

Dealing with Adult ADD in Marriage

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Now that you have a diagnosis, don't start blaming the ADD/ADHD for all your marital or relationship problems. An individual adjusts to ADD/ADHD in many different ways, some of which are helpful and some of which are harmful. A relationship also adjusts to ADD/ADHD in similar ways. How a couple deals with one of the partner's ADD/ADHD determines the level of difficulty that you experience in your relationship from ADD/ADHD.

The ADD partner with distractibility, focus difficulties, time management and organizational deficits may contribute a certain amount of chaos and disorganization to household management, that the other partner feels compelled to compensate for. That partner may be running around like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to pay the bills, cook, clean, chauffeur kids, and in general, manage the household and domestic responsibilities. The stress of taking on "all of" the responsibilities can create resentment at minimum and major relationship difficulties in the extreme. Over time, some couples adjust to these differences and figure out how to allow each partner to contribute to the household management and the relationship according to his/her strengths and characteristics. Others struggle without problem solving, until the ways that they are ineffectively dealing with conflicts (some over ADD symptoms) create enough pain that they give up.

Couples who work together to find coping mechanisms can develop complementary ways of dealing with it that enriches their life together as a couple and strengthens their family. To make this happen the best things that you can do are listed below:

1. Identify the ADD/ADHD behaviors that are causing the most difficulty for the individual partners and for the relationship and to begin to look for solutions to these problems.
2. Work to improve any communication deficits that keep you from effectively communicating and problem solving. Learn to actively listen, ask questions, ask for clarification, challenges your assumptions and judgements, and share feelings regularly.
3. Most issues have a positive and negative side. Work to identify ADD characteristics and behaviors that have a positive face. An example would be "impulsivity". Impulsivity from a different slant may involve spontaneity, flexibility, creativity. These characteristics can be positive in most aspects of a person's life and in a relationship. Find the positive sides of the ADD characteristics together. Chances are that the things that attracted you to your ADD spouse in the first place, have been things you have been annoyed about lately. Try to see those characteristics in the ways you first saw them.
4. Respect your partner and show consideration for how s/he feels. Don't take your partner for granted. Be generous with the praise and compliments.

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