

## Adult ADHD and the Family

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Resources on Adult ADHD  
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### Topics that will be Covered

- Adult ADHD Facts
- Adult ADHD Impairments
- Impact on the Family
- Impact on Parenting
- How treatment can help
- Communication strategies
- Organizational strategies
- Chores
- Emotional Regulation Outbursts



### Adult ADHD Facts

- Occurs in 4.4% of population world wide
- 80% of children continue Dx in adulthood, 2/3s continue to be impaired in adulthood
- 90% of adults remain untreated
- 85% also have other mental health coexisting disorders –anxiety, depression, OCD, personality disorder
- Adults with ADHD present differently from children
- There is no one unique “cookie cutter presentation
- To others - symptoms look like the adult does not care, is lazy and unmotivated, or obstinate and defiant
- Adults can have silos of competency BUT



## Adult ADHD Impairments



### Typical ADHD Impairments


- Attention dysregulation
- Poor listening skills
- Easily bored
- Executive functioning – lack of organizational skills – house hold duties, paying bills, losing things, messiness, hoarding
- Can become easily overwhelmed
- Remembering routines, appointments, promises
- Following rules
- Time management – always late, missed deadlines, lack of schedule
- Distractibility can lead to poor follow-through on responsibilities and promises







### Typical ADHD Impairments

- Difficulty staying motivated
- Social skills – difficulty picking up subtle signals
- Unable to view situations as anything other than black and white -dwelling on perceived slights
- Emotional dysregulation – difficulty dealing with frustration leading to verbal outbursts and meltdowns
- More easily angered, perceive slights and hold onto anger and slights longer
- Impulsivity in speech, actions, spending – seen as uncaring and irresponsible

### Impact of Adult ADHD on the Family



- Less years of education - lower wages
- More unemployment
- More impulsive decisions that impact the entire family
- Additional coexisting disorders
- Self medicating
- More marital conflict and breakup
- More child/parent conflict
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### Reduced Life Expectancy



- Worst case scenario a 25 year reduced life expectancy
- 2- or 3-times greater risk of dying in the next 5-year period
- More accidents and driving accidents
- More suicide
- More obesity and less healthy lifestyle
- More substance abuse- smoking, alcohol and drugs

R. Barkley, Health Outcomes of ADHD: Do They Adversely Impact Life Expectancy, American Professional Society of ADHD and Related Disorders – Published on: January 14, 2018



### How These Impairments can Impact the Family

- Non ADHD spouse becoming the sole parent as well as parenting the other spouse
- Spouse taking on a heavier load – builds resentment leading to more marital discord
- More financial instability
- More maternal depression
- More substance abuse -alcohol
- More unemployment and lower paying jobs impacts family's financial situation


### Parenting and ADHD


- Parents will likely go through emotional stages after hearing a diagnosis – similar to the stages of grief
  - Disbelief
  - Denial
  - Confusion
  - Fear and Anger
  - Guilt
  - Bargaining
  - Helplessness and depression
- Parents in different stages of acceptance = Discord
- Parents who disagree on treatment = Discord
- Parents with different parenting styles = Discord
- This can lead to inconsistent parenting

### Parents with ADHD

- Children with ADHD require consistent parenting
- This requires following a parenting behavioural plan
- A parent with untreated ADHD makes this extremely difficult
- Their own ADHD impairments will interfere
- Emotional dysregulation on the part of the parent will increase dysfunction
- Therefore all family members should be assessed , diagnosed and treated






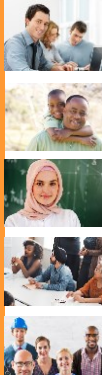
## Increased Stress for All

Child, parents and siblings are all under more stress for the same or different reasons



- More parent / child conflict
- Increased sibling conflict
- Increase of child non compliance
- Need for more specialized parenting
- More likely that one or both parents have ADHD which further complicates parent/Child interaction

**Coping Strategies**

- The feeling of lack of control of the stressors increases stress
- Knowing that they have coping strategies can reduce stress



## Strategies to Improve Family Functioning

## Steps to Repairing the Relationship

**Necessities:**



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

## Next Steps

**Except that:**

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

## ADHD Treatment

**Medication:**  
May assist with attention, forgetfulness, emotional regulation however,


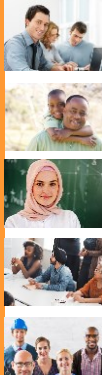
- This is not a substitute for ADHD education
- Strategies must be put in place

**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

## Strategies





## Treatment

- Diagnosis and Treatment of ADHD adult!!!!
- Initiate healthy lifestyle choices – exercise, sleep, balanced diet, mindfulness
- Counseling, therapy – CBT, mindfulness
- Treat any coexisting disorders – anxiety, depression, OCD
- Medication
- Assess and improve self and emotional dysregulation
- Treat substance use and abuse – nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, pot consumption, cocaine etc.
- Workplace accommodations





## Communication Strategies

- Not being heard – most common complaint – once the person feels heard their stress level reduces
- Each person needs to increase their 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](#)






## Communication Strategies Continued

- ADHD partner can ask questions to help stay focused or take notes to hold an idea for later
- Non-ADHD partner can be more direct and use shorter sentences
- Listen openly without judgment – helps to walk in other's shoes
- Ask for repetition if your mind wanders – 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 – 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 diagnosed and treated
- 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
- 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
- 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







## Parenting

- The untreated adults with ADHD will find it impossible to parent patiently and consistently – get diagnosed and treated
- Learn as much as you can about ADHD, so you can understand your child
- Reframe your thinking of the behaviours as being caused by an impairment due to a medical disorder
- Create a supportive environment by reducing conflict as much as possible and put structures and supports in place to offset impairments
- Be aware that some of the things you are asking your child to do may not be in their control
- Be proactive rather than reactive, try and anticipate times, and situations that trigger behaviours and have a plan in place for when behaviours happen
- Don't take behaviours, moods, ODD, disrespect personally



## Parenting

- Have only a few house rules e.g., not hurting others, staying safe, and school work
- Decide as a team of care givers what these rules will be and make this known to the child
- Let small things go, at least for now
- It is important to model the behaviours you want to see
- Avoid power struggles - pick your battles (CPS)
- Keep issues in perspective - don't overreact to small things
- Neither you or the child will be perfect, expect this and practice forgiveness
- You may need to take a time out yourself if you are feeling overwhelmed
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## Parenting

- Think of interactions (consequences) as a bank account – you need to be more heavily loaded on the credit side – more positive interactions – always use positive consequences first
- When consequences are required, both good and bad, they must be done immediately and consistently
- Don't engage in arguing - allow the rules to take the blame
- When speaking with your child make sure you are telling and not asking your child to do something
- Make sure you have their attention - eye contact and touching
- Don't continually lecture or nag your child
- Do listen to their perspective of a situation - you can obtain insight into their thinking and children with ADHD are not always at fault
- Keep your perspective and sense of humor



## Emotional Outbursts

- This 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 and become unable to deal with frustration in an appropriate or constructive way
- Easy to anger and can become unintentionally aggressive

## Emotional Outbursts Continued


- 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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