

A Guide to Ghostbusting Your Haunted House

Three paranormal investigators and six people who have dealt with supernatural activity firsthand offer advice on dealing with housemates from the other side



By [Elizabeth Stamp](#)

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The thought of living in a haunted house may conjure up horrifying scenes of possessed dolls or blood streaming down walls, and while actually cohabitating with the deceased—per those who’ve experienced a supernatural presence and lived to tell their tales to *AD*—is perhaps a bit less cinematic, it’s no less terrifying.

Chelsea Smith hated the Palmdale, California, home her parents rented in the spring of 1997 from the moment she first stepped inside at the age of seven. She recalls seeing figures and hearing the doors to the Jack-and-Jill bathroom she shared with her sister, Courtney, slam in succession. Courtney remembers the TV and faucets turning on randomly. One day, when the family was enjoying some time together at the home’s pool, Chelsea went into the house alone, and upon heading for the exit to rejoin her family outside, she saw that the sliding glass door, which she had left open, was closed, locked, and secured with a dowel rod. Even then, her parents insisted that shadows or the air conditioner, not a supernatural presence, were to blame for the strange occurrences.

For those who believe their homes are haunted, dealing with the problem can be a bit trickier than handling other household issues. While everyone believes in bedbugs, the same cannot be said for ghosts. According to a 2021 YouGov poll, 41% of Americans believe that ghosts exist, and about 20% say they have encountered one. [Jane Phillips](#), ([ghostbusting.org](#)) a paranormal investigator, psychic medium, and medical intuitive, says that common signs

of paranormal activity include hearing noises, seeing dark shadows in the house or on outdoor cameras, and a general feeling of unease.

MacKenzie Koncher, a paranormal investigator and cofounder of XX Paranormal Communications, an all-female paranormal team based in Colorado, says that people might feel like they're being watched or as though someone else is in the room. "We hear a lot about things moving," she says. "Like, 'This picture fell off the wall, and I keep hanging it, but it keeps flying off the wall.'" Koncher's fellow paranormal investigator at XX, Christine Hendrickson, says that in her experience, children can be particularly perceptive when it comes to sensing paranormal activity.

It was one of the family's more surreal experiences in the house that finally convinced Chelsea and Courtney's parents that something was wrong; five-year-old Courtney exhibited a strange behavior once after getting out of the shower. "My mom says my face just went kind of blank, and I just kept repeating, 'I don't want to die, but I know I have to,'" says Courtney. "Then she said as quickly as my face had gone blank, I blinked, came to, and had no idea what she was talking about." The family, who had planned to buy the house, moved out shortly after. "This is how you know Courtney was the favorite because I had been complaining for almost an entire year that the house is haunted," jokes Chelsea. While the Smith family opted to leave their ghosts behind, there are other things you can try before calling the movers.

While a person's initial instinct may be to "bust" the ghost, Koncher suggests a gut check. "I would ask the person, Is what you're experiencing uncomfortable?" she says. "Does it give you a feeling that it's negative or bad, or do you feel like you can coexist with this spirit?"

And it may be possible to coexist. Phillips notes that "most of these energies are not out to harm you, but they're interfering." Margaret Kaminski grew up in a circa-1800s former ice house in Connecticut, and after years of doors slamming on their own and faucets turning on mysteriously, Kaminski's father revealed a detail he'd learned when buying the pad: A man named Peter had apparently frozen to death in there one winter.

"If I decide to be afraid of this ghost, this is going to ruin my life," she recalls thinking. "So, I just made the decision that this was a friendly ghost and he's

here to live with us, like a roommate.” The entire Kaminski family took an empathetic approach to the presence known as Peter. “We would leave the light on as we were going out, or we would make sure it was never too cold in the area that he lived in,” she says.

Danlly Domingo also found a way to coexist with his squatting spirit. While living in the garden-level apartment of an 1878 town house on the Upper East Side, Domingo says three friends independently described seeing a tall, bearded man with a top hat in the space. While his Abraham Lincoln–esque ghost unsettled him at first, Domingo ultimately made peace with the idea and got his “roommate” a companion: a Roomba that he named Joshua Fry Speed, after [Lincoln’s close friend and bedmate](#) for four years.

