



# Relationships and Adult ADHD

Family, friends, partners and parenting

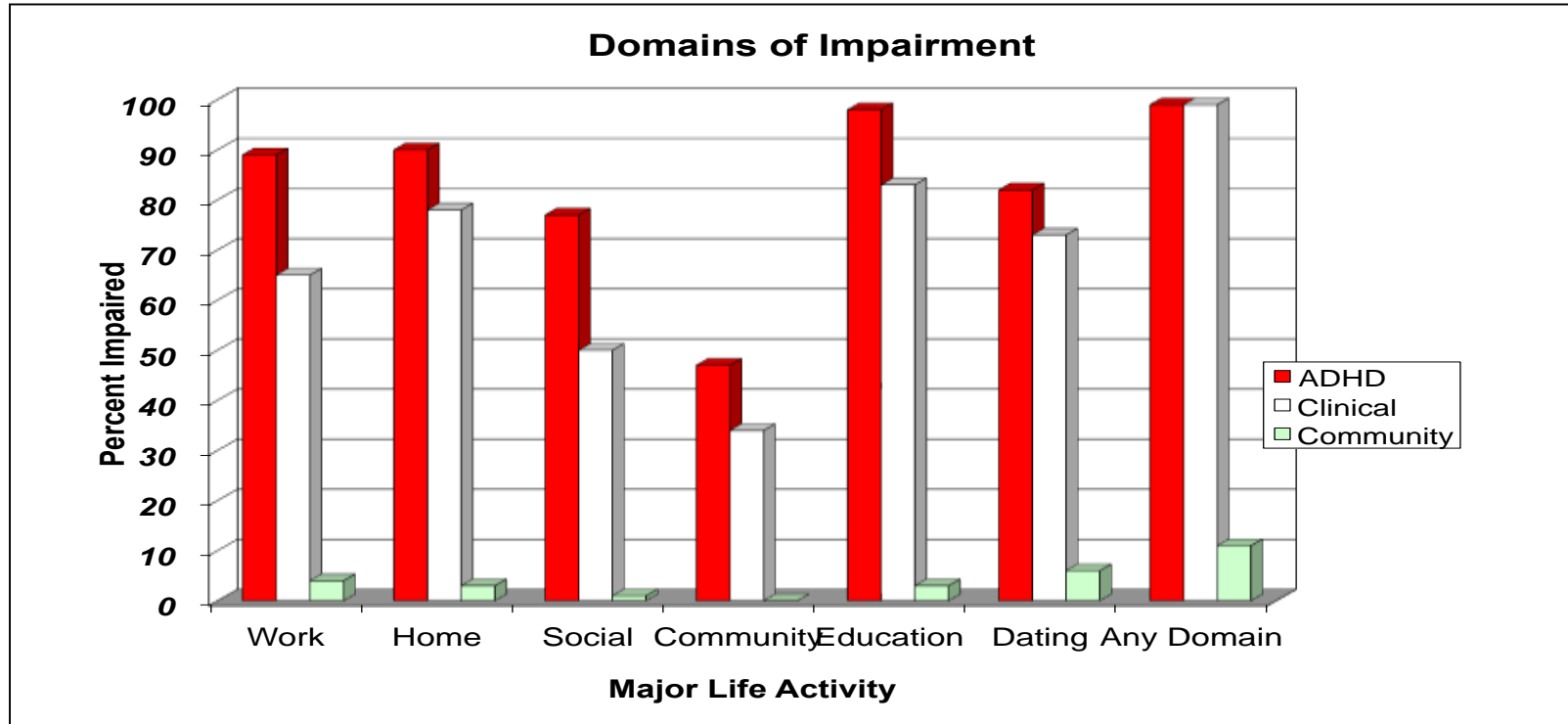
Melissa Orlov - UKAAN, 2017

[www.ADHDmarriage.com](http://www.ADHDmarriage.com)

# + Adult ADHD impacts relationships

- 80-90% adults w/ADHD still undiagnosed – ADHD ‘shadow’
- 58% relationships ‘maladjusted’
- Divorce rates rise over time to almost double
- High incidence of co-existing conditions that directly impact relationships...and diagnosis
- Hereditary

