

Lee: Couples Counseling for ADHD. This is Stay Happily Married Episode Number 208.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Lee: I'm Lee Rosen, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Is it possible for a couple to come back from the edge? The truth is that ADHD is a condition that does not discriminate based on age. The effects of ADHD are just as likely to manifest in adults as they are in children; however, many adults are not even aware their behavior can be linked to a medical diagnosis.

In this episode of Stay Happily Married, we explore Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and its impact on marriage. This is the second episode of a two part series on Stay Happily Married, and we're going to be joined by Dr. Susan Orenstein. If you haven't listened to the first part, be sure and listen to it before you listen to this episode. I think that will give you a much better sense of what we're dealing with.

Dr. Susan Orenstein is our guest. She received her PhD in counseling psychology from Temple University. She's a licensed psychologist and director of the group private practice, Orenstein Solutions, in Cary, North Carolina. Susan specializes in adult relationship issues, and she's worked extensively in treating couples in situations where ADD and ADHD affect one partner. Susan's been married for 23 years. She participates in the pairs' workshop. She leads those workshops with her husband, and they have an opportunity in every one of those workshops to demonstrate their communication skills right in front of workshop participants as part of her practice.

Susan, welcome back to the show. I'm really excited that we can do part two of this episode on ADHD.

Susan: Me, too. Thank you, Lee.

Lee: Boy, we spent some time a few weeks ago really drilling down into ADHD and what it's all about, how it works, diagnosis, that kind of thing. What I want to do today is really apply what we've learned to the relationship, and what we can do to make the marriage work because I know that recognizing that there's ADHD in the marriage seems like it's just the first step. So, after you've recognized the issue, there's still treatment as an individual or as a couple that needs to be done to repair the relationship. Fill us in, just to get us started here, on some of the negative things that happen to a relationship where there's ADHD in that relationship.

Susan: OK. I'm going to refer to the two partners as the ADHD partner and the non-ADHD partner just to keep it short and sweet. Generally, when couples have been together for a while and one partner has ADHD, after a certain amount of time their patterns look like this. The non-ADHD partner is tired and frustrated and generally resentful, so they feel like they've been saying the same thing over and over, nagging,

trying to be heard and they can't get their partner's attention. And so, they can be feeling really angry. They feel like they've been neglected and not getting attention.

Then, the second part is they feel like they've been left with the responsibilities of the household, with the parenting, that they're just getting a raw deal because there's not a balance, they're doing too much of the work. They don't really understand why because generally these couples come to me, and they don't know that ADHD is driving this.

Lee: Right.

Susan: And then, there's the ADHD partner. After couples have been together a long time and ADHD's part of the picture, the ADHD partner will often feel disrespected. They might feel guilty and ashamed because they can't follow through in the ways that they would like, and they just don't understand it. They might start distancing themselves from their partner because they're associating their partner with nagging and anger, so they might just start distancing themselves more and more. And so, [inaudible 05:00] really at this point.

Lee: Overall, how big an impact does ADHD have on marriages?

Susan: Huge. It has a huge impact because, think about it, if you feel like you're not going to be listened to or if your partner is going to be constantly disapproving of you, it really wears away at the respect and the trust and the affection, and often the sex life, the fun, the pleasure. In every way it's very, very destructive for couples.

Lee: Right. I would assume that once the partner that has ADHD understands what the situation is and begins to get treatment for it that that would resolve the issues that they were having in the relationship. Am I wrong about that?

Susan: You're right, but there's more to it than that. It's just of utmost importance that the ADHD partner recognizes that they have ADHD and gets treatment. That is huge, but there are other parts that have to happen and that's that the couples really have to redefine their relationship, find that balance again, learn to let go of past hurt and resentment. There's some forgiveness work. So, I think you get the partner diagnosed and treated, and that's huge, huge, huge, but there's some repair work and there's more conversations that need to happen that a couples' therapist, like myself, ends up facilitating.

Lee: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me. Is this the sort of thing, when you're dealing with some issues there, like chronic illnesses, the spouses have to make adjustments and recognize that they're going to deal with these forever. Is ADHD like that or once you're got the treatment in place, is that you deal with the issues that you just described. Is that it; are we done?

Susan: I'm thinking about that, and I think there are a few parts to that. One is with treatment, a lot of things do work out. And so, a lot of things do get better. So, on the one hand, change occurs and the couples can really appreciate and enjoy that change. Then,

on the other hand, there are some parts of this that are not going to be ideal. There's some acceptance that needs to happen with the couple where they do see this is a chronic situation. There are some quirks that my partner may have that he or she has no control over and I can accept this.

Lee: What about practical stuff in couples? When you're dealing with and working through the emotional stuff, I assume there are also practical issues. You described in the first episode how things like the nagging and all of that and trying to get things done in the relationship. Are there practical skills that people need to learn as part of dealing with ADHD?

