Ten Tips for Successful Shared Living

Nan Carle PhD

Shared Living

A life that has meaning, is interesting and has a sense of personal safety and wellbeing is directly related to how much control one has on their choices and how connected they are to the community at large. Shared Living is one vehicle for driving an experience of service that communicates mutuality and a real community life not a service life. It focuses on developing relationships between people with and without disabilities and emphasizes the expectation that people will live together and share life experiences.

The following are 10 Tips for crafting successful Share Living experiences.

1. **Person Centered Planning** is at the heart of Shared Living. It provides the foundation for understanding your dreams and aspirations. A good Personal Profile will highlight the skills and abilities you currently have accompanied by what is important to and what is important for you in meeting your needs. A good plan of action that is jointly understood will draw out your infinite capacities to lead an interesting and meaningful life.

2. **Strengthen Your Existing Relationships.** Deepen your relationships with your whole family – brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles and all extended family connections. These are the people who will most likely want to support you and be supported by you when necessary. Have family reunions, create family traditions, send cards, etc. If they do not live near you, learn to Skype. These relationships are core for how you move through life. Treat them as your most important investment in learning how to share your life with others.

3. **Make New Relationships:** Find ways to be a good friend as well as have them. Reach out and connect with old friends and make new ones. Shared Living depends on making sure you like who you live with – a good match is key. This is a highly personal skill. Being a good friend and making new friends are important
skills to learn and grow. Get to know the kind of people you would like to live with. Continue to grow and deepen your networks. Be an active participant in match making for Shared Living. You will likely have the opportunity to share your life more than once.

4. **Explore Where and How You Want to Live:** Are there areas of town you particularly want to live in? Do you want to live in a house or an apartment? How dense of an area are you comfortable with? Do you want to live near public transportation or do you have access to private transportation. Do you like having a garden or are you a patio person? The answers to these questions will help you know what you have in common with the person in your Life Sharing arrangement.

5. **Know your Budget:** Know your income - find out what funds you are eligible to receive plus what your job will bring in. Are there other resources you could name such as time banking, or bartering for services? Know your expenditures – rent/mortgage, utilities, telephone, transportation, health care, clothes, etc. Also if you move into a new place there are numerous hook-up fees and deposits. Do your research. Set a budget as a tool for discussion with those with whom you are about to share your life. They may have additional resources that you do not yet know about.

6. **Have Your Own Key:** Even if you can not physically use a key, make sure you have one and are responsible for your own front door. An equitable and respectful sharing is often observed at the front door. Make sure you expect to be ‘in control’ of your space and your home. Do not delegate your key to others without a clear understanding of how it is to be used and by whom.

7. **Learn to Resolve Conflicts:** Living with others demands that you know how to prevent unnecessary disagreements and that you know how to resolve conflicts when they occur. All relationships have moments when there is a need for ‘space’ or ways of talking respectfully with each other. There are many tools available such a role playing and mediation - find what works for you and use them. You may also have to teach your families and those around you to how resolve conflicts that include you.
8. **Write It Down.** Make sure you have a written document that states who is responsible for what roles and responsibilities. This will include who will pay for what, what kind of support you will receive from your shared living provider, what emergency protocols you need, what support you will received for health care and taking medications, and how will quality be judged? These are key issues to have in writing before a shared living arrangement is put into play. Don’t move until you have a document. Because Shared Living has money involved, it is a business. Make sure you ‘do the business’ stuff right!

9. **Know Your Neighbors.** Living safely in today’s world depends on whether you know your neighbor’s names and are seen to be out and about in your neighborhood. Join the neighborhood watch committee. Make a point of being a good neighbor – that will contribute to your safety and others. It also helps you to be a contributing member of your community. This is a contribution you can share with your Shared Living Provider. It is also a major safety feature for you.

10. **Community is a Verb.** Shared Living is a vehicle for sharing life experiences – learn what you like to do and be an active participant in that sharing. Create routines and rhythms of community life that show you belong. Don’t just wait to be invited to join an activity that someone else is interested in - do the inviting yourself. Be an active member of your community so that your aspirations and dreams come alive. Live!

Nan Carle PhD  
Director of the Initiative for Inclusive Communities  
Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy  
College of Public Programs, Arizona State University