# + Impaired major life activities



Source: Milwaukee Longitudinal Study, Barkley, et al

# + “Everybody has ADHD...” myth

	Adults with ADHD (“often” %)	Adults Genl. Community (“often” %)
Time management problems	98	8
Poor mental organization	89	11
Inhibition problems	94	7
Self-motivation problems	95	9
Concentration problems	98	7

Source: Barkley, Benton *Taking Charge of Adult ADHD*, p 55

# + ADHD and non-ADHD *very* different

- Energy and speed of ADHD
- Shame
- “Library of Congress” / hierarchy
- Emotional lability
- Consistently inconsistent
- Now and not now



# + Now and not now

- Parenting: go with the flow vs. plan ahead
- Friendships: out of sight, out of mind
- Reactive life vs. pro-active life
- Timeliness = caring



# + What does it look like?

- **Misinterpreted symptoms:**
  - Other partner feels alone, unloved (distraction)
  - “Moral diagnosis” – lazy, rude
  - Repetitive behaviors = broken trust
- **Status imbalance in couple**
  - Parent/child dynamics
  - The constant critique
  - ADHD partner anger or retreat



# + What does it look like? (cont.)



- Feeling 'duped' from hyperfocus courtship
- Often low self-esteem in ADHD partner
- Hopelessness and chronic resentment, particularly in non-ADHD partner
- “Bumble bee” approach – lack of correlation between effort and outcome
- Specific, consistent patterns of interactions
  - Patterns in *The ADHD Effect on Marriage*





# + Verbal 'clues'

- “I feel as if I have another child!”
- “My partner is consistently inconsistent”  
(in spite of desire to please)
- “I can never let down my guard.  
I can't trust my partner to keep promises.”
- “My partner never gives me a break!”
- “If she would just stop being angry, everything would be fine...”



# + S/R/R - Adult Symptom: Distraction

## Characteristic Behavior (symptomatic)

- Pays attention to what is immediate – all is equally important...even partner

## Partner's Misinterpretation and Behavior

- “My partner doesn't pay special attention to me; therefore doesn't love me.”
- Increases intrusive behavior to gain attn.

## ADHD partner response

- Fights back; escapes or avoids

# + Diagnosis of ADHD is *GOOD* news!

- Finally, an explanation!
- Provides alternate “story” to history, leads to greater empathy
- Opens doors to treatment

