

# **SURVIVE AND THRIVE** **Managing Life with Adult ADHD**

Abigail's Podcast Cheatsheet

**#027**

## **ADHD and Romantic Relationships**

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For the purposes of this discussion I refer to the partner not affected by ADHD as the non-ADHDer and the partner affected by ADHD as the ADHDer. While I dislike these terms because people are more than just their ADHD, it makes delineations clearer when discussing couples affected by ADHD.

What happens when two people affected by ADHD get together in a relationship? Is it any different than when an ADHDer and a non-ADHDer get together?

Many of the issues are similar.

### **Addressing Problems of an Unequal Relationship**

Usually one person is more affected by ADHD than the other. The less affected partner takes the role usually played by the non-ADHDer in a relationship: The role of de facto parent.

The de facto parent role happens because it appears to the non-ADHDer that the ADHDer is not carrying their weight in the relationship. The non-ADHDer feels they have to take control or become the responsible one in the relationship.

One of the first things to go is the intimacy the couple once shared. Being cast in these new roles will diminish the sexual pull that the couple felt as romantic partners courting each other. Another way to think about this is one partner will begin to feel like a constant nag while the other partner begins to feel constantly badgered. Neither one feels good in the role they feel they have been forced into.

The situation that develops is no one's fault. The only fault would be if both partners were unwilling to realize that they each needed to make changes and modifications in their behaviors for the relationship to thrive.

Most often it is the non-ADHDer partner who calls me about coaching their spouse to improve the marriage or relationship. One of the first things I ask is if they want their ADHD spouse or partner to change some of his or her behaviors. The answer is always a big YES! Then I ask them the question that will decide if I take them on as clients: Are you willing to make changes in your behavior also? If I hear a yes, all systems are go. If I hear, "I don't need to make any changes, I am not the one with ADHD," all systems stop. I don't take them on as clients. Change is a catalyst for more change. If one person is changing their behavior and the other person isn't, there is no incentive to keep trying to change.

### **Additional challenges for ADHD Couples**

When one or both of the partners is affected by ADHD, there are additional challenges in the relationship.

#### **Poor Memory**

People affected by ADHD have an especially poor memory for conversations – especially if the ADHD affected person is doing something else during the conversation. The non-ADHD partner takes it personally that the conversation is forgotten. It feels like you don't care! In reality it is the ADHD at work.

The good news is that you can improve the odds that you will remember a conversation. Try these tips:

- *Stop whatever you are doing when you are spoken to so that you can listen.*
- *Takes notes that you can refer to in your cell phone, on your calendar, etc.*
- *Ask your partner to repeat what was said if you are not sure what you heard a moment ago.*
- *Reframe, meaning repeat back what was said by your partner to them in your own words. Ask, "Did I get that right?"*
- *Apologize when you mess up. Don't make an excuse, just say, "I'm sorry, dear. I'll keep working on this. Remember this isn't about how important you are to me in my life."*

#### **Impulsivity**

People with ADHD often are impulsive. This can manifest itself in purchases that are not planned or discussed as a couple.

"Honey, I got us a great deal on a house on my way home from work! Trust me, a little work and it will be worth twice what we paid!"

“Honey, while I was picking up the milk, I also picked up a new car! It’s sweet!”

Similar unplanned, impulsive, or out-of-the-blue purchases can hurt a couple’s relationship. A big financial expenditure may even put the couple in financial jeopardy. Keep in mind that the number one reason people get divorced is over money. Here are some approaches to dealing with impulsivity, yours or the other person’s:

- *Wait 24 hours and then go back to see if you still want to buy it.*
- *Discuss making a rule that the one person has to call the other before making any big purchase, or over X amount that you have buy it together.*
- *Ask these questions:*
  - *Do we need this or just want this?*
  - *Is there place for it at home?*
  - *What will we get rid of in exchange for getting this?*
  - *Can we afford this?*
  - *Where else could the money go?*
  - *Are we saving for something and is that more important than this?*

### **Adjusting after the honeymoon**

A startling thing happens after getting married to those affected by ADHD. They change.

If it is a man who has the ADHD, which is statistically more likely, he will be Prince Charming during courtship, every woman’s dream. They will do exciting things together. He will be attentive. He is in hunter mode. The ADHD-affected person is very stimulated during this part of the relationship. People affected by ADHD like novelty, so a new person in their life and a developing relationship is exciting. The unknown makes it attractive.

Then the ADHD man proposes (or woman), the couple marries, and things begin to change. The charming person who swept the woman (or man) away begins to disappear, replaced by someone who is easily distracted, who gets wrapped up in new things and new ideas, and who is on the computer for long periods of time.

This husband (or wife) forgets things that he or she is told. He or she is often late. He or she is impulsive. He or she makes decisions without consulting his wife (or her husband). He or she may even have difficulty holding down a job.

Mind you I have been saying he or she, but these problems will also come up with she and she and he and he couples also. It is really about one having ADHD and one not having ADHD, or one more ADHD than the other.

These things were not apparent when they were courting. How can that be? And what can you do about it?