Meredith Paul says there were several sightings of a man wearing a bowler hat and pinstripe suit in her family’s Long Island home. She claims that over the years, she and her brother have heard noises and noticed things moving. While her parents don’t believe the house is haunted, Paul and her brother say they communicate with the presence when they’re home by themselves. “We try to talk to the ghost and tell him everything’s okay and that we like him,” says Paul. “We try to keep it nice with the ghost.”

Set some boundaries

Boundaries aren’t just for relationships with the living. “If you are feeling uncomfortable, the first and foremost thing that we recommend to people is to make sure to verbalize that,” says Koncher. “You can talk to [the spirits] and tell them they’re making you uncomfortable or ask them to stop.” Hendrickson agrees that communication is critical. “When we do investigations, we always thank all of the spirits for communicating with us and for being there for us— but we remind them: You need to stay here,” she adds. Both women say they’ve been followed home by curious spirits, but that their visitors left when asked.

Cleanse the space yourself

If your boundaries aren’t being respected, but you’re not ready to call in a professional, Koncher and her team recommend smudging the space. “We

usually recommend [sage](#) or sage followed by palo santo or sweetgrass,” she says. “I’ve also heard that frankincense and copal work really well for stronger energies.” Make sure doors and windows are open, Koncher advises, and ask whatever it is to leave during the smudging process.

On the other hand, Phillips doesn’t believe that saging is effective. She notes that prayer or calling on a higher power can help, if you’re religious. It’s also worth bearing in mind that many consider smudging with sage to be cultural appropriation, and that white sage has become environmentally threatened partially due to overharvesting for commercial demand.

Call in a pro

When coexisting is out of the question and boundaries and incense are ineffective, it might be time to call in a professional. “If [the spirit is] disrupting your life, if you’re having a whole series of bad events happening, or if you’re afraid in your house, that’s when you should reach out [to a pro],” says Phillips, who began clearing properties in 2010 and today works remotely with clients around the world from her office in Santa Fe.

She explains that real estate agents frequently call on her to clear homes that aren’t selling. When called in, she has a list of about 50 things that she addresses during a clearing, some of which she cites as portals, geopathic zones, and dark blobs. “My goal is not to just point out how many ghosts you have and say, ‘Well, there you have it,’” she says. “My goal is to talk to somebody who thinks they have a problem and talk them off the ledge. And sometimes let them know I think it’s really water heater noises or it’s electrical, because I’m here to help.”

While Phillips works remotely, there are also paranormal experts who clear spaces in person. When Amina Akhtar lived in a Manhattan studio apartment, she noticed that her dog was staring at walls with her ears pinned back in fear. Things escalated when Akhtar, an occasional sleepwalker, found herself sleepwalking every single night for three weeks. She found herself waking up in her closet and facing corners. Then, out of the blue, a healer she’d met at a press dinner months earlier reached out. “He said, ‘I need to get into your apartment. My spirit guides are telling me there’s something really wrong

inside your apartment right now,” says Akhtar, who drew inspiration from the experience for her book *Almost Surely Dead*. “I literally dropped my phone.”

The night before the healer came over, she had a dream that she was in her bathroom, and something was telling her that if she took a picture with a flash in the mirror, she would see what was in her apartment. “I didn’t do that, because that’s how you die in a horror movie,” she says. When the healer surveyed her apartment, he told Akhtar that the problem was an entity, attached to someone in the building, that was coming in through the bathroom. She says he put up a barrier and that seemed to do the trick. “The vibe in the apartment was just different all of a sudden,” she says.

Akhtar’s healer didn’t bill her, but many paranormal investigators do charge for their services. Phillips warns that it’s important to do your research before hiring someone to investigate or cleanse a space. Koncher concurs: “There are a lot of scam artists out there that prey on people,” she says. “Make sure they have references or good reviews and that they’re just not charging an obscene amount of money.” Phillips, who also has celebrity clientele, says her prices vary based on the size of the property, and a large home could cost a few thousand dollars. She also called out a group with exorbitant prices. “There’s a lot of ego.... There’s one group that will come to your property and they charge \$7,000.”

Whether you learn to live in harmony with your uninvited guests or get rid of them for good, living in a haunted house doesn’t need to turn into a horror movie. Says Hendrickson, “You can take control back. It’s your house now, and you get to tell them what the rules are.”

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