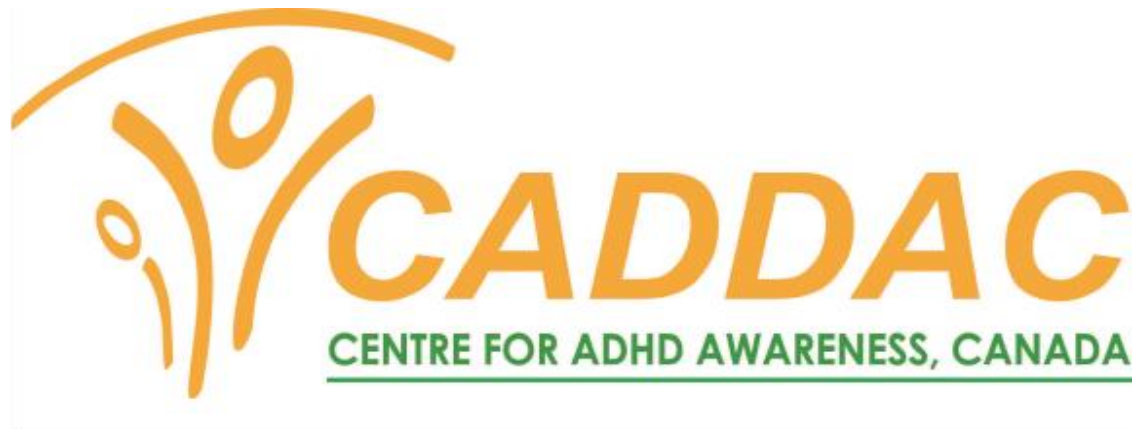


The ADHD Impact on Relationships

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Is a national not-for-profit organization providing leadership in education and advocacy for ADHD organizations and individuals with ADHD across Canada.

The ADHD Impact on Relationships

ADHD comes with Impairments in:

- Attention – losing focus – easily bored
- Social skills – difficulty picking up social cues
- Emotional regulation – difficulty dealing with frustration, verbal outbursts, emotional meltdowns
- Impulsivity in speech, actions, spending - seen as irresponsible
- Executive functioning – lack of organizational skills, household duties, paying bills, losing things, messiness, hoarding
- Remembering routines, appointments, promises
- Following rules - consistency in parenting
- Time management- late, missed deadlines, no schedule
- Distractibility can lead to poor follow-through on responsibilities and promises

ADHD Symptoms

“ADHD symptoms alone aren’t destructive to a relationship; a partner’s response to the symptoms , and the reaction that it evokes, is.” Melissa Orloff

- The interpretation of the what has occurred – by both parties
- The communication patterns that occur afterward
 - Non- ADHD partner
 - Blame, frustration, anger, withdrawal
 - ADHD Partner
 - Downplaying severity, excuses, denial, withdrawal

New Relationships

The novelty of a new relationship can result in an intensity of focus for the adult with ADHD

Results in :

- Hyperfocus during courtship
- Makes the partner feel very special
- “Relationships are an endurance sport” - too much attention can cause burn out
- The partner with ADHD can become bored and disengaged
- The eventual let down after the hyper focus stops can be confusing and hurtful for the partner

Feelings of non-ADHD Partners

- Feelings of being ignored, lonely, unloved, unappreciated
- Cannot rely on or trust their partner
- Feels that their partner just does not care enough
- Not being heard or discounted since areas of concern are downplayed and not change - same issues keep resurfacing
- Feelings of being unfairly saddled with being the responsible one – taking on the load of household and parental duties
- Feelings of resentment and anger
- Increased stress, exhaustion – carrying the entire load
- Feel that they have to walk on eggshells to avoid emotional outbursts – can be exhausting

Feelings of Partner with ADHD

- Feels that their partner is constantly trying to micromanage their life, has become a control freak, consistently nagging
- Leads to avoiding partner or saying what they want to hear
- May be hypersensitive to criticism due to the excess of criticism in earlier years
- Feels continually and unfairly judged and misunderstood
- May become resentful and deaf to criticism and stop trying
- Feels overwhelmed - anticipates failure - incapable of meeting partner's expectations – stops trying
- Feels shamed, less than partner, unloved and unwanted
- Longs to be accepted and appreciated

Developing and Repairing ADHD Relationships

Steps to Repairing the Relationship

Necessities:

1. Assessment for ADHD and all other potential co-existing disorders resulting in diagnoses
2. Review treatment options and implement
3. Education about ADHD in general and how it impacts this person specifically
4. Both partners must be committed to change
5. The partner with ADHD must take responsibility for their treatment and change
6. The N-A partner is responsible for changing their own behaviour and correcting their misconceptions

Next Steps

Except that:

1. ADHD does impact your relationship
2. Do not wait until things are irreparable
3. ADHD is a medical disorder with impairments – change the lens of how you view actions and issues
4. ADHD symptoms and impairments are not an intentional act – forgive and forget past transgressions
5. The blame game must be stopped - who is right is not as important as getting along – use the team approach
6. Nagging and shame does not work
7. Continual criticism is demoralizing

