of State Courts, which won't cost you a red cent, since it's part of public records.

It also doesn't hurt to do a social media screen and check out their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. Services like PeekYou (\$3.95 for 3 months) scour more than 60 sites for that person's online presence and are more user-friendly at pulling up address data, voter registration, and even arrest history (though that may be excessive if you've already spoken to your candidate's past roommates and landlords and they've given their thumbs up). Still, if they only post pictures of wild nights on the town and how much they love being in a Death Metal band, you might want to keep looking (unless you're a Death Metal fan yourself).

The bottom line is — this is someone with whom you're going to share a home, so it doesn't hurt to be overly cautious.

## **Step 2: Understand the process – and the price**

Sprawling West Village walk-up? Twee India Street residence in Greenpoint? Don't get your hopes up, says Platinum Properties' [Daniel Itingen](#). "It's expensive, it's competitive, it's tedious," he says of navigating today's high-stakes rental market.

And it takes not only plenty of rock-solid finances on your part, but from your potential roommates and their parents as well. Good credit is typically a must for all roommates, Itingen explains. "You need proof of employment, proof of income, any liquid assets, and you need to make a combined 40 times the monthly rent."

And if you don't, you'll need a guarantor who makes 80 times the monthly rent and will agree to pay rent if you default.

If a single guarantor doesn't make 80x, most landlords will accept multiple guarantors but be warned – it might be hard convincing your parents to be financially responsible for said stranger if he or she is unable to cough up the necessary funds on the first of the month.

[Teresa Stephenson](#), an agent with Platinum Properties, recommends putting everyone who will be living in the apartment on the lease. That way, everyone will have gone through a credit check and is legally responsible for the rent. Otherwise, if things sour and a roommate moves out without being on the lease, the others are responsible for picking up the slack.

It's also important to manage expectations. Summertime is traditionally the hardest for finding deals, since recent grads and young professionals whose leases are up are also competing for apartments. Sure, your roommates may want a doorman, elevator building with dishwasher and roof deck in TriBeCa, but you'll likely have to sacrifice something (be it location, amenities, or price) to find something within budget.

Once you're settled, it's extremely important to get renter's insurance to protect your collective belongings. Most plans cost only a few hundred dollars a year but can save you plenty of heartache (and money) in the instance of a burglary, theft, or fire.

## **Step 3: Make sure you're the right fit**

Arguably, the most important thing for roommates to talk about is their expectations for the shared space. Who is responsible for cleaning the common spaces? Who gets bathroom privileges first, and for how long? How will you split up household costs like cleaning supplies and groceries? How will the rent be divided each month?

Another important topic is schedules and lifestyle choices. Will there be quiet hours? What time is too late to have company? Do your roommates work odd hours? If so, will the noise of them getting home bother you? Finding out and agreeing to lifestyle standards early on means keeping your own personal Pax Romana for as long as possible. (Our list of 20 questions to ask a potential roommate should help immensely.)

#### **Step 4: Everyone needs to see the place before you sign on any dotted lines**

When you're looking for apartments with other people, you'll have a lot of schedule coordination to do to actually see the places. It may be annoying, but it's necessary. Taking an apartment without seeing it — even if just one roommate hasn't — is a recipe for disappointment.

Platinum's Stephenson was working with three recent college graduates looking to rent in the West Village. Only two viewed it before moving in. The third woman was the first to move into the space, but she was shocked by how small it was. "When I met her, she was bawling," Stephenson says. "She didn't know how they were going to live in such a small space, and she hadn't been a part of the search."

If you're all looking at apartments together, it's easier to gauge how everyone feels about the space and it also makes it much easier to put in an application then and there. Otherwise, roommates run the risk of losing an apartment, especially if they're waiting for an out-of-state roommate to view the space in person. (FaceTime can be a prospective roommate — and broker's — best friend in that case.)

#### **Step 5: Figure out whether you want to build a wall**

As Robert Frost once penned, "Good fences make good neighbors," but in the case of New York City apartments, good walls do, too.

If you get a share (say, a flex two-bedroom that can become three bedrooms), it will cost you another \$1,000 to \$1,500 to put up a temporary wall, but according to Itingen, you get more value this way, since looking for a place with more bedrooms is costly, about \$1,000 extra per month.

It's important to note, though, that a lot of buildings now prohibit building walls, so you'll have to check with management to make sure you can do it. Sometimes a bookshelf wall is an option when a full wall is not.

#### **Step 6: If it doesn't work out ...**

Roommates are as transient as the seasons in New York, and, at the end of the day, if a living situation isn't working, the most you'll have to do is wait a few months for your lease to run out and move on.

"If it isn't working out, hopefully you're civil enough to make it work until the lease is up, but another option is to move out and find another roommate for the place and sign a sublet agreement for your room," Stephenson says.

A word of caution: Management has to approve the swap—not impossible, but they at least want proof that they're getting a tenant with good finances who can pay your share of the rent.

Roommates, she adds, are a de facto part of early life in New York City, and those hoping to live here have to adapt to close quarters and domestic spats. "People here live with roommates much longer than they do in other cities. Probably more so than before, but roommates are a big part of the NYC apartment scene," she says. "They have been and always will be."