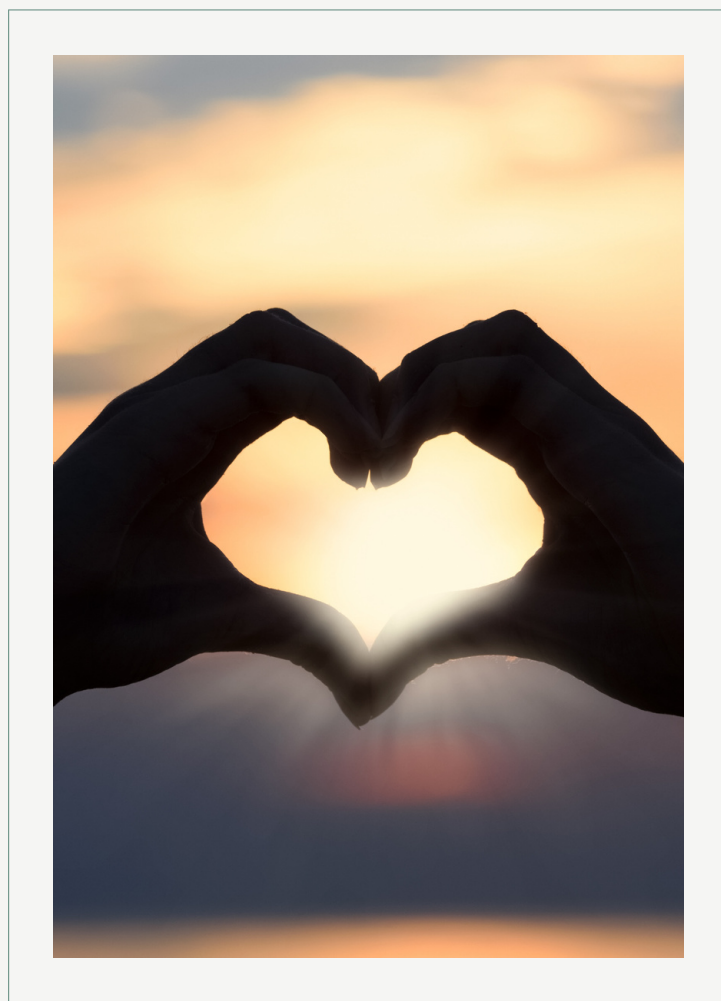
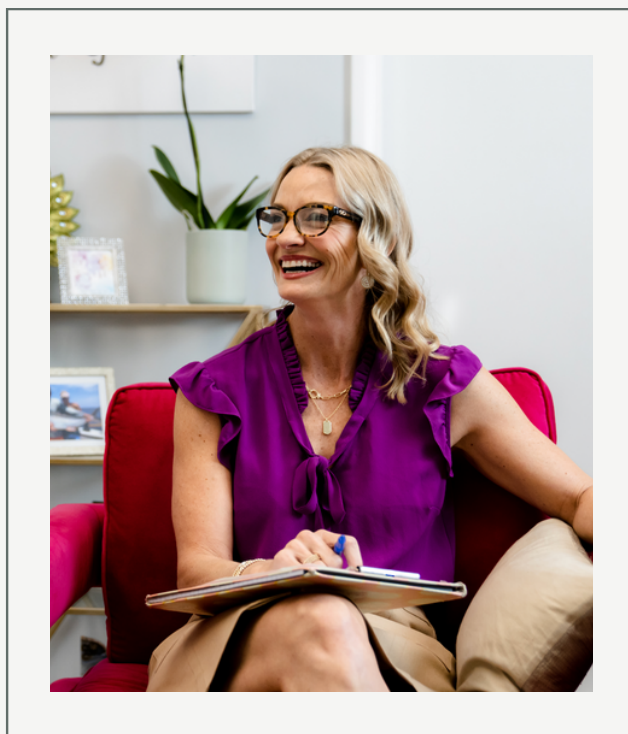


ADHD & RELATIONSHIPS



STRATEGIES TO THRIVE



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If you are in a relationship with someone who has ADHD, or you yourself experience ADHD, it can be like there is a third person interacting in your dynamic. Relationships can be tricky in the first place so when you introduce a person who processes things differently, it takes a specific approach to navigate successfully.

As a clinician, (and someone who has ADHD), I promise the greatest coping mechanism in a relationship with someone with ADHD is to understand. It genuinely makes your partner easier to love.

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IN A RELATIONSHIP

While everyone who struggles with ADHD experiences it somewhat differently, there are some common threads that exist. The first step is to identify where ADHD is showing up in your relationship to develop the appropriate compensatory skills.

Here are some of the symptoms of ADHD that can cause problems in your relationship:

- **Trouble paying attention.**
- **Poor organizational skills.**
- **Forgetfulness.**
- **Impulsivity.**
- **Emotional outbursts.**
- **Changing plans and life goals.**
- **Rejection sensitivity.**
- **Getting bored easily.**
- **Communication struggles.**
- **Hyperfocus.**

ABOUT ADHD

UNDERSTANDING THE SYMPTOMS OF ADULT ADHD

The defining feature of ADHD is a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interfere with functioning (in more than one area) for a period of at least six months. For adults, hyperactivity often manifests as restlessness or wearing others down.

