

Missionary Singles Issues: Housing

When a family arrives on a field of service in the host country, there is seldom any question about housing. The whole family lives in one residence, usually with no one else in the house or apartment. However, when an unmarried person arrives, housing may be a question. It seems to “make sense” to have two or more singles share a residence to save money, and also they are not as likely to be lonely.

However, although two people from the same culture may share cultural values, they may still bring very different family and personality backgrounds. When two people from different cultures are serving on a multi-cultural team and asked to share a residence, even their cultural values will not be the same. The more people, and the more differences between people living in the same residence, the more likely is conflict.

Following are some advantages and disadvantages of various housing arrangements, some suggestions to make them work, and a danger to avoid.

Living Alone, Your Choice

If your agency has no requirements or subtle pressures (or some not so subtle) about your living circumstances and you choose to live alone, that usually works well. If you are enough of an introvert to be most comfortable when alone, do not like being disturbed, and your passport culture values privacy, you will probably be very happy living alone.

If you are enough of an extrovert to want someone around all the time or are from a culture that values togetherness/community,

you may find living alone very stressful. If this is your first time to live alone, you may not have realized how much extra work is required to cook, clean, do maintenance, care for the lawn, etc. You may find that the extra funds needed to live alone strain your budget. If so, find a roommate when your lease is up.

Living with Friend, Mutual Idea

If you and a friend both want to share a house or large apartment, this usually works as long as all goes well with the friendship. If both of you like someone around much of the time it saves money, saves time, and decreases loneliness. Since you were already friends and both came up with the idea, you are likely to work together to maintain the friendship

Unfortunately, there may be a couple of drawbacks. First, the friendship may cool with constant contact. In fact, living together may ruin a friendship. Living together is quite different from spending several hours a day having fun. Your friend may not want to help with cooking and cleaning, want to talk “all the time,” want the two of you to buy an expensive piece of furniture, etc. Second, the friendship may gradually change until it leads to physical intimacy, a problem dealt with later.

Living with an “Acquaintance,” Agency’s “Suggestion,” Your “Choice”

The quotation marks above mean that the enclosed words may have various meanings. If you know the person well, you know that you can live alone if you prefer to, and you have your choice of several people that you really like, this may go well.

However, if the acquaintance is someone you met two weeks ago, the

suggestion feels more like pressure to you, and your choice is because the alternative is even worse, the arrangement is not likely to succeed.

When people feel like they do not have full freedom to do something, they develop psychological reactance. This means that they have a negative emotional reaction and are motivated to reestablish the freedom. This goes way back to the Garden of Eden. God told the man that he could eat fruit from any tree in the garden except one. Of course, after that, he wanted to eat fruit from that tree—and did so (Genesis 2-3). Another example is that a child may have no interest in any of several toys in front of him, but as soon as another child picks one up (no longer freely available), the child wants that one.

Living with a “Stranger,” Agency’s “Requirement,” Agency’s “Choice”

Although this may sometimes work, it is much more likely to fail than to succeed. If you do not know someone, the agency requires you to live with someone, and the agency picks who you live with, you are not likely to enjoy living with that person.

Suggestions to Make It Work

If you find yourself in the situation of having to live with someone rather than alone, remember that you will have a period of adjustment even longer than a newly married couple who know each other from their period of courtship. It will take much time and patience with each other as you adjust to this living situation. Here are some suggestions.

- Agree with each other that you are two different people and that you do not have to do everything together.

- Make it clear to other missionaries, both single and married, that you are two different people and you do not need to be invited to everything together.
- Feel free to turn down an invitation that your housemate is accepting if you just do not feel like going. You do not have to give a reason to justify your staying home.
- Each of you keep your own identity and be careful not to develop a joint identity at the expense of your own.
- Set aside a regular time, at least weekly to check with each other about how you feel like things are going. Make adjustments as necessary.
- Call in a third party in which each of you has confidence if you cannot come to a mutual agreement between the two of you (Matthew 18).
- Remember that missionaries move a lot so a bad situation is temporary—but so is a good one. Flexibility is a must.
- Regardless of how busy you are, set aside time to pray together and agree not to let “small stuff” in your relationship become big things.