People affected by ADHD can be adrenalin junkies. Once they have climbed Mt. Everest, the high is over. It is not that they were being inauthentic prior to marriage. The charmer is a true part of them, but not the whole of them. It is the stimulated part. Once settled into marriage they find it hard to keep that high going every day with regards to their spouse. In addition other parts of their personality begin to appear that may not be as attractive.

This can be incredibly shocking for the non-ADHD spouse. She thought she was marrying one man and she feels she got another. She is dismayed. She feels rejected. The level of attention she is used to is gone. What is it she has done wrong? How can she fix it?

Here is where the real work of marriage comes in. The couple will need to work hard to keep their marriage stimulating. Additionally, they each will have to adjust to this new reality. She will have to learn it is not personal when he is distracted, and he will have to learn to be sensitive to her need for him to be fully present when they are talking. It will take vigilance on both their parts, but improvement is possible. ADHD and marriage is hard but can be rewarding.

### **Plan Spontaneity!**

This may sound contradictory, but planning spontaneity is important.

Don't make a specific plan but do schedule time for the two of you to do something special. This does not include staying in and watching TV. Nor does it mean buying tickets in advance for a play.

This is a time to brainstorm as a team and come up with something new to do that is of interest or curiosity to *both of you*, No compromising by one to placate the other. You are a team solving an intriguing problem and then acting on it.

Why is it important to do this? Novelty is important to many people affected by ADHD. Plus, in most relationships there is usually a leader and a follower. This joint activity levels the playing field so no one person is doing all the bending.

### **Dealing with Finances**

Like many people with ADHD, do you often pay late fees on your bills even though you have money to pay the bill at the time it is due? Have you gotten a ticket for not renewing your car registration on time even though you can do it online and you were sent a reminder?

You need help, especially if you are part of a couple.

You can automate some things, but some bills and obligations may not be regular enough or they require some scrutiny before being paid. But you don't, won't, or can't do it. Fortunately you can find help!

### **Hiring a Virtual Assistant or VA**

A VA is a virtual assistant you hire to take care of certain tasks for you. Generally you pay VAs hourly. They either work independently or for a company. You can search online for a VA or, if you know someone who owns their own business, ask them if they use and can recommend a VA.

One of the most common difficulties is determining who is going to pay the bills, make appointments, and keep track of filings and registrations. Having a VA do it takes away the battle.

Getting a VA may seem unnecessary, but it could save your relationship or marriage! Why? Because many couples affected by ADHD argue about chores. One of the most common difficulties is determining who is going to pay the bills, make appointments, and keep track of filings and registrations. Having a VA take care of it not only takes away the battle but also the power issues that surround whom manages the money day to day.

The big decisions can still be made jointly. The VA will just be directed on what to do. This reduces the possibility of the partner with ADHD acting impulsively or not at all. It also makes sure the non-ADHD partner doesn't become the caretaker and master of financial threads in the fabric of the partnership.

### **Barter, Trade, or Hire**

Consider bartering, trading, or hiring out things you dislike or have difficulty doing. I pay someone to do my taxes because I am not good at doing taxes. That doesn't mean I live in ignorance about them or abdicate all responsibility. I carefully chose my accountant. I am responsible for getting the proper information to my accountant in a timely manner, and have my taxes explained to me before I sign off on them.

In all areas of your life, take full responsibility. It can free you from uncomfortable obligations and help you become independent and empowered.

This may seem off topic talking about things like bartering, trading and hiring but a major sticking point for couples is the chore wars. Anyway to alleviate some of those issues can help a marriage or partnership.

## Resources

### Books:

Bell, Michael T. The ADHD Marriage Workbook: A User-Friendly Guide to Improving Your Relationship. Williamsville: Echo Point Books & Media, LLC., 2012.

Bell, Michael T. You, Your Relationship and Your ADD: A Workbook. Williamsville: Echo Point Books & Media, LLC., 2011.

Halverstadt, Jonathan Scott. A.D.D. & Romance: Finding Fulfillment in Love, Sex, and Relationships. Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 1998.

Maucieri, Larry and Jon Carlson. The Distracted Couple: The Impact of ADHD on Adult Relationships. Bethel: Crown House Publishing Ltd., 2014.

Orlov, Melissa. The ADHD Effect on Marriage. Plantation: Specialty Press, Inc., 2010.

Orlov, Melissa and Nancie Kohleberger. The Couple's Guide to Thriving with ADHD. Plantation: Specialty Press, Inc., 2014.

Pera, Gina. Is It You, Me, or Adult A.D.D.? San Francisco: 1201 Alarm Press, 2008.

Tschudi, Susan. Loving Someone with Attention Deficit Disorder: A Practical Guide to Understanding Your Partner, Improving Communication & Strengthening Your Relationship. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications Inc., 2012.

### Further Help:

<https://www.adhdmarrriage.com/> - this is a website that hosts a forum for couples affected by ADHD. Founded by Melissa Orlov, whose training I participated in regarding working with couples, this site is very informative.

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