

Seven Rules for Getting Along With Those You Live With

Some friends of mine recently sent their oldest son to college.

In the bustle of moving into the dorm, meeting new friends, and conversing with old ones, the father took a moment to impart some wisdom to his son. He exhorted him to remember that he was now swimming in multiple spheres of influence and needed to watch how he conducted himself and interacted with roommates, friends, and professors.

In other words, “Do your best to get along with people, Son.”

His advice is basic and something that every one of us should know; yet, it’s also something that we’re all excellent at forgetting. We live and work and play with all kinds of individuals throughout our life on earth, yet it’s often those closest to us whom we have the hardest time getting along with.

In his 1857 book “[Friends in Council](#),” Sir Arthur Helps writes that “the hatreds and disgusts that there are behind friendship, relationship, service, and, indeed, proximity of all kinds, is one of the darkest spots upon earth.”

So how do we navigate such murky waters, particularly in a time when brother is turning against brother with increasing intensity? Helps offers us a handful of clues.

Vive la Différence

Variety is the spice of life, but sometimes it’s a very biting spice given various personal backgrounds.

“If people are to live happily together,” Helps writes, “they

must not fancy, because they are thrown together now, that all their lives have been exactly similar up to the present time, that they started exactly alike, and that they are to be for the future of the same mind.”

Embrace the differences between yourself and those close to you. Learn to smile at differences and look for ways that they benefit you, rather than simply looking at why they annoy you.

Don't Meddle

Helps encourages his readers not to “interfere unreasonably with others,” nor to continually criticize, “even if it were kindly and just criticism.”

Undoubtedly, each of us would say that our reasons for sticking our noses into the business of our housemates are always reasonable. But would they say the same? Probably not. Are they cooking dinner, sorting the laundry, or washing the bathroom in a way that you wouldn't do those chores? Let them do those things their way—free from negative commentary from you.

Avoid Mockery

Living with others for an extended period of time naturally allows us to learn their interests, tastes, and likes. These tastes then become easy prey for mockery. However, Helps exhorts us to avoid ridiculing them. Instead, encourage or praise those tastes, or if you simply can't stand them, avoid saying anything about them at all.

Have Confidence, Not Doubt

When living with others, we often get a chance to help them make decisions, both big and small. In instances such as these, Helps writes, don't “question and requestion their

resolves.” Individuals are bound to do that to themselves enough. Constantly asking “Are you sure?” or arguing why something they want to do won’t work may, indeed, manipulate them to go in the direction you want, but it will also discourage them and give them greater reason for resentment toward you.

Don’t Pick Fights

Helps encourages us to “avoid having stock subjects of disputation” that we engage in over and over with our housemates. If these are left unchecked, there “is a tendency in all minor disputes to drift” back to these subjects.

Helps further cautions those who are sticklers for logic and reason. It may work well in law offices and ivory towers to continually be reasoning and debating a matter, but it only escalates contention when practiced regularly in a household.

Remember Your Manners

While we all know that familiarity breeds contempt, few of us work to ward off that contemptuousness for those we live with. Helps cautions us “not to let familiarity swallow up all courtesy.” In other words, be kind. Pour their coffee. Do more than grunt at them in the morning. Offer to do a household task that you know they don’t like. Smile at them!

Think of Others First

“Lastly, in conciliating those we live with,” Helps tells us, “it is most surely done, not by consulting their interests, nor by giving way to their opinions, so much as by not offending their tastes.” In other words, be sensitive and know what they like or dislike so that you can happily seek their best interests.

As I looked at these recommendations, I couldn't help but think that they seemed familiar. Then, it hit me. They mirror the biblical text of [1 Corinthians 13: 4-6](#), one of the greatest passages of literature ever written on love:

“Charity [Love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

In essence, what Helps recommends is to just show love to those we live with and interact with on a daily basis. It isn't a mushy type of love; it's simply showing kind favor to others, thinking of them first before we think of ourselves.

We often wonder what we can do to make this world a better place. I've got news for all of us, myself included: Start with those at home or right around you. Make their lives happy by showing them love and they'll be better able to go out into the world and show the same love to others, multiplying your little investment for good far faster than you could ever imagine.

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