

BONUS #1: HOW TO CONDUCT SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

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How to improve your problematic relationships with relationship partners who have trouble staying focused, paying attention and hearing what you say.

Dealing with people who have attentional problems and /or hyperactivity can be a real challenge. And it can require the patience of Job.

Partners who have attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder may fail to pick up on non-verbal cues in conversations, may have trouble listening for more than a minute or two, may seem unable to pay attention to details, or may forget to pay the bills on time.

Such behaviors can be extremely frustrating, and are the norm for relationships where one or both people have attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) or attention deficit disorder (ADD).

It is a common myth that only children have these problems. Many adults have AD/HD. Generally, people do not grow out of the disorder, so hyperactive kids grow into hyperactive adults.

ADULTS AND AD/HD

Many adults have gone undiagnosed for years and encounter AD/HD-related problems in most areas of their lives, including their jobs and relationships.

Although AD/HD has long been thought of as a disorder for children, it can affect people of any age. A recent study done at State University New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, New York and Harvard Medical School in Boston, suggests that not all those who suffer from AD/HD had symptoms in early childhood.

Many adults may not experience symptoms until later in life.

There are three basic kinds of AD/HD:

- one involves mostly attention;
- the second involves mostly hyperactivity;
- and the third involves both.

The symptoms of Attention Deficit include difficulty in staying focused on a task, problems

paying close attention to details, not listening (mind wandering), difficulty in finishing tasks and getting organized, forgetfulness and getting distracted easily.

Symptoms of the hyperactivity side of AD/HD include fidgeting, leaving one's seat frequently, running about or climbing excessively, talking excessively, and interrupting. Often the person seems to be driven by a motor.

THE IMPACT OF AD-HD

Naturally, these symptoms can have a derogatory effect on one's work, education, marriage, and any and all activities. Those with AD/HD may not achieve as much in life as they are capable.

Or they may stop working on a goal because it seems impossible. And many goals are hard to reach when you are disorganized, lousy with details and tend to avoid tasks that require sustained effort! Those with AD/HD may lack self-confidence and avoid situations in which their symptoms may be exposed.

Is the impact of AD/HD real? You betcha!

In some folks this is a very exhausting and trying condition. In others, the symptoms are less severe and don't interfere with their work and personal lives as much.

All in all, this is a costly disorder that has been misunderstood for years. Getting a leg up on AD/HD starts with finding out what type you have and devoting time to understanding the condition, and employing strategies to help you deal with it.

RESOURCES

There are many resources available for sufferers, resources that will help you learn to live with your AD-HD.

One of my favorites is the magazine, *ADDitude: Attention Deficit*, available at www.attitudemag.com. You can find it at bookstores and news stands, too.

You can find ADD Health and Wellness Centers, Inc. at www.addhealthandwellness.com. They have lots of information and resources.

There are many good books on AD/HD, such as, *ADD-Friendly Ways To Organize Your Life* by Judith Kolberg and Kathleen Nadeau.

A good organization for adults and children with AD/HD is CHADD, Children and Adults With Attention Deficit Disorder.

RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

Many people with ADD have a hard time with their relationships. Marriage becomes more difficult when one or both partners have ADD.

There are several reasons for this.

The ADD spouse often fails to hear what the other spouse says, even when it's critical that they talk, such as in times of crisis.

Communication problems haunt the ADD relationship, since the ADD partner has problems with listening and may be unable to remember what was discussed earlier.

Forgetfulness is a big problem with many people who have some form of AD-HD. I know this is true for me, as I tend to have ADD symptoms (the attention part but not the hyperactive part). I believe I had it as a child, as well, but it was not diagnosed.

Forgetfulness has frequently been an issue for me at work and in my personal life. I may talk to my wife at 4:00 P.M. She may tell me to pick up a loaf of bread on my way home from work. No problem, I tell her.

Of course, I forget, don't I? You betcha!

