

Charting the Course: Exploring Strategies for Managing Adult ADHD

By Erin Bernhardt

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Erin Bernhardt and I'm the Administrative Assistant for CADDAC, filling in for Michelle Beer while she is on maternity leave. I have my Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the United States, specializing in English and Science. I am a married woman and I am also an adult with ADHD. I will be sharing my experiences, research, and thoughts regarding issues that adults with ADHD frequently face.

In my experience, two major issues adults with ADHD face are a lack of household organization skills and communication difficulties within the marriage and/or family. I have been working on organization skills lately, and have been doing research to that effect.

I have been brought to tears by my lack of organization within my household. I would see mess and think that there couldn't possibly be any way out. The mountain of clutter I faced was impossible to deal with – so I avoided it, but, of course, avoiding the clutter made it grow bigger and more out of control. I was ashamed – here I am not able to manage what other people seem to manage just fine on a daily basis. There is a lot of pressure, especially on women, to keep a tidy household, and I was not living up to the picture at all. I felt like an utter failure.

I got to the point that I had to humble myself and ask for some help. I wasn't really taught proper household organizational skills, but I knew someone who was good at it and would do her best not to judge me. I explained the situation and she brought some bins and cleaning supplies and we worked.

I notice that when I suddenly had these bins and places to put things, I was so easily able to continue to clean and organize on my own! Could it really be that simple? I thought. How can I learn to find bins for myself? How do I figure out what to get? How do I implement some systems to keep this up?

Well, I made an appointment with my psychologist who specializes in ADHD. He recommended a book to me: ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life by Judith Kolberg and Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D. When I

began working for CADDAC, I read this book cover to cover. It was like they made a book for me, about me, without me even knowing it! They covered all the areas I'm weak in, explained why I'm weak in them in relation to the ADHD symptomology, and teach practical strategies for organizing that work in coordination with people with ADHD. Regular organizing strategies often don't work for us!

The theme of the book is to take everything and break it down into bite-sized little bits. I realized that, like exercising, this would be a lifestyle change. I can't lose weight in a month that it took me years to put on; and I can't become neat and tidy and organized in a month, either. It's an ongoing process like eating healthy. It takes maintenance. Oh no! I thought. Maintenance is where I always fall apart!

But it teaches you routines. And routines make habits. And habits become lifestyles. I have to pocket my perfectionism and celebrate each victory. Another tool I'm utilizing in coordination with my new organization book is called flylady.com. She sends you email reminders (if you sign up) what area to tackle each day. She also helps you create a "Control Journal" in bite-sized pieces that help you decide upon routines.

Another good resource for organization is The Side-tracked Home Executives (Pam Young and Peggy Jones) who have written several books about organization over the years and support FlyLady. Their website is www.shesintouch.com. They call themselves the "Slob Sisters" are reformed slobs who use their humour and a pack of index cards to organize themselves, and now speak out in support of others.

And finally there is "Messies Anonymous" at www.messies.com. Sandra Felton is the founder, also dubbed "The Organizer Lady." She's written several books, spoken at conferences, and founded the Messies Anonymous 12-step group. This website offers more organizing tips, daily emailed tips, and support through online and local self-help groups. One of the support groups is called "Messies and ADD" at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Messiness-and-ADD>.

I plan to use all the resources I can to get my home whipped into shape. I know it will take me awhile, but it will make my household a happier one, and help me manage my ADHD symptoms, too. Using the tools I've discovered and the time management skills the book teaches (with the help of a buddy), I can put my goals into action. I want to be able to be a model for my children someday, so they won't encounter as many obstacles (hopefully) as I have with organization and ADHD.

References:

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