

Dr. Edward Hallowell's Blog

ADHD Relationship Tips

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In couples the symptoms of ADHD can be particularly vexing. The distractibility, impulsivity, and excess energy associated with the syndrome can perturb intimate relationships in ways that leave each partner exhausted, angry, hurt and misunderstood.

This is doubly unfortunate because two people suffer. However, if the situation is subtly regulated, the ADHD couple can thrive and find satisfaction commensurate with the high energy the couple usually possess.

The following guidelines or “tips” might be helpful settling the chaos that is so often present in the ADHD relationship and moving on toward a satisfying mutual relationship of love and understanding.

1. **Make sure you have an accurate diagnosis.** There are many things that look like ADHD, from too much coffee to anxiety states in dissociative disorders to hyperthyroidism. Before embarking on treatment of ADHD consult with your physician to make sure what you have is really ADHD and not something else.
2. **Educate yourself about ADHD.** The more you and your mate know, the better you will be able to help each other.
3. **Declare a truce.** After the diagnosis is made and you’ve learned about ADHD, take a deep breath and wave the white flag. You both need some breathing space to begin to get your relationship on new footing.
4. **Set up a time for talking.** You need to talk to each other about ADHD – what it is, how it affects your relationship, what each of you wants to do about it. Don’t do this on the run, i.e., during TV commercials, while drying dishes, etc. Reserve some time for yourselves to talk uninterrupted.
5. **Spill the beans.** Tell each other what is on your mind. ADHD shows up in different ways in different couples. Tell each other how it is showing up between you, what is driving you crazy, what you want to change, what you want to preserve. Get it all out on the table. Try not to react until all the beans have been spilled.
6. **Make a Treatment Plan.** Brainstorm with each other as to how to reach your goals. You may want professional help with this phase, but it is a good idea to try starting it on your own.
7. **Add structure to your relationship.** Make lists, use bulletin boards, notepads in strategic places like by the bed, in car, in bathroom. Write down what you want the other person to do and give it to them in the form of a list every day.
8. **Break the tapes of negativity.** Many ADD couples have long ago taken on a resigned attitude of ‘There’s no-hope-for-us.’
9. **Use praise freely.** Encouragement, too. Begin to play positive tapes.
10. **Don’t use ADHD as an excuse.** Each member of the couple has to take responsibility for his or her actions. Don’t blame it on ADHD. On the other hand, while one mustn’t use ADHD as an excuse, knowledge of the syndrome can add immeasurably to the understanding one brings to the relationship.