Susan: Yes. And thank goodness because that's what I enjoy doing the most. I really have fun teaching people the practical. So, for example, what might be typical with somebody with ADHD might be a tendency to interrupt their partner when talking, and there are a few reasons for that. One is folks with ADHD tend to have poor working memory. So, they're afraid they're going to forget if they don't blurt it out, and the other piece is there's just some impulsivity there. That little habit can really be disturbing over time.

And so, for example, in couples' work I can teach couples. I can explain why this pattern started, but I can help the couple come up with some other ways to deal with this. For instance, the partner who is interrupting can take notes instead, or I can help set the ADHD partner up in the role of listening and reflecting instead of thinking of what they're going to say. That's one example of the practical.

Another example of the practical that comes up all the time is just who does what in the house. Who's primarily responsible for picking up the kids or doing the laundry or taking out the trash? How much more practical can you get? That's fun for me because I help couples have conversations where they make these decisions, then they figure out how they're going to hold themselves accountable and how they're going to set up reminders using their iPhone and pen to paper, things like that that are really practical and can make a huge difference.

Actually, I had one couple. I thought this was really unbelievably interesting to me where the wife was very upset that the husband didn't do laundry, or when he did do laundry, he would mess it up after she had told him hundreds of times how to do the laundry. She took it as he's intentionally not listening because he doesn't respect me or he doesn't care. Well, at some point she wrote down the instructions for doing the laundry and pinned them in the laundry room. That's what we came up with as a practical way to help. I think both of the partners were completely amazed how now it became extremely simple for the man, the husband, to do the laundry. He didn't mind doing it. That was a way he could give to her, and it made a huge difference.

I'm just fascinated by how little things can make huge differences with couples.

Lee: Right. Right. That is fascinating. I find that very interesting. Is this the kind of situation, when you're got ADHD in one partner, is it the kind of thing where the

counseling, coming to you and working on these issues, is going to be sort of a one period of time arrangement? Like maybe, they come and see you for several months and get the issues worked out, or is this the kind of thing that requires folks to keep coming to see you forever, basically?

Susan: I don't have any forever clients although I love my couples. I think generally people can come in for a few months and get the skills they need. And then, think of like your family doctor or your car mechanic. You kind of come in for tune-ups. The couples come, they get the new skills, they're feeling closer, they leave but then something else happens in their life. There are new demands, there are new stressors, or somehow there's some setback, and then they're welcome to come back and have tune-ups with me. So, they wouldn't come every week forever, but I would love it if couples wanted to come to me forever for an annual tune-up or annual checkup.

Lee: Right. It sounds like once you have the diagnosis made, you've got treatment going and you get these basic skills in place, then you're going to be able to do a lot of fine tuning on your own.

Susan: Absolutely.

Lee: Now, that's good news. Well, between this episode and the part one of this series, we've really covered a lot of ground. I feel like, hopefully, we've given folks what they need to address this in their marriages and go and get the help that they need. Is there anything else that we haven't mentioned that you think we should throw out there for people that are in the midst of dealing with this?

Susan: I think to let them know this is so treatable. There's just so much help out there; the medications, the counseling, the couples' work. There are also support groups out there. There are communities out there. This is a good time. If you're going to have ADHD, this is a good time to have it because it's more out in the open now, and we're understanding more about how the brain works and more ways to live and thrive with ADHD and being married to an ADHD partner. So, there's good news all around.

Lee: Good. Good. That's very optimistic and hopeful. I love that. If you're going to have ADHD, this is a good time to have it. Susan, thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today. I really appreciate this in-depth understanding you've given us of ADHD.

Susan: Thank you for having me.

Lee: To find out more about Susan Orenstein and her practice, Orenstein Solutions, you can visit their website at [www.orensteinsolutions.com](http://www.orensteinsolutions.com). I'll put a link to that in the show notes, and that's O-R-E-N-S-T-E-I-N Solutions.com. You can also reach their offices at 919-428-2766.

The first episode of this two part series originally aired about five weeks ago on June 25th of 2012. As with all of our previous episodes, you can go and listen to that one on

our website or on iTunes. You can listen to part one there along with everything else we have available.

Thank you so much for being with us today. I hope that you will come back and join us next week. In the meantime, if you have feedback or comments on this episode or any episode, you can reach us by emailing at [comments@stayhappily married.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com), or you can call our comment line at 919-256-3083. I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

Announcer: Thank you for joining us today on Stay Happily Married. If you'd like more information, please visit us on the web at [stayhappilymarried.com](http://stayhappilymarried.com). We would love to hear your feedback or comments. Please email us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com) or call us at 919-256-3083. Until next time, best wishes.