

## ADHD and Marital Attachment

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Some people do not develop secure romantic attachments because they have difficulty focusing on their partners. Their relationships are hampered by longstanding patterns of forgetfulness, poor attunement and unresponsiveness to partner feelings and needs, rude or insensitive behavior, and hypersensitivity to perceived criticism. These patterns are suggestive of Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). While health professionals have shown interest in childhood ADHD, adult ADHD is under-diagnosed and under-treated.

### What to Look For:

- **Hyperactive-Impulsive** symptoms of ADHD in adults are easily noticed by others: extreme talkativeness, restlessness, impatience, and saying or doing things without thinking first.
- **Inattentive** symptoms of ADHD may be harder to spot: poor concentration, drifting in and out of conversations, forgetfulness, and disorganization. To their partners, people with these symptoms may seem unable or unwilling to have intimate relationships. When confronted, people with these symptoms may feel confused or overwhelmed by their partners' complaints.
- **Depression** and **anxiety** often occur alongside symptoms of ADHD. Those with **depression** may exhibit low self-esteem and irritability, while those with **anxiety** may be argumentative, inflexible, and alternate between periods of poor concentration (e.g., while balancing the checkbook) and overly intense concentration (e.g., while watching TV). When such symptoms occur, non-ADHD partners often 'walk on eggshells' to avoid conflict with their loved ones.

### If This Sounds Like Someone You Know...

- **Seek an assessment from a qualified professional.** Assessment of ADHD often reveals a symptom history dating back to childhood. Because adults with ADHD may not recall relevant history, they should seek information from family, schools, and significant others. Symptoms should also be assessed by a doctor to rule-out medical conditions mimicking ADHD.
- **If ADHD is diagnosed, seek help from a professional trained to treat adult ADHD.**

### Some Things to Keep in Mind:

- **ADHD is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, for which there is no 'cure.'** ADHD is not caused by laziness or carelessness. At the same time, the chemical imbalance that causes ADHD is not a blanket excuse for dysfunctional behavior. ADHD is a vulnerability that can be managed by lifestyle changes and medication. Couples struggling with ADHD must balance their desire for change with an acceptance of disability.
- **Environmental stimulation often affects ADHD symptoms.** When over-stimulated, ADHD adults may desperately seek time alone to restore a sense of equilibrium. When under-stimulated, they may unconsciously seek stimulation by moving around excessively, engaging in risky activities, talking excessively, or even provoking conflict.
- **ADHD adults may struggle to 'fit' in a non-ADHD world.** Non-ADHD partners should understand that forgetfulness and lack of follow-through are not necessarily signs of under-commitment. At the same time, ADHD adults must accept their high need for structure, using such organizational tools as set routines, schedule books, to do lists, and filing systems.
- **A constructive attitude towards poor social skills may lessen conflict.** In ADHD adults, misattunement to feelings and needs is usually not intentional. Many ADHD adults have difficulty noticing and describing even their own emotions; it is no wonder that they listen poorly and do not grasp the feelings of others. Many express affection inconsistently and repair conflict unsuccessfully. However, with patience and support, couples can improve communication patterns, learn ways to repair conflict, and find new levels of intimacy.