

Understanding Residence Hall Damages

“\$346.97?!?” This could be your exclamation upon receiving a bill for student residence hall damages at the end of the academic year. Avoid getting into this situation by helping your student live (and decorate!) responsibly in her residence hall room and common areas.

Avoiding Charges: A Student Checklist

Share the following checklist with your student to help her avoid getting charged for damages:

- Review your room thoroughly upon arrival – before moving any items in. Check the furniture for scratches, gauges, graffiti and breaks. Check the walls for holes or putty marks from previous “fix-ups.” Make sure the windows are not cracked and that they open and close correctly.
- Note any issues on the room condition form. If there is not a formal room condition form to complete, make sure you notify the Resident Assistant or another college official. This will help ensure that two things happen: the problem gets taken care of during the year and you are not held responsible for damages you did not cause.

- Don’t hang items on the walls. This is hard, particularly if you want to create a homey feel. But, it’s nearly impossible to hang items in a residence hall room without causing damage. If you must hang things, be very, very selective about the adhesives you use. It’s always a good idea to check with a college official to get recommendations on products that won’t pull off paint from walls or leave holes that can’t be filled. Despite what the product labels say, sticky tack and other tape adhesives almost always leave residue. Residence hall staff members are wise to the “fill the hole with toothpaste” trick too!
- Be respectful of the property. Essentially, you are renting a home. Would you be so quick to destroy an apartment or house you were paying rent or a mortgage payment on each month? Probably not. If you want your space to stay nice, and not receive extraordinary damage charges at the conclusion of your stay, you need to be careful. Throwing out-of-control parties, doodling on walls or furniture when bored, and being careless with walls and windows doesn’t demonstrate respect.

- Be honest when damage occurs. Accidents are bound to happen in residence halls, just like in any home. Taking responsibility not only shows integrity but also can result in lower damage charges—sometimes for everyone. College officials might be willing to work with students who come to report damage mid-year. Sometimes there are special considerations that can be made. Plus, the damage will get attended to and you won’t have to live with it all year.
- Lock your door. More often than not, college students leave their rooms unlocked. Not only is this a major safety concern, but it also welcomes uninvited visitors. This can result in parties held in your room without your knowledge, a drunken student walking into your room and causing damage, and more.

What to Do If Your Student Gets Charged

If your student receives a bill for residence hall damages, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Stay calm, even if the charge seems ridiculous.
- Talk with your student about the charge. Your student may know exactly what the charge is for and be able to explain the rationale behind it.
- Encourage your student to find out more information about the charge if he’s unaware of what it is for. He can do this by calling to talk with a professional staff member who should be able to offer a breakdown of the bill (labor, cost of repairing/replacing the item, etc.), so he can ensure that he was charged appropriately.
- Make a decision with your student to accept or contest the charge. If you choose to contest the charge (i.e. you don’t believe your student is responsible or think you were overcharged), follow the appropriate steps to do so. If you accept the charge, don’t wait too long to pay it. Outstanding balances on a student’s account can affect his ability to register for classes, participate in certain activities, and more.