

Linda Roggli:

It's October 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD awareness month. And we're still here with TADD Talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minute, short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned here it comes.

Keith Griffin:

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I'm Keith Griffin, an ADHD coach at This ADHD Life. Today, I'd like to share a few thoughts about building successful relationships. As with everything that I ever produce on the internet, I'd like to say, take from today's recording what it is that actually applies to your life and discard the rest. These are my observations after being in a successful relationship for 10 plus years and after coaching many, many adults, and sometimes their partners, in my almost five-year coaching career. At this point, I've noticed certain patterns have developed and generally they happen to be around expectations. So what does it take to start building a successful relationship? Well, you gotta set some expectations. The first thing that you have to acknowledge is it's a teamwork type thing. Now, if I were to say that you shouldn't be in competition with your partner, most people would see that as being, well, kind of obvious, but people don't understand that relationships, above the romance and what-not, are actually about building a winning team for the both of you. Or if you happen to be in an open relationship, all three of you or four of you, however it works in your life.

Keith Griffin:

But the important thing is that you wind up building a team that focuses on each other's strengths, is focused on each other's growth, and more importantly, communicating. It really tends to be helpful, particularly if you have ADHD—and I'll focus today's talk on me as the person who has ADHD so you don't get too confused or I don't confuse things. So one of the things that I have to regularly remind myself is that I have to be open to change. Now, I have to say, I have to remind my partner more often that he needs to be open to change because if there's one thing about consistency, it is that I am consistently inconsistent. Things can change on a moment's notice, and he's accepted that fact for the most part.

Keith Griffin:

And I have to be open to change as well. It's not fair for me to expect him to deal with inconsistency and then say, "Well, we were supposed to have waffles, and now you want hamburgers—how dare you? I'm not open to this change. Darn it." You gotta focus on each other's growth as well. At the end of the day, if you're going to spend any amount of time with someone and really love them, you need to be focused on that person's growth. What is it that they need to be able to be the best versions of themselves? And of course, you need to focus on what is it they need to be the best versions of themselves? It needs to be a two-way street. You need to have some shared goals, but even if your goals aren't shared, what can you do to help your partner reach their goals?

Keith Griffin:

Oftentimes, this encourages a conversation about working from strengths. Sometimes you can sit down and say, "Hey, I've noticed you've been struggling on this. What strengths might you need to use to get your project done?" Or "Is this even a project you should be doing?" In my own relationship, I'll give just two examples. I tend to be pretty decent on the phone; I make all of our medical appointments, car appointments, vet appointments, billing appointments, banks, anything that has to be done on the phone, generally, I am responsible for. And that's because I used to work in the IT industry on the phone, and now I'm an ADHD coach on the phone. And so I use a phone a lot every day and I have been for most of my life. My partner, on the other hand, does not enjoy phone calls, does not enjoy the dialing process, does not enjoy talking to strangers.

Keith Griffin:

He is, however, really good at getting dishes done in the evening. So the compromise here is, I'm focusing on my strength: I make appointments—that's my job in life. He does dishes at night—that's his

job in life. That's his strength, that's my strength—that's how we work it. And by the way, I can do dishes in the morning, and we've set an expectation that dishes are done at night. I'm perfectly happy leaving dishes out for a period of time and getting up in the morning and doing them; he's not. And so in our relationship, we have defined expectations that dishes are generally, if one of us is not sick, done in the evenings—which actually leads into another topic, setting expectations. You're a team. You don't both come in with your own expectations and then force the other person to meet them. You don't do that, right? That would be silly. A lot of people don't understand that you can actually discuss as a couple, or more, what the expectations are. How often are you going to be vacuuming? Who's going to be doing the dishes? How often are you going to be cooking? What's that cooking going to look like? Is there a dietary preference? Are there dietary needs? Such as, I live with someone that needs to be gluten-free.

Keith Griffin:

All of the sort of chores and daily activities and just living life stuff—we each come into a relationship with our own sort of expectations, rooted in large part on how our parents did it or rebelling against how our parents did it. A key thing to realize as you're building this relationship and really trying to become a team with your partner is you, as a team, get to define what success looks like in any number of areas. I mentioned some chores, but it could look like: When do I want us to pay off student loan debt? When do we want to save up for a house? How does the 401k need to look like? Again, we each come in with our expectations. The important thing is to communicate, communicate, communicate those expectations—which brings me to another thing about teams. Good effective teams require meetings.