- **Failure to pay close attention to details.**
- **Difficulty remembering information.**
- **Difficulty following directions.**
- **Difficulty concentrating or remaining on task.**
- **Struggles to organize tasks.**
- **Difficulty completing work on time.**
- **Chronic lateness and forgetfulness.**
- **Social intrusiveness – frequent interruptions or making important decisions without consulting others.**
- **Hyper-focus: Intense focus on things of interest (i.e. shopping online, video games) or tasks that are rewarding/stimulating.**
- **Reckless behavior.**
- **Poor planning.**
- **Easily stressed out.**
- **Explosive temper.**
- **Difficulty sitting still.**
- **Excessive talking.**
- **Easily bored.**

FIVE DYSFUNCTIONAL PATTERNS COMMON TO ADHD RELATIONSHIPS

The biggest challenge to making the necessary changes to improve your relationship is to understand the symptoms that have the greatest impact on your partner. Once you know how your symptoms influence your behavior with your partner, you can learn how to manage them.

Inattention: Adults with ADHD can lose focus during conversations, which leaves the partner feeling devalued. Inattention can also lead to mindlessly agreeing to things that you later forget. This can be frustrating and lead to resentment.

Forgetfulness: Even when adults with ADHD are paying attention, they might still forget what was discussed. This can cause others to see the person as unreliable or incapable.

Impulsivity: This symptom of adult ADHD can lead to frequent interruptions during conversations or blurting out thoughts without considering the feelings of others. This can result in hurt feelings.

Disorganization: Difficulty organizing and/or completing tasks can lead to household chaos. This can cause resentment and frustration for the partner, who might feel like he or she does more of the work at home.

Explosive temper: Many adults with ADHD have difficulty regulating their emotions. This can result in angry outbursts that leave partners feeling hurt or fearful.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

While the adult with ADHD in the relationship is at risk of feeling micromanaged and overwhelmed with criticism, the non-ADHD partner might feel disconnected, lonely, or under-appreciated.



It's important to place the focus on how the ADHD symptoms impact the relationship, instead of blaming one another for a breakdown in the bond.

COMMUNICATION HACKS

Communication often breaks down when one partner has ADHD. More often than not, the behaviors on the surface (i.e. she's always late for dinner) mask a deeper issue (he feels under-appreciated because she never shows up on time.)

Couples also tend to fall into a “parent-child” dynamic, where the non-ADHD partner feels responsible for everything and the ADHD partner feels like a child. This chronic pattern of micromanaging and underachievement can result in feelings of shame and insecurity for the ADHD partner.

When couples work to improve communication skills, they can restore balance to the relationship. Try these strategies to communicate effectively with your partner:

- ·Use “I feel” statements to focus on feelings and avoid blame.
- ·Communicate face-to-face as often as possible – nonverbal cues are important.
- ·Repeat and rephrase – to avoid allowing your mind to wander, repeat what your partner says and rephrase for clarification.
- ·Ask questions.
- ·Text yourself important takeaways from the conversation (especially if your partner asks you to assist with certain tasks).
- ·Talk about how your symptoms impair your ability to remember things or follow through on tasks. Sharing your struggles helps your partner understand how ADHD impacts your behavior.
- ·Hold eye contact when listening.
- ·For long conversations, consider a fidget toy like a squeeze ball to keep your mind engaged.

TIPS TO IMPROVE HOUSEHOLD OPERATIONS

Focus on teamwork. To create balance in a relationship, two partners have to work together. Having ADHD doesn't mean that you can't find balance; it means that you have to rely on open and honest communication and feedback to find ways to help one another.

Divide tasks based on strengths. If ADHD interferes with your ability to pay bills on time or manage money, ask your partner to handle that task. When couples divide tasks based on their strengths, they get through their to-do lists without either partner feeling overburdened or resentful.

Evaluate the workload. Have a weekly meeting at a predetermined time to discuss the workload and rebalance the tasks if one of you is feeling overwhelmed. A weekly check-in gives you the chance to consider how you're doing with your household tasks and whether or not you need a change. Weekly check-ins are also a great opportunity to slow down and connect and plan time together to strengthen your bond. When one partner has ADHD, relationships can quickly become overwhelmed by the focus to attend to tasks together to reduce frustration, but it's just as important to spend time together enjoying each other's company.

Delegate tasks. You and your partner don't have to manage every aspect of the household independently (particularly if failure to complete tasks is a common problem impacting your relationship.) If you have children, assign age appropriate chores to help keep the house organized. Automatic bill pay can be very helpful for adults with ADHD. If you can afford it, you might also consider a monthly cleaning service.

Rely on routines. Routines, schedules, and visual planners (think wall-size whiteboard calendar) help adults with ADHD know what to expect, stay on task, and complete important tasks. When couples coping with ADHD use organizational systems to take some of the guesswork out of the daily grind, they can focus more on connection than completing tasks and chores.