

## GUIDE TO HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH HOUSEMATES/ROOMMATES ABOUT PHYSICALLY RETURNING TO WORK AND LABS



### SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH YOUR HOUSE/ROOMMATES.

Set up a meeting to discuss concerns and actions around returning to work and labs. It's important to get it calendared into everyone's schedules.



### IT'S TIME TO TALK.

Begin with open-ended questions to explore what's important to you as individuals and as a household. Make note of the topics and work through them all. Refer to the Caltech Housing roommate agreement document as a starting place.



### SHARE WORKPLACE AND LAB PROTOCOLS.

Most likely, each of your workplaces and labs has a "return to work" safety protocol. Everyone should share these plans with the household. Be sure to discuss any thoughts or concerns about the protocols. Are there especially "high-risk" return-to-work activities engaged by anyone in the household?



### DON'T FORGET TO ADDRESS THOSE CONTINUING TO WORK REMOTELY.

Some people in your household may not physically return to work. Their needs are also important. Allow space to discuss their concerns about people returning to work. Ask specifically about their needs and how their concerns can be addressed.



### PLAN.

Develop a household plan for health and safety. Ask the tough questions: what if someone is exposed to a person with COVID-19? What if someone tests positive for COVID-19? In these situations, what actions does the exposed individual need to take? What actions does everyone else in the household take?



### REVISIT.

Use this time to revisit topics you may have already discussed at the start of the quarantine such as hygiene, food, guests, masks, trips outside of the living space (refer to "Conduct Science" document). Is there anything else important to the household that needs to be discussed?



### REACH AN AGREEMENT.

After discussing the various concerns and actions, ask everyone in the household for agreement to the plan and protocol discussed. Additionally, ask everyone to be open to accountability and being called in if the agreements aren't met at any point. Finally, agree to a check-in point (set a target date) wherein the household reviews the existing plan and adjusts as needed.



### SHOW ONGOING CARE AND SUPPORT.

After this conversation, continually check in with one another to see how folks are doing. This is an extremely challenging time—even lonely and isolating for some—so consistently showing care and support to one another is important.

## HOW DO I HAVE AN EMPATHETIC DISCUSSION WITH MY HOUSE/ROOMMATES?

We understand these are difficult and unprecedented times. We also understand these conversations are hard and uncomfortable to have. To help you prepare, we've put together some tips on how you can approach this important conversation with your house/roommates.

- Approach this conversation from a place of care, empathy, and compassion. This has been a difficult time for everyone, and folks just want to be safe and healthy.
- Understand that a person's identities and the intersection of those identities, and personal life experiences are intrinsically woven into the way they approach this conversation. Different groups of people are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Some people might have lost loved ones to COVID-19. Some peoples' stress and emotions are compounded with ongoing community tragedies and the current movement for Black lives. It's important to be mindful of the complexities of everyone's personal journeys.
- When the meeting begins, negotiate and agree on ground rules as a household.
  - This could include: going around in a circle to allow one person at a time to discuss, using "I" statements when sharing, etc.
- Appoint a scribe before you begin. Someone should take notes and read those notes at the end of the conversation to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- It's always a good idea to ask questions in an open-ended manner so as to allow space for folks to share openly.
- Validate everyone's concerns and feelings, even if you disagree. People tend to listen to you when they feel heard by you. You're all in this together.
  - Some helpful phrases include: "I understand where you're coming from", "I can understand why that's important to you", "What you shared is valid", "Your feelings are valid".
- Negotiate. When you live with others, negotiating is key to setting boundaries and addressing everyone's needs.
- Rather than argue, offer or ask for suggestions.
  - Some helpful phrases include: "Would this work for you instead?", "Does this address your concern?", "What does the group think?", "Does someone in the group have an alternative suggestion that might address this need?"
- Don't assume that you know where the other person is coming from. If you are unclear, ask questions or rephrase what they said.
  - Some helpful phrases include: "Can you help me understand what you mean by that?", "You mentioned something important to you. Will you elaborate?", "When you said that, I understood it as this. Is that a fair/accurate assessment?"
- Take everyone's concerns seriously, even if you don't know the full story. You should not expect your house/roommates to disclose personal and medical information with you. It's important to be respectful of the fact that people may not feel comfortable explaining themselves or their situation, because you just don't know what people have been going through. We want people to feel safe, accepted, heard, and supported.
- Discuss respectful ways to hold one another accountable should anyone deviate from the agreements. As a group, reflect on effective, caring ways to approach one another.

*Note: this guide is just a start. Please don't hesitate to reach out for support and further guidance.*

- *PMA students: PMA Student Programs Office at [pmastudentprograms@caltech.edu](mailto:pmastudentprograms@caltech.edu)*
- *Students in other options: please contact your respective Option Administrator(s)*
- *Students living on campus: Office of Residential Experience staff/RAs at [gradras@caltech.edu](mailto:gradras@caltech.edu)*