

## AD/HD and Relationships

A Chat with Arthur Robin, PhD

### FOR MANY PEOPLE AFFECTED BY ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER,

interpersonal relationships can be a challenge. Inattentive and/or impulsive behaviors in particular cause problems in social relationships, impacting a person's ability to listen, to show good manners, or to follow basic social etiquette. Arthur Robin, PhD, is professor of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Wayne State University. He is a licensed psychologist in practice in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where he specializes in adolescent and adult AD/HD. Dr. Robin has participated in a number of CHADD's interactive online chats about relationships and AD/HD. Full transcripts from these chats are just one of many benefits available to CHADD members, and can be accessed at [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).



Arthur Robin, PhD

#### **When is the best time to disclose to your partner or friend that you have AD/HD?**

Before the relationship gets too serious. Relationships must be built on honesty.

#### **I tend to get bored in relationships. Any suggestions on how to avoid this?**

You need to decide what your goal is. If your goal is to remain single and have a succession of relationships, then that is different than if you are looking for a long-term relationship or marriage. If you are looking for a long-term relationship, list the qualities you want in your partner. Prioritize them. Stay on your medication as much as you can, and when you get bored, remind yourself of the list of characteristics that your partner has, in addition to excitement. Try to keep the whole picture in mind and not assume that every moment of a relationship has to be terribly exciting.

#### **Any advice for a relationship where one person has AD/HD and the other does not? Is this an ideal situation or would it cause conflict?**

People have always said that opposites attract. It can work as long as each person in the relationship recognizes the other's strengths and weaknesses. The relationship should be one of love and respect, and the couple should make sure they have open channels of communication, work as a team, and use structure to cope with weaknesses that stem from the AD/HD.

#### **My husband has AD/HD, and at times, when he feels overwhelmed, can have sudden outbursts of anger. I don't want my children to grow up handling anger in the same way. How can I prevent this from happening without sounding like I'm criticizing my husband?**

First, help your husband with his feelings of being overwhelmed. Analyze with him things that make him feel overwhelmed. Develop warning signs. Help him to identify the warning signs and take action before he becomes overwhelmed. Action could mean that he provides you with verbal feedback. For example, he could say, "I am feeling overwhelmed and need to take a ten-minute time-out." When he does this, you should point out to your children how well he is coping with the issue at hand. This will be a positive example for them!

#### **Sometimes when I'm having a discussion with my husband, who has AD/HD, he can become sarcastic and snotty. I have heard this is typical behavior. What can I do in these situations?**

One of Russell Barkley's principles of dealing with AD/HD is "practice forgiveness and keep a disability perspective." This means we need to forgive our loved ones with AD/HD for some of the things they do, and forgive ourselves for our reactions to their behavior. It is helpful to write this down on a note card and look at it every day, training yourself to evaluate all interactions with family members who have AD/HD. Having said that, he still needs to take responsibility for clean-

ing up his act and communicating positively. Nicely but assertively tell him that you need him to work on his communication; offer to give neutral feedback when he talks sarcastically. Of course, a marital therapist trained to deal with marriages affected by AD/HD can also help couples change negative communication patterns.

**Even after taking medication and seeing improvements, how do I resist the impulse to interrupt others or respond hastily, either verbally or by actions?**

Scotch tape your mouth—no joke; it will remind you. Gradually fade out the tape. Create an object that a person must be holding to talk (in family gatherings this works, not at the office). Until you have the object, don't talk. Write down what you have the urge to say so you won't forget it. This will help a little. If all else fails, laugh at your interrupting and apologize.

**Both my 17-year-old son and my husband have AD/HD. They spend endless hours playing computer games—often throughout the night. We have no family life. Is this common?**

Yes, computer games maintain short attention spans and provide high stimulation. If they play the games together, at least they are doing some sort of interaction. Try to get them to agree to time limits on the games, integrated with other activities. 🗣️

## Helpful Books on AD/HD and Relationships

Michael T. Bell, EdS, LPC, NCC

**You, Your Relationship, and Your ADD: A Workbook**

*(New Harbinger Publications, 2002)*

Jonathan Halverstadt, MS

**ADD & Romance: Finding Fulfillment in Love**

*Sex & Relationships (Taylor, 1998)*

Michele Novotni, PhD, and Randy Petersen

**What Does Everybody Else Know That I Don't?:**

**Social Skills Help for Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

*(Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 1999)*