Potential Danger

Could two missionaries begin a homosexual relationship? Yes, they can, and it can happen with either men or women, married or single, young or old. As a result of isolation and loneliness, single missionaries living together with same-sex partners may form emotionally dependent relationships. These rather exclusive relationships may become possessive and lead to physical activity with sexual elements. An embrace may become more than just comforting. This may progress into

homosexual activity, so that the people involved have progressed from a healthy, loving relationship into a sinful relationship

Although the Bible does not say as much about homosexual behavior as it does about adultery and sexual immorality, both Old and New Testaments have clear statements about its sinfulness.

- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 say that it is abominable for two men to have homosexual relations, and that both would be put to death.
- Romans 1:26-27 says that it is wrong for two women to have homosexual relations, and likewise it is wrong for two men. This passage talks about both burning in lust for each other and committing what is shameful.

This can happen either between two men or between two women; however, it is more likely to happen between two women for two reasons.

- First, there are far more single women than single men on most mission fields. Therefore, there are many more female couples sharing living quarters than male couples, so more chances for it to occur.
- Second, gay men are generally far more promiscuous than are lesbian women. Gay men typically have a few sexual contacts with each of dozens or scores of different men. Lesbian women typically form rather long-lasting relationships with many sexual contacts with one or a few different women.

Even if sexual attraction does not progress to actual sexual behavior, confusion, guilt feelings, and the relationship itself need to be carefully examined. As with heterosexual attraction and/or behavior, people must make the distinction between temptation and sin.

If some homosexual activity does take place, people need to make the distinction

between one act of sinful behavior and a gay or lesbian lifestyle. Since one-time homosexual activity is more likely to occur during adolescence at the height of the sexual drive in men, it is usually seen as an experimental thing. However, since the sexual drive peaks later in women and an experimental homosexual experience may occur then, it may seem more threatening.

Although one such act is sinful and requires God's forgiveness, it does not mean that the person is living a homosexual lifestyle, that they are gay or lesbian. It may mean only that they have tried out such activity.

Since such activity is sinful, several things need to be done if it occurs.

- The people involved need to confess their sin, repent of it, and trust God for forgiveness.
- To prevent it from happening again, they need to take steps to avoid it. The major thing is to make changes in their lives which will decrease the opportunities. That is, not spend time alone together, but spend time in groups, etc.
- This may mean not living together in the same house or apartment.
- Both people need to find someone to hold them accountable on at least a weekly basis.

It Can Work.

Two single missionaries can live in the same house for many years with great success. Jeannie Lockerbie Stevenson dedicated her excellent book, *By Ones & by Twos* to her good friend "with whom I shared a home for more than 25 years."

Ronald Koteskey
Member Care Consultant
GO InterNational

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Ronald Koteskey
122 Lowry Lane
Wilmore, KY 40390

Phone: (859) 858-3436

e-mail: ron@missionarycare.com

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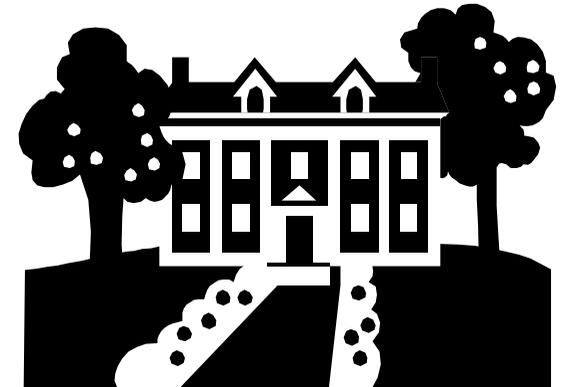
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