Now, my wife has learned my habits, so she may call to remind me when she thinks I am leaving the office or getting near town. This is an example of how a partner without ADD can be helpful to the person who has it. Couples can learn to work with the problem and make the relationship better.

People who have AD-HD tend to do a lousy job of regulating thoughts, emotions and actions, which makes it difficult for them to interact effectively with others.

They have trouble staying on task. Or they are so focused on one thing they can't shift attention to another. Misbehaviors, like being critical or demanding, may be overblown, and constructive behaviors may be underdeveloped or displayed inconsistently.

Couples who both have AD-HD face real obstacles. If both spouses are impulsive and poor at planning and organizing, just think of the implications for budgeting, solving conflict and preparing for special events. Both may have problems modulating emotions, which may result in frequent fights and emotional upheavals. Neither partner may be able to show the other how to effectively cope with frustration.

What can be done to help?

HELPFUL STRATEGIES

If you or your partner has AD/HD, the first step is understanding how the disorder impacts one's thoughts, emotions and behaviors. And to realize the person isn't trying to cause problems for the relationship.

The next step is to realize the importance of taking action. You can do something about the problem, but only if you act.

1st Strategy:

CONSIDER MEDICATION AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

Medications which are prescribed for AD/HD are effective at controlling symptoms and making it easier for people to communicate. See your physician about possible medication. Don't be afraid to take advantage of the many excellent medications at your disposal.

If the couple tries to talk when the medication is working, the result will probably improve. The medication will make it easier for the partner with AD/HD to listen and respond with full attention. It may be easier for him or her to refrain from interrupting, stay on task and listen without getting angry.

The couple should set goals for improving communication, write them down and make them visible during the discussions. That way the AD/HD-partner will not forget or lose track of the agenda.

Realistic goals for the partner with AD/HD may include: learning to complete a discussion without zoning out; acknowledging feelings and remaining seated (and quiet) while the partner is talking; and being able to write a few points down.

The non-AD/HD-partner will have to learn the best ways of supporting and encouraging his/her partner, and to avoid making the problems worse by reacting the wrong way.

The couple may want to work with a therapist or AD/HD coach in improving their communication skills, or use books and other resources for support.

Keep in mind, it can be difficult for the partner with AD/HD to improve communication skills without medication. In some cases, it may seem impossible. So medication can be very helpful.

2nd Strategy:

LEARN EFFECTIVE COPING SKILLS

It is inevitable that the AD/HD spouse will make mistakes or have "ADD moments." He or she will forget to put the deposit in the bank, feed the dog or miss important parts of conversations, etc.

So the couple must learn to expect some of these mishaps and stop over-reacting to them. Avoid getting angry and making it worse than it is. Use a sense of humor to deal with these moments. Don't make it so hard on the relationship.

Instead of wasting energy complaining about the blunder, get busy fixing the problem. Take a matter-of-fact approach to undoing the damage. The ADD-partner should go back and make the bank deposit. And feed the dog once the mistake has been uncovered.

And both partners should approach the tasks with a smile, not a frown. Keep all communications positive and the partner with ADD will not be tempted to run away or avoid talking to you again.

Remember: criticizing the ADD-behaviors of your spouse will only make matters worse!

Learn to check and double check before you leave the house. If you are going away for the weekend, do a walk-through to make sure the oven hasn't been left on and the house is safe and secure before you leave. Have the non-ADD partner conduct the second walk-through.

Adopt the same policy to other areas of your life.

3RD Strategy:

USE A CREATIVE APPROACH TO ORGANIZING

Persons who have AD/HD tend to be poor organizers. It doesn't matter how many workshops we attend on organizational skills, we still have problems getting and staying organized. The executive functions in our brains are not what they should be, resulting in difficulty regulating tasks, thoughts, emotions and interactions.

If your spouse, child or employee has AD/HD, you can always help out by encouraging them to make "Do Lists" with you. Yes, they will probably need a little help from you.