Treatments

Medication may assist with attention, forgetfulness, emotional regulation however,

- This is not a substitute for ADHD education
- Organization strategies must be used as well

Therapies that can also be helpful:

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) – challenges negative thought process
- ADHD Coaching for organization and strategies
- Anger management and marriage therapy by ADHD expert

Lifestyle changes:

- Better diet, sleep habits and more aerobic exercise can be helpful

General Strategies

- Treat each other with respect
- Keep a sense of humour
- You cannot control your spouse, but you can change the dynamics of the relationship by stopping, verbal attacks, blame, nagging, excuses, ignoring the situation
- Positive feedback as encouragement when there is progress
- Make time for doing enjoyable things
- Rule: there can only be one “crazy” person at a time
- Analyze the things you frequently fight about and think about solutions to the problem rather than assigning blame
- Decide how to deal with embarrassing social situations and missing social cues as a team

Tips for the Adult With ADHD

- Acknowledge the fact that your ADHD symptoms have been interfering with the relationship and it is not that your partner is being unreasonable
- Take responsibility for the symptoms that can be improved with treatment
- Be honest with yourself and others around commitments –know your limits and when you need down time - don't impulsively agree and disappoint later
- Learn your strengths and weaknesses and set up your environment for success, schedule and work accordingly
- Figure out the way things work best for you and implement - unless it interferes or hurts others
- Apologize when required – others are more forgiving when you take responsibility

Tips for Adult Without ADHD

- Be supportive without taking over – do not parent
- Recognize your partner's limitations but do not take on all the tasks - you will just end up being resentful – swap tasks
- Strive for an equal balance of labour, but be sensitive to assign tasks to people's strengths
- You may wish to take on the time sensitive duties
- Be open to your partner's unorthodox approaches if they work – your way will most likely not work for them
- DO NOT take ADHD symptoms personally!
- Put issues into perspective – which are the most important and what can be put on hold for a while
- Remember the “fun” ADHD traits that you fell in love with

Communication Strategies

- Not being heard – most common complaint – once the person feels heard their stress level reduces
- Each person needs to increase your own listening skills
- Make time to sit down to talk rather than using the phone, text or e-mail – nonverbal cues are important
- Use eye contact to make sure your partner is engaged
- Reiterate what you heard your partner say to check your understanding movie story
- Ask questions to help you stay focused – take notes to hold an idea for later, non-ADHD partner can be more direct and use shorter sentences
- Listen openly without judgment – helps you walk in other's shoes
- Ask for repetition if your mind wonders – both parties
- Ask for breaks if you feel yourself tiring and unable to stay focused
- Don't make assumptions as to your partner's motivation
- Be aware of what you say and how you are saying it – tone matters

Organizational Tips

- Identify both of your areas of strength and weakness
- Use individual and joint organizational methods, family laminated calendar in the fridge
- Remember that one partner's organization strategies may feel very strange and not work for the other partner
- Designate specific areas for things that get lost frequently - keys, electronic devices, papers
- Develop routines and schedules - use visual reminders
- Decrease clutter – may need to use a professional
- Use organizational tools for bills, papers etc.
- Weekly family meeting to organize upcoming week's events and responsibilities

Fighting About Chores

- Address workload imbalances
- Divide chores along strengths
- Trade and/or divide chores - but partners must feel the balance is equal
- Agree on a mutually acceptable way to use reminders – lists, post-its, verbal reminders (use humour) – wife versus coach
- Some tasks may need to be split with one person being the closer
- If neither partner is good with a specific task – find ways to outsource them: bookkeeping, cleaning, yard work
- Some tasks can now be automated - grocery shopping
- If one partner has had a heavier load due to unforeseen circumstances find ways to show your appreciation

Parenting

- The untreated adults with ADHD will find it impossible to parent patiently and consistently – get dx and treated
- Parent as a team – do not allow kids to divide and conquer
- Arguing over parenting can be hugely detrimental to your relationship and your parent/child relationships
- Adults with ADHD who take responsibility for their treatment and use strategies make great role models for their children with ADHD – who could relate better?
- Divide parenting chores by strengths
- Remember to divide the fun duties and the onerous ones equally – no one wants to be the “bad guy” all the time

Emotional Outbursts

- The can be the most destructive thing to a relationship
- Emotional dysregulation is a core symptom of ADHD – however this is not a well known fact
- Adults with ADHD become easily frustrated - unable to deal with frustration in an appropriate or constructive way
- Easy to anger and can become unintentionally aggressive
- Person with ADHD may be unaware that they are speaking loudly or being scary – this can be costly to a relationship
- Both partners need to become aware of the other partner's triggers and signals – non-ADHD partners should not expect subtle cues to be picked up
- Call for time outs – code word that stops interaction immediately - use cool down periods

The Keys to Great Strategies

By John Tucker ADHD Coach

- They work for YOU
- They are tied to your strengths
- They take advantage of the resources available

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Resource
www.caddac.ca

