

My Partner has ADD

By John P. Carneseccchi, MSW, LCSW, CEAP

So, your partner has Attention-Deficit Disorder. What you probably have is anger and the frustration of loving someone who seems to be fine one moment and hard to follow the next.

Get the diagnosis

If you suspect your partner has ADD, encourage them to get a diagnosis. Simply getting a diagnosis can be revelatory. Past failures can be explained, treatment options can be explored, and the ADD can be brought under some control. Most importantly, it will allow you both to set realistic expectations about goals and behaviors.

Here are a few signs:

- The division of labor in your relationship is wildly unfair
- The relationship is so full of frustration that intimate moments are few and far between
- Your partner is constantly making promises that you both know they can not keep
- You feel more like a parent than that of a partner
- Your partner feels constantly judged, and you fear bringing up any problem because it might destroy the whole relationship
- Your partner seems incredibly motivated and focused in some areas, like when they are on the computer, and downright lazy and uninterested in others, like sex
- Your partner never has time for anything, and never has space to put anything

People with ADD are often characterized by any combination of inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Sex and ADD

Partners with ADD sometimes lose interest in sex; there are a number of reasons this happens. Put simply, intimacy needs time and space to develop, two resources that people with ADD have great difficulty managing.

Sometimes there is an unhealthy and off-putting parent-child relationship between the ADD partner and you. This is a large and complicated issue best tackled with therapy. However, just taking steps to unknot this type relationship creates real opportunities for intimacy.

Simply taking the time for intimacy can be difficult. People with ADD are often all over the place, or glued into one of the few things they can maintain attention on such as a television or computer. As unromantic as it sounds, set a time and a place free from distraction and judgment. "Meet me in bed at 10:00 pm tonight." Don't expect passion

right away or every time; intimacy takes time to reestablish itself. But what it needs is the time and place to do so.

Occasionally those with ADD can be hypersexual, demanding sex four and five times a day in order to be satiated. This is sex as a coping mechanism for stress, not true intimacy. Therapy and medication are critical.

What you can do

Again, get the diagnosis and the treatment, which can include talk therapy, couples therapy, drugs, dietary change, and more. Simply naming the problem is a large step towards a solution.

Remember ADD – while it is not an excuse, it is often a reason for a particular behavior or failure. An understanding of ADD will help you both divide work loads and set realistic expectations.

Tackle your problems sooner rather than later. Don't let anger fester into resentment and depression. If both of you can be honest about your emotions, problems can be headed off while they are small and have less emotional impact.

Take your arguments slowly and in a new direction – if things get over heated, one or both of you need the freedom to walk away and reengage later.

Only deal with adult behavior. No name calling or passive-aggressive arguing. “You said that to hurt me, not to find a solution. I expect better.”

Think creatively about your frequent fights. If you have been down this avenue, then you know it will simply end in frustration. Tackling the problem honestly can create new options: “Look, I asked you to clean the house while I was away and you said that you would do it, but you didn't. I'd rather avoid being angry, and you feeling like a failure. We both want a cleaner house. Let's hire a maid once every two weeks and stop worrying about this.” Putting the frustration and pain out in the open allows you and your partner to let go of the toxins.

Encourage exercise – while this isn't always a cure, it is one of the best treatments. Shoot for thirty minutes a day, five days a week. The exercise can be as simple as going for a walk. A proper diet with Omega-3 fatty acids has been shown to improve the symptoms of ADD. No skipping breakfast!

There is hope

Attacking and judging an ADD partner will fail to produce anything other than anxiety and anger. An undiagnosed ADD partner has spent a lifetime being called a lazy failure despite the painful hours put into goals. After a lifetime of being sold short and selling themselves short, attacking and judging your partner will just feed the pathology.

But the worst judgment has always come from inside: “Why couldn’t I just be on time? I love the guitar, why can’t I just practice? What is wrong with me?” A person with ADD has spent a lifetime watching other people accomplish simple, daily tasks that they find impossible. It is like being in a wheelchair that no one, not even you, can see. When asked to walk, they have fallen flat on their face every time. Never mind climbing the stairs!

Add is a struggle for your partners and will be for you as well. Loving someone with ADD requires patience, flexibility, and honesty. It can also require therapy and medication. There is help for those who have ADD— and hope for your relationship.