

Copyright © 1996

[George T. Lynn, M.A., M.P.A., L.M.H.C.](#)

The Challenges of "Being A.D.D." In Relationship

The discovery of the DRD4 gene which National Institute of Mental Health researchers say causes people who have it to be "novelty seeking," is the first hard scientific evidence for the existence of this key characteristic of Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D.)

The discovery of this gene fits in with the idea that A.D.D. is caused by hypersensitivity of certain neurons in the brain. If these cells are overactive, the person is hypersensitive to stimulation and has a difficult time holding focus on any one thing. This difficulty in holding focus can increase the person's tendency to continually search for new stimulation and lead to "novelty seeking" behavior.

The fact that some people may be genetically predisposed to be novelty seeking has fascinating implications for relationships. It makes sense for both men and women who have A.D.D. tendencies to look at the impact of neurology on their relationships. It is important to sort out problems with a neurological basis from those with a psychological basis.

A person might spend years in psychotherapy trying to figure out why she "can't sustain commitment" in a relationship or stay interested in one person. This same person might be accused by her partner of "not listening" or of "being a stimulation junkie." She may have a real problem with procrastination and not follow through on her commitments. She also may be a creative success who is always on the verge of going broke because of her horrible business sense.

Oftentimes the ADD'r and his or her partner fall into roles that revolve around A.D.D. related problems:

- The non-A.D.D. partner enables the ADD'r by apologizing and smoothing over the results of his disorganization, missed appointments, and mess ups. She plays "mom" to his "child" in an attempt to keep the relationship together.
- Procrastination is a major issue. The person with ADD tries to keep his agreements, but he does not. Not remembering the commitments he has made, he overloads himself with things to do and does not come through on promises he has made. He needs to learn how to say "no."
- Intimate communications are fouled up by the ADDr's insistence on "getting to the point," instead of taking the time to sit with important questions and get all the information out. Listening is problematic for the ADD'r and reading the non-verbal cues of his partner is very difficult if not impossible. "You never listen to me," she screams: "Get a clue!"
- The couple's interactions are bedeviled by the ADDr's moodiness and feelings

of low self-esteem. Frustration and rage may emerge out of nowhere. Mercurial emotionality is a response to the chronic sense of stress that accompanies A.D.D. This feature is seen in both kids and adults.

- If both partners are A.D.D., the relationship may become emotionally overheated. Anger, acrimony, passion, confusion, distraction, and compulsivity may all be wrapped up together. This arrangement makes for an interesting screen-play but is nightmarish in actuality. Peace of mind becomes impossible to find.
- Infidelity may be a problem, or the ADD'r may seek to enlarge the relationship to include others. If the relationship is already stressed to the max by A.D.D. related features, picking up with someone else may become an attractive option. The saying "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence" could have been penned by an ADD'r seeking relief from a difficult and confusing situation.
- Partners may experience sexual dissatisfaction with each other. Ability to achieve sensate and sexual focus is essential to sexual enjoyment. A person has to be able to slow his mind down and give himself over to feeling. Achieving relaxed, sensual focus can be difficult for men and women with A.D.D. Partners may mistakenly assume that the ADD'r is "uninterested," is impotent, (or frigid), or acting "out-of-body." These interpretations are invalid and destructive to the self-esteem of both people. And medications used to treat ADD and related issues may also cause problems with sexual function.

Sorting out neurological causes from the psychological causes of relationship problems can be difficult, but the couple should put a priority on the task so that they understand the measure of control that they have. Some couples will not find relief until medication for ADD is in place.

Couples who are dealing with the issue of A.D.D. in relationship should acknowledge the potential impact of brain chemistry in the problems they face, along with the issues that have a clear psychological etiology. Being ADD does not make one partner the villain or the non ADD'r the hero. It always takes two to Tango. But change begins with the development of understanding of A.D.D., open and honest sharing, and a lot of mutual compassion.