



BY NED HALLOWELL, M.D.

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Married to It: When Your Spouse has ADD

If you are married to someone with AD/HD, you have probably wondered how many times you will have to forgive him or her. ADD is not easy—for those who have it or for those who live with them!

Those of us who have ADD (myself included) don't often learn from our mistakes. We repeat them over and over again. If the question is, "How many times do I have to tell you?" the answer can be, "Hundreds, at least!" Does this mean we deserve a get-out-of-jail-free card? Of course not. AD/HD is not an excuse for irresponsibility. It is an explanation for behavior, and a sign that the person must learn to take responsibility more effectively.

Yet even the best treatments for AD/HD do not produce perfect results. You ask your ADD spouse to take out the trash, and he agrees. (I'll keep the spouse with ADD male in this column, for simplicity's sake.) Then he walks right past the trash as a new idea catches his attention. You ask your ADD spouse to compliment you now and

then, as you find it difficult to remind him that you need his attention. Embarrassed and ashamed, he apologizes and resolves to pay more and better attention to you. You know he means what he says. But does he follow

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through? No. You ask your ADD spouse to stop running up charges on credit cards with impulsive purchases. Again, somewhat embarrassed, he agrees. He doesn't want huge debt any more than you do. But the next day he sees a piece of software he just can't resist, and bingo, a new item is added to the bill.

What can you do? Forget all about it? Divorce him? Beat him over the head with a blunt instrument in the hope of knocking some sense into him?

I just finished writing a book called *Dare to Forgive*. One of the points I make in it is that forgiveness is not license to repeat the same mistake over and over again. So, if you forgive your spouse—and I hope you will—you should also set up a plan so that the same problem won't arise again and again. If the plan doesn't work, revise it and try again. Revising plans is what life is all about.

Realize that these problems don't indicate a willful disregard of you or of responsibility, but rather an involuntary, intermittent disregard of just about everything. This is the devilish nature of AD/HD. Keep that (and his good qualities) in mind when you want to strangle him. As long as he is willing to work with you—and maybe with a professional as well—progress can be made. Total victory? Complete cure? No. But progress.

As you see him working hard at better behavior, take heart. Build on the positive and make it grow. Keep your sense of humor. Stay in touch with others who can help you. And remember that underneath the shell of ADD there beats a heart and mind full of warmth, creativity, playfulness, and unpredictability. There's enough good, almost always, to outweigh the bad.

Enough, even, to make a joyful marriage and a joyful life.

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