Keith Griffin:

There has to be an entire level of regular communication to do check-ins to see how we're doing as a team. So in my own life, I try to do this every two to three weeks. I don't like weekly meetings. He doesn't like weekly meetings. We don't do daily meetings. And if we just never put something on the calendar we wouldn't meet, but it is so important for us to sit down and check in with each other and go, okay, things are going well. Or, oh, you know what? We need to tweak the student loan payment because we want to start saving for a house—and that's actually a true story in my own life right now. And so those kinds of meetings are so important. Communication is so important to building teams and ultimately relationships.

Keith Griffin:

Another thing to become aware of is what your partner's love language is. And if I tried to reiterate all five of them, I would definitely forget at least one and a half. So I will just mention, there is a book called *The Five Love Languages*—I'm sure if you do a Google search, you will find what they are. But the important thing is to try to operate from a mode of your partner's top two love languages. So for example, if there's someone who experiences love, feels loved, when they're being touched and when they receive gifts, your goal is to give them gifts and touch them more. And if your love language is not being touched and receiving gifts, it's going to be really hard for you to recognize that because we naturally give our love languages back to our partners. That's just how we operate it. So it takes some time to actually get into the habit and the realization that, oh, well, I don't value gifts necessarily. I value quality time, and I keep giving this person quality time, but they don't feel love. Well, that's because you need to give them gifts. It's just how they operate.

Keith Griffin:

So learning to love in your partner's language is so important. And I'm going to add onto this experiencing and understanding their ADHD traits and knowing when it's the ADHD versus they're being a jerk. And this has been a conversation in my own household—that there are times when I'm just a jerk. We all are, we're human. Every one of us has jerk mode. But there are times when our ADHD is actually really impacting us. And so becoming an expert on your partner's ADHD traits, as my partner has, has really helped him understand and accept when it is that I'm actually just locked into an ADHD trait. So, for example, I have hyper-focus capability. Most of us do. And so if I'm in the office doing something with my website or learning a new technology or something like that, and I'm hyper-focused, he doesn't take offense to when he comes in and says something and I yell at him because it's painful to break hyper-

focus. So we've developed a system where he can signal me. Other potential relationship-impacting traits could be impulsivity, forgetfulness, time management issues, emotional regulation—that's a biggie—restlessness, anxiety, and even sometimes substance abuse, unfortunately. But recognizing those traits and trying to understand when you're starting to judge your partner, what's really happening, and then helping them appropriately is really life-changing and relationship-changing.

Keith Griffin:

Lastly, it's so important to recognize the good. I like to try to celebrate every day with my partner. We tend to do it three or four times a week. I'm not a perfectionist about this, but just, what was the best part of your day? What are three good things that happened to you today? Or at the end of the week, what are your top five wins for the week? Taking just 10 to 15 minutes to sit down and recognize what each person did well that week can be again, life-changing and relationship-changing. And then you might even say, what did you do well as a couple? So, hey, we actually cooked all of the vegetables we bought this week versus last week—we threw them out. So doing that is going to be again, it's so impactful. And I said the last thing, but I'll actually end with this, which is just understanding verbal processors. I am a verbal processor. When I'm verbal processing, I'm curious, it doesn't mean anything serious. So I have tried to train, so to speak, my partner to understand that if I'm in verbal processing mode, that doesn't mean anything is happening. I might say, "Hey, let's move to Hawaii. I think I want to move to Hawaii." That doesn't mean we're moving to Hawaii. And it took a while for him to understand that this just is how my brain operates and what needs to come out.

Keith Griffin:

And that's today's TADD Talk about building successful relationships. I'm ADHD Coach Keith Griffin. It's been great being with you today. If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, find me at thisADHDlife.com. You can also email me at coaching@thisADHDlife.com. Take care and have a great rest of awareness month 2020.

Linda Roggli:

Okay, that's today's ADHD wisdom. Much more to come. And why not join us for the Virtual 2020 International ADHD Conference coming up in November? Details at ADD.org. And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.