

A CO-LIVING AGREEMENT: PART ONE.



Also known as a group agreement, a co-living agreement is a tool which can be used to help you happily co-live in a property with your Mates. Whilst a co-ownership agreement is focused on the legal/ professional decisions you make with your co-owner, the co-living agreement is focused on the practicalities of living together on a day to day basis.

A co-living agreement can apply when you are going to live with your co-owner, or, for your tenants to use to live together in your investment property.

Below, we will give some thoughts on how a co-living agreement might work in the 'real world' and how you can apply it to benefit you and your Mates when you buy a home. This information sheet doesn't list the items to be included in the agreement (e.g. rules and responsibilities on items like: cleaning, partners and friends visiting) rather, it looks at the overarching principles of how you can work together, regardless of which tasks you include in your agreement.

As with any agreement, make sure you include any terms and conditions which meet your needs and the needs of your co-owners. The aim of a co-living agreement is to set in motion some basic agreements of how you will operate, communicate and support your fellow co-owners or housemates whilst you live together. The idea is to use this tool to set the tone for your relationship and to set your housing goals in motion.

Some general things to decide on at the beginning of the agreement are:

1) How long it will be in use for. If you are using it to start the beginning of your co-living experience you may agree to have it place for a short amount of time, using it to set your relationship up and then remove it once you know how to work together well. Alternatively you may decide to implement the agreement and have it in the background, available to use if and when it's needed for the whole of your co-living time frame. Both can work equally effectively and will be somewhat guided by the information included in the agreement, how many people co-live together and how quickly new people join the property.

2) When you come together to set up the agreement, you should agree what tone and language you are going to use when communicating with each other. In particular you should set out how you will respectfully and responsibly work together to agree on any situations as they present, and how you will resolve any challenges as they arise. For example, you may agree to hold weekly meetings where any queries or questions can be raised and discussed, with a promise to be respectful and considerate of each other when this happens, or you may agree to just talk through things at the time they occur. These options will vary depending on your communication styles and how often you spend time together as co-owners.

When more than two people co-live in the property you may want to be more descriptive on what being respectful means, e.g. ensuring each person gets equal opportunity to raise questions, and making sure everyone agrees to listen to each other when someone else is speaking. Whilst these things may seem obvious in the beginning, by writing the document out for each party it is something to come back to if something challenging arises. The more people who co-live together, the more important the agreement may become, especially if residents change over time. Agreeing to the co-living rules/philosophies may even form part of how you find your fellow residents in the future.

3) Deciding whether the agreement is binding, or guiding is also important. Do you all agree to follow the agreement to the letter or is it something that you use to guide the way in which you live together? For example, if you develop a cleaning schedule, what happens if one of the parties doesn't complete their task? Do they face a financial penalty, or is it simply agreed they do more next week?

4) Are the conversations individuals have with their co-owners confidential? Agreeing this upfront may help people to feel confident and not concerned about others hearing about the things discussed. This may be important where you have a mutual friendship group and don't want house discussions mentioned to others outside the home.

5) If you agree to have formal or semi formal meetings each week- make sure the time is used effectively and respectfully. Turn off mobiles when the group are meeting, and set a certain amount of time each person gets to speak. This will help the group to be mindful of what they talk about and limit the possibility of ongoing arguments and discussions.

6) Depending on how long you live together you may agree to revisit the agreement after a period of time. You may also agree to change the items listed in the agreement every couple of months. E.G. If you include a cleaning schedule in the co-living agreement, you may have a summer and winter tasks list which gets adapted depending on the time of year. You may also remove things from the agreement, once it is clear they are being met, with the option to reintroduce them if needed.

In terms of what to actually include in the agreement, this will be very specific to your needs as housemates or co-owners. For example, do you have pets, and if so are they a joint or independent responsibility? If both of you work, do you split the bills evenly each month or pay more or less based on how often you watched Netflix/used the internet etc.

The reason the overarching conversations are so important, is that being able to respectfully hold a conversation, means you can discuss anything from how often you clean the property to how you pay the mortgage, and if more challenging questions come up- each member will feel confident in raising an issue or a situation when it happens, making it easier to resolve and have a happy co-living environment in the future.

As with all our information sheets- these suggested points are not exhaustive! However, they are hopefully a useful tool to set you on the right track when co-living with a co-owner. If you have any questions about anything raised in this information sheet please reach out to daisy@mortgagemates.com.au

Daisy