How to Maintain a Healthy Relationship Despite ADHD

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ADHD and Relationships: Tips for Fostering Better Communication

For anyone, relationships are challenging. They demand massive amounts of energy, time and commitment.

Even if you do well to provide your relationships with enough resources, disaster can strike; a mistimed comment, a thoughtless behavior or a neglected anniversary can throw a functioning relationship into a tailspin.

Studies show that about one-quarter of the romantic relationships are dysfunctional on some level. The difficulty associated with relationships only increases when one or both partners have a mental health disorder. Often, the disorder plays a significant role in the relationship.

Take ADHD for example: if one or both partners have an ADHD diagnosis, the rate of dysfunction jumps from 24 to 58 percent. This means that ADHD doubles your chance of having an unhealthy romantic relationship. It also means that if you have ADHD, it is more likely that your current or future relationship will be dysfunctional rather than functional.

Most people are not interested in a life without relationships, though. People seek the emotional and physical closeness, the stability and consistency of having someone around, and the practicality of having someone to share responsibilities and expenses.

Whether your relationship is your desire or outside forces thrust you and your partner together, the goal is a successful, happy relationship. Even if ADHD works to derail your plans, you can achieve the goals you desire. Here's how:

ADHD and Relationship Issues: How to Identify the Issues

With all relationships, problems arise from a number of sources. In the case of ADHD relationships, both the person with ADHD and the person without ADHD play a role in the negative facets of the relationship.

Taking time to investigate how each person contributes to the relationship will yield useful information that you can use later to develop an appropriate treatment plan.

When assessing the situation, be sure to enter with open eyes. Otherwise, you may be more interested in pointing fingers than accepting your share of the responsibility.

The Person With ADHD

Some of the symptoms of ADHD that can be problematic in a relationship include:

- **Poor attention.** Of course, paying attention is important in relationships. Giving full attention to a

conversation is essential when trying to make the other person feel valued and appreciated. Poor attention leads to poor communication, poor listening and a poor ability to respond appropriately in a conversation.

- **Being forgetful.** During periods of attention, the person with ADHD can do well to convince himself and his partner that he heard every detail of the conversation and took the needed steps to follow through. Then, an hour later he has no recollection of the conversation.

- **Acting without thinking.** People with ADHD have a track record of making impulsive, spontaneous and reckless decisions that lead to unwanted consequences. The choices can be associated with poor spending habits, infidelity or conflicted parenting.
- Similar to above, people with ADHD may say things in an unfiltered way. Typically, this leads to hurt feelings and statements being made that are untrue. Some outbursts can be aggressive or physically abusive
- **Other mental health factors.** Unfortunately, ADHD does not exist in a bubble. Instead, people with ADHD commonly have co-occurring disorders like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. These influences further impact the relationship.

Next page: the person without ADHD.

The Person With ADHD

To the person without ADHD in the relationship, these symptoms can lead them to feel ignored, underappreciated, frustrated and angry with their partner. They may question if the behaviors are fueled by ADHD or if that is how their partner truly sees them.

The person without ADHD may also become overwhelmed or burned out due to having to manage more of the daily household obligations. Perhaps, they become tired of the disappointment when the person with ADHD cannot follow through on promises.

The Person Without ADHD

Relationship dynamics, personality styles, and communication levels have a lot to do with the negative contributions of the person without ADHD in the relationship. They are likely to blame their partner, and his or her disorder for the negative aspects of the relationship – the partner with ADHD becomes a scapegoat.

In some cases, the scapegoating will be unintentional and based on patterns that develop in the relationship. When something goes wrong, it is normal to look for something or someone to blame. ADHD is an easy target.

The scapegoating can also be intentional as it becomes a smoke screen to cover the mistakes of the partner without ADHD. Depending on the confidence and signs of low self-esteem of the partner with ADHD, they might be more willing to accept that problems and unwanted situations are their faults, a view quite likely congruent with their established self-perception.

If the scapegoating is unintentional, both people in the relationship lose. The person with ADHD feels like a constant failure that cannot please their partner, and the person without ADHD feels that ADHD is a huge, unchangeable barrier standing in the way of happiness.

If the scapegoating is intentional, again, the person with ADHD feels like a failure while feeling confused and second-guessing his or her memory and decision-making. The person without ADHD may feel good about their ability to manipulate the situation, but that satisfaction is a negative and indicative of an unhealthy relationship.

Helping Your Partner With ADHD by Finding Solutions

The goal should be to make the relationship as rewarding as can be. Here’s how:

Seek Treatment

With ADHD, the question is not *if* treatment is needed, but *what* treatment and *how much* treatment.

Commonly, medication is helpful for ADHD, which means it is helpful for your marriage. Individual ADHD therapy, group therapy and support groups are available to both partners in the relationship. Be creative and willing to experiment to find a good balance and maintain symptoms.

Next page: additional solutions and crossing the line.

Helping Your Partner With ADHD by Finding Solutions

Monitor

Insight, self-awareness, and self-monitoring all mean essentially the same thing: knowing yourself, your symptoms, your partner and your triggers. Use tracking sheets, journals, and charts to identify and understand your trends and patterns.

Regardless if you are the one with the diagnosis or not, you can learn a lot about yourself from tracking. Unless you know yourself, you cannot know ADHD.

Communicate

In any good relationship, your partner is your teammate. Honest, open, assertive communication helps ensure that she stays your teammate and not your opponent. Even the most exceptional treatment and self-monitoring are useless if you do not have someone at home to reinforce what you have learned.

Check in with your partner throughout the day, not only when situations become poor. Let them know what you are doing to improve your symptoms and the relationship and what she can do to assist.

Be Well-Rounded

Your relationship is likely more stressful than most others. When stress is high, supports need to be even higher to counteract. Schedule plans to leave home, meet with friends, exercise, attend church or support groups. Too much worry or involvement in the relationship leads to less sense of self.

Without a strong sense of who you are outside of the relationship, you cannot maintain the objectivity needed to help yourself and your partner truly. Your partner surely sways your happiness, but you cannot allow his symptoms to be your symptoms. Separation is needed.

Stop Fighting and Start Talking

People in relationships where ADHD is a factor are at higher risk of abuse that is verbal, emotional and physical. Because of this, you must establish ground rules for conflict and breaking points that you will not tolerate on any level.

Without establishing these preventively, you put your values and beliefs at risk since you will be less likely to react in an objective, rational way during periods of conflict.

No one deserves to be subjected to mistreatment of any variety. If someone is making you feel worthless, calls you terrible names or ever hits you, walking away is the best thing you can do.

Abusive relationships rarely get better spontaneously. Instead, the abuse tends to escalate in frequency and intensity. This is not a situation for you or anyone else.

Conclusion

ADHD does a great deal to add dissatisfaction to your relationship. To improve your situations, you must understand the causes before you can work towards solutions.

Along the way, be sure to create and communicate your deal breakers – lines that cannot be crossed. Following these tips might make a happy relationship with ADHD possible after all.