Make the "Do Lists" every evening for the next day. In the morning, review the list at breakfast. Or ask the person to tell you about what the day will look like and what he/she may be looking forward to doing the most. Talking about the day can help the person to form mental pictures of the tasks they must do and to fix the images in memory.

You can use this time to discuss how the person will be successful at following through with task completion. Following-through is difficult for most people with AD/HD, so a little time and effort spent here can be beneficial.

Alarms on wristwatches can be set to help the person remember when to do certain things. Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) can be helpful devices, as well. Most people enjoy using them and find them quite useful.

The non-AD/HD-partner, parent or supervisor can remind the person with AD/HD when it is

time to do something through phone calls, email messages or even a personal visit, if possible. Teachers can be a big aid for AD/HD-students because they are in a good position to send reminders or review the day's "Do List" with the student.

Parents can remember the ADD-child's strengths and weaknesses when assigning household tasks or jobs. If the child does physical work well but has trouble organizing a complicated task, like cleaning a big basement, give him the physical job to do, such as bringing in the firewood or moving the woodpile.

For couples, the same idea works equally well. Just remember to give each person the types of jobs they like to do best. And if the AD/HD-spouse has to do something which he/she finds difficult, build in lots of support, reminders and added discussion to facilitate success. There is no reason to let the AD/HD-spouse off the hook (the best relationships involve the sharing of work and responsibility), just create "a system" to ensure his/her success.

4th Strategy (for couples):

HAVE FUN AND CULTIVATE ROMANCE

School and work can be very challenging for those with AD/HD. Relationships are laced with peril. There are so many ways the AD/HD-person can fall into trouble. And it is hard for someone with AD/HD to keep a positive mental attitude and to avoid getting down on himself.

That's one reason it's so important for the AD/HD person to have fun. Making life enjoyable (and not so serious) can be motivational. Instead of focusing on the AD/HD-related symptoms and problems, couples should make an effort to keep enjoying their relationship.

The AD/HD-spouse may neglect to send flowers or say "I love you," may forget to give a card or chocolate on Valentine's day, may forget anniversaries and other important dates. They forget to prepare for romance.

The anecdote for these AD/HD deficits may lie in the partner going to the little extra trouble of planning dates and special nights out. The AD/HD-partner can leave himself notes and reminders to be more thoughtful, to express gratitude or remember the spouse's birthday.

The couple may need to plan for romance. Otherwise the romantic elements of the relationship may get left out. The couple may choose one or two nights a week for their special dates. Maybe the AD/HD-spouse will be responsible for setting it all up on one night, and the other spouse will take care of things on the second night.

The AD/HD-spouse should create reminders for picking up the flowers or a small gift to kick the night off. He/she will have to record the special day in the Palm Pilot or calendar.

The couple may want to buy a couple of good books on how to spice up their love life, and refer to the books often, talking about what they may want to try or not try. Communicating is

important.

SUMMARY

The ADD-marriage or ADD-relationship takes more effort and ingenuity than the average marriage or relationship. Successful relationships will go to the extra effort of making, planning, and communicating fun. Reminders and creative planning will be required to help those with ADD succeed.

Relationships which consist of two people who have AD/HD are even more challenging and will require careful planning and consideration. The partners will need to carefully structure their attempts to communicate, organize and manage their work in creative and resourceful ways. Relationships where AD/HD is a factor can be pleasurable and successful, if the participants educate themselves about the disorder and develop strategies for dealing with the challenges posed by inattentiveness, impulsiveness, forgetfulness and hyperactivity.

People who have symptoms of AD/HD should talk with others about their symptoms in a direct and positive, if not humorous, manner. It is not a condition to feel ashamed about. By talking about it and laughing at one's AD/HD-related miscues, it makes it easier to carry the load.

If you have some form of ADD or AD/HD do not despair. Learn all you can about the condition and develop creative ways of working with it. Chances are, you will learn to manage the problems quite satisfactorily.

If you need further assistance, call a counselor or AD/HD coach, or contact the organization, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD), www.CHADD.org.