

Housemates – Together from a distance, ZDF, Germany

“ZDF’s popular show “Housemates” is entering its 11th season. The show is aired on the public broad-casting channel KiKA, which exclusively broadcasts content for children.

Each “Housemates” season follows five girls or five boys, whose big dream has come true: they are invited to spend four weeks in a beautiful house, situated at a wonderful spot in Europe. What makes it more than a holiday: they are doing so without their parents. During their time together, the housemates encounter tons of fun, but simultaneously have to take responsibility for their everyday life, for the first time. 2020 Lisbon expected five housemates to enter the city but then Corona turned the filming of “Housemates” into a Mission Impossible. Social distancing, travel stops and lockdown – how could a “Housemates” situation possibly be done? How do you “share”, if you cannot even be together? Well, it can be done. Six 15- to 17-year-olds - three girls and three boys - moved into their virtually shared home, they became “Housemates – Together From A Distance”. While remaining in their own family homes, the six spend all their time together online. Unlike prior seasons, the six adolescents are not unknown faces. They were part of the “Housemates” seasons from Valencia (2018) and Amsterdam (2019). Of course, Corona plays an important role in the virtual “Housemates” season of 2020. The young people are desperate to see their friends, they talk about how they cope with homeschooling, they think about alternatives to sports clubs or dance classes. They share their personal experiences in times of Corona. The viewer learns how sad one of the participants is because he is not allowed to visit his grandma in her nursing home. One girl of Asian descent is experiencing a new form of racism, since the pandemic reached Germany. Economic consequences for several parents due to the lockdown are also an issue. The young people encourage each other in many ways. They think about what can be done to support the weak in the society or to thank the many social care workers and helpers who keep the country running. The youngsters offer neighbors to do their shopping, to take their dogs for a walk or to sew protective masks for them. Despite all the serious corona topics, the well-known and entertaining “Housemates” feeling and humor is still there! Regardless of all restrictions, the young people have a lot of fun, they joke and flirt, are virtually together and spend an intensive time together. Additionally, they give their virtual roommates and the viewers insights into their private and family lives.

The implementation takes place through the skillful use of all the modern technologies possible. The “Housemates” were equipped with a camera to shoot themselves or to be filmed by a family member. A mobile phone can be attached to the camera tripod which enables video conferences with the other five. The youngsters hear each other via headphones. Connected that way, they are capable to spend their everyday life “together”. The directors are also present via headphones and can see the video recordings as well as the video conferences. They sometimes set topics and activities, but also give proper filming directions. For example: "Please show us the queue in front of the supermarket that you are talking about". In addition, there are daily

interviews by the directors in which the protagonists talk more precisely about what they have experienced.

The directors are involved in all discussions and actions and ensure that all points of view are represented with appreciation. Furthermore, the directors make sure that everyone in the group can express themselves fully and freely. Contrary to a regular "Housemates" season, the "Housemates - Together From A Distance" has got a host. Jolina, who is also the host of the brand-new YouTube channel #WGZusammenZuhause (#togetherathome), makes comments and occasionally introduces challenges to the housemates. The filming for the current season will continue until the 10th of May 2020. 20 episodes of "Housemates - Together From A Distance" will be broadcasted on TV channel KiKA from May 11, 2020 and simultaneously streamed in the zdftivi media library. There are short version of episodes on YouTube and a lot of additional information for the "Housemates" community."

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