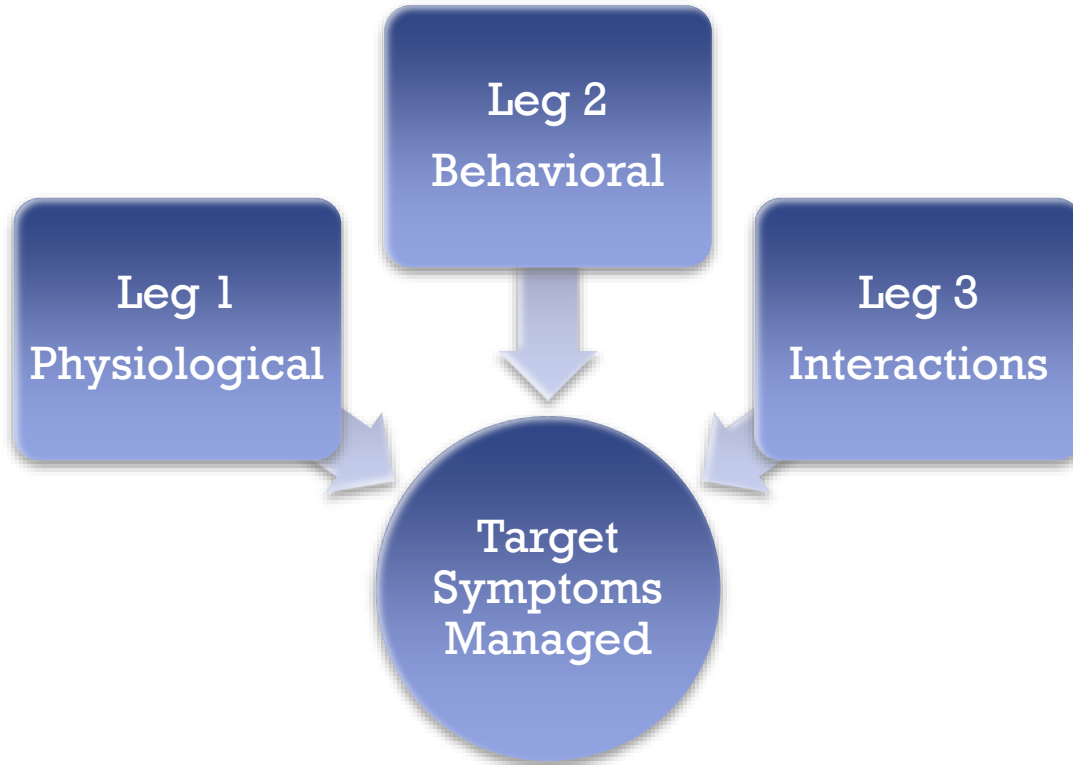


# + More good news...

- 50% can 'normalize' with treatment;  
+20-30% 'significantly improve symptoms'
- 80% can find a med with few side effects  
BUT 'pills don't teach skills'
- Dose v. medication; combine lower doses of meds plus  
behavioral therapy most effective (kids)
- Tuckman – more approaches



# + Optimize 3 legs of treatment



# + Parent/child dynamic huge issue



- The classic ‘mutual denial’
- Chronic resentment and ‘constant critique’
- Chore wars are symbolic – trust; caring; love; attention
- Counseling; role playing...nagging is not an option
- BOTH are equal – just different. Learn radical acceptance; conflict intimacy skills



And So...

What About Kids and Family?



# + The family with ADHD

- For kids – different, with a *label* – de-stigmatize!
  - Later development of logical thinking skills
  - Impulsivity / emotionality
  - Difficulty reading social/emotional cues
  - “That’s so ADD!”
  - Struggles in school - structures
  - “You would do so well...  
*if you only tried harder...!*”





# + Family (cont.)

- Repeated rejections / ‘less than’ lessons (adults learned, too)
  - Teachers
  - Vs. peers – self criticism (“Why is it so hard for me & easy for others?”)
  - Parents (“Of course you can do that!”)
- Parents may be in crisis
  - Non-ADHD partner feels besieged
  - Fear – “Don’t want my ADHD child to turn out like my partner...”
  - Non-ADHD partner as ‘enforcer’ and organizer = bad news!
  - Spouse v. kid with ADHD – not the same



# + Take a strengths-based approach

- Create independence in managing symptoms & self-advocacy; understanding of ADHD – own it!
- Mitigate ‘well enough’ in critical weak areas
- “Try differently” not harder
- Be sensitive to status
- Find strengths, “mirror traits” - celebrate



# + Appreciating ADHD

<b>Negative Trait - ADHD</b>	<b>Positive Mirror Trait</b>
Distractible	Curious
Impulsive	Creative
Hyperactive, restless	Energetic
Intrusive	Eager
Disorganized	Spontaneous
Inconsistent	Shows flashes of brilliance
Moody	Sensitive
Stubborn	Persistent, won't give up
Forgetful	Gets totally into what she is doing

Source: Hallowell, Jenson *SuperParenting for ADD*

# + The alternative – fight ADHD, and those who love you

- Hate being told what to do
  - “Wrong way” – not ADHD friendly
  - A set up to disappoint others when ADHD not managed
- It may not matter how hard they try – so why try?
- To ‘go with the flow’ and never learn to plan / organize
- Promises = suggestions

# + ADHD in friendships

- 'Out of sight, out of mind' – difficulty staying connected
- Tardiness – communication of caring
- Same tactics work
  - 3 legs of treatment / reliability
  - Education about ADHD
  - Shared interests / adventures
  - Radical acceptance



# + Radical Acceptance and ADHD

- You are the expert on your own feelings & actions
- Ask, don't demand = equal status
- Your responsibility to contribute your best self
  - “How can I get you to change?”



“How do I respond to where we are?”

“How can we mutually do better?”

- ~~“Take me as I am no matter what”~~

# + Bottom Line

- ADHD greatly impacts relationships
  - Spread the word so couples can learn to thrive
- Optimize ADHD treatment – not just meds!
- Eliminate parent/child dynamics
- Education - symptomatic behaviors vs. symbolic interpretation
- Strengths-based approach



# + Resources

- [www.ADHDMarriage.com](http://www.ADHDMarriage.com) - blog, seminar, forum, resources, contact form
- *Optimizing Treatment for Adult ADHD* E-book on site
- *The Distracted Couple*
- Future talks at your clinic

