Tips for Overcoming ADHD Obstacles in Relationships

by ANGELA FINLAY

Supporting Your ADHD Partner

Attention deficiency can bubble up in different ways, and distracted conversation or a seeming loss of interest may have you second-guessing your relationship. But so many hardships of living with an ADHD partner come down to misunderstanding. The more you know about adult ADHD symptoms, the better you can avoid misunderstanding and overcome problems with communication, consideration and compromise.

Gain Knowledge and Adjust Your Response

The more you know about ADHD symptoms and how they interfere with behavior, the easier it will be to respond to your partner with empathy rather than resentment. You'll never know exactly how it feels to live with ADHD, but there are techniques to help you relate and respond more appropriately:

- **Don't let actions speak louder than words.** Impulsive action is the hallmark of ADHD behavior, so it's important not to read too much into each action. Take time to discuss your feelings openly, and try to see things from their side; the more you can anticipate certain behaviors and understand where they're coming from, the less you'll feel slighted when they occur.
- **Give them the benefit of the doubt.** It can be difficult to remember that your ADHD partner isn't being selfish or malicious, and they aren't out to make your life more difficult. Put love and compassion ahead of accounting for who's right and wrong – it will go far to building a healthy, happy relationship.
- **Coordinate goals and expectations.** You can't do it all, nor should you. Find a way to divide the work well, so you don't get overwhelmed or begin to feel like a "parent" in the relationship. Take your partner's limitations into consideration, but also acknowledge their abilities. It can be useful to call on books, support groups or counseling to work out productive strategies to split up tasks and even the playing field.

How to Prepare for Challenges

Preparation is the key to avoiding big problems with ADHD. Luckily, there are some straightforward ways to overcome daily issues before they push your relationship too far:

- **Manage problems before they turn into crises.** Instead of laying blame at every corner, just get things done: wash the sink-full of dishes before it begins to overflow, do an extra load of laundry and handle the bills. While you shouldn't take on all of the responsibility, once things spiral out of control, it gets much more difficult to keep the household intact and relationships amiable.
- **Set priorities.** If you can start to embrace the chaos – or at least, take encouragement in the challenge – you can learn to live with being a couple minutes late or making a last-minute scramble for dinner. Define your absolute priorities, and do whatever it takes to meet those obligations; try not to get up in arms about the things that fall by the wayside.
- **Look on the bright side.** Even if things get overwhelming at times, the positive points of your relationship

are worth remembering. Stay focused on the great things that *both* of you bring to the table, and celebrate often with quality time together, free from stress or daily obligations.

The Key Is Communication

If you take one thing away from this article, let it be this: Communication is essential. This is true for any relationship, but especially true for an ADHD partner relationship. Communication enhances openness, understanding and trust.

Communication is crucial when mistakes are made or wires are tied. For example, people with ADHD may fail to complete a task or they may show up to an event late. Communication in these situations can help couples avoid fights. Here are some communication tips to use:

- Use phrases like "I feel..."
- Communicate in-person
- Repeat your words if they aren't understood
- Ask questions
- Take notes from important conversations
- Maintain eye contact throughout conversation
- Practice teamwork

Life with an ADHD partner can be difficult, but relationship troubles can’t be blamed on ADHD symptoms alone. Your responses to those behaviors are just as significant, and one poor response can trigger a chain of hurtful or harmful responses. It’s certainly not easy, and it will take time to craft a new outlook, but when you both alter your approaches to life with ADHD, you pave the way for a more rewarding life together.