

Although we all make the occasional social blunder, most people are pretty forgiving if it doesn't happen too often. However, those with ADHD tend to use up their free passes too quickly, causing others to make deeper assumptions about their character. As a result, people with ADHD can be seen as irresponsible, self-centered, or rude, even though they're really not (or at least not any more than anyone else!).

As in other parts of their lives, adults with ADHD know what they should and shouldn't do but have trouble sticking with that plan. They know they should pay attention to people and remember what they are told, but they find their attention wandering. Or they interrupt people for fear of forgetting their comment before the other person stops talking. They too frequently put their foot in their mouth. They may express both positive and negative emotions strongly, which can overwhelm some people. They may also miss the nonverbal

**ADHD IS DEFINITELY NOT**  
an invisible condition. It may not always be obvious *why* people with ADHD do the things that they do, but there won't be much doubt about what they do. Therefore, part of managing your ADHD involves managing how you relate to other people.

# friendship

**Boosters for Adults with ADHD**

cues that are so important in social interactions or run late too often.

It's important to remember that when it comes to improving your relationships and friendships, you don't need to strive for perfection. Often, some partial improvements are enough to make things much better and create a situation where your positive qualities outweigh the negative feelings the other person has about your ADHD-based behaviors.

Real-life friendships have suffered in our cyber-driven world, yet they are just as important as ever. Adults with ADHD need good friends too. Supportive relationships have an important protective effect for both our mental health as well as our physical health. Let's talk about how to boost that benefit.

### Know yourself.

In order to be able to manage your relationships effectively, you first need to know yourself and what you want. What do you expect from your friends? What are you willing to give in friendships? With what sorts of people do you get along best? What sorts of people get along best with you? What are you willing to be flexible about and what won't you budge on? These answers will make it easier to find what you're looking for.

### Find good friends.

It's much easier to be a good friend if you start with people who are good friendship material; that is, people who are a good fit for you. They appreciate your good qualities and are willing to overlook or at least tolerate the things about you that they don't appreciate—and vice versa. Sometimes we stay with the same friends out of habit, even though we may have outgrown them. Or perhaps they were never really great friends to begin with, but they were there, so we kept them.

Because of prior social difficulties, some adults with ADHD will settle for friends who don't treat them very well or who make them the butt of too many jokes or negative comments. Even though it isn't always fun, they tolerate it because it's familiar and at least they can keep the friendship. Although I understand how this can develop, I would hope for better for them. So it may be worth thinking about the dynamics in some of



your friendships. Are you treated with respect and fairness? If not, it may be worth politely pointing it out and asking for a change. If ADHD-related behaviors have made you the easy target in the group, then working on your ADHD gives you much more credibility to ask to be treated better. Of course, your friends have the right to continue doing what they do, but you also have the right to find other friends.

If you feel like you need some new friends, the easiest way to find them is to look around at the people that you already know as acquaintances. Are any of them possibilities to be promoted up to friend status? You can also put yourself into situations where you can meet some new people. Your local CHADD chapter is one obvious place, but look for situations where people gather. You may need to try a number of things before you encounter someone that you click with. You probably will also have to try a few times before anything comes of it. Don't take rejection personally—not everyone is interested in making new friends, so it isn't anything about you.

Of course, if you're one of those folks who get bored with people after a while, you're more likely to hang in there if you start with interesting people. It's fine to have multiple shorter friendships, but it's helpful to have at least some longer ones.

### Consider disclosure carefully.

I'm often asked by clients and audience members at presentations about whether someone should tell friends about having ADHD. There are no right or wrong answers, since it depends on the circumstances, the openness of the person with ADHD, and the trustworthiness of the other person. My hope is just that the decision to tell someone is well thought-out, rather than impulsive or based on what turn out to be shaky assumptions. To read more about this topic, see my article, "To Tell or Not to Tell," in the April 2009 issue of *Attention*.



### FOR MORE INFO

**Ari Tuckman's** session on disclosure at the 2010 CHADD conference, *To Tell or Not to Tell*, is available for purchase through [chadd.org](http://chadd.org). Read more about the topic of disclosure in the April 2009 issue of *Attention*, available in the *Attention Archives* at [chadd.org](http://chadd.org).

A clinical psychologist based in West Chester, Pennsylvania, **Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA**, specializes in diagnosing and treating children, teens, and adults with ADHD. He is the vice president of the Attention Deficit Disorder Association. Tuckman is the author of *More Attention, Less Deficit: Success Strategies for Adults with ADHD* (Specialty Press, 2009) and *Integrative Treatment for Adult ADHD* (New Harbinger, 2007).

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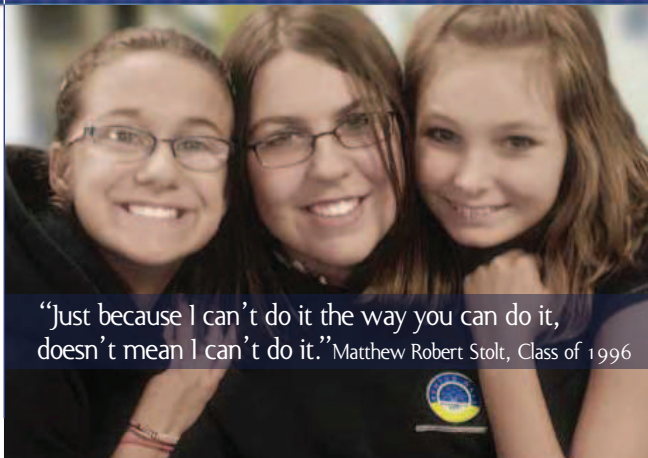
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"Just because I can't do it the way you can do it, doesn't mean I can't do it." Matthew Robert Stolt, Class of 1996

### Manage expectations.

Since we can't see inside other people's heads, we have to make the best guesses we can based on what we see. This leaves a lot of room for error, especially because we all tend to assume that other people do things the same way we do. Undiagnosed and untreated ADHD very much lends itself to this kind of misinterpretation. I sometimes say that ADHD is a disorder of actualizing good intentions or of turning your intentions reliably into actions. Therefore, you may need to work a little bit harder to ensure that people are clear about your intentions, especially when your actions might suggest otherwise.

When you can, it's even better to set things up ahead of time, before anyone gets the wrong idea. This is where *expectation management* comes in—that is, actively managing the expectations that other people have of you, telling them what they should and shouldn't expect you to do. Because ADHD affects an adult's ability to consistently do what others expect, expectation management is an especially important skill to develop.

For example, if you tend to run late, you may want to tell a new friend, "I'm really bad at getting places on time. I try to, but I still tend to run late a lot more than I would like. So if I'm late getting to the restaurant, just call me and I'll tell you when I'll get there. Better yet, call me before you leave to make sure that I'm not running too far behind. If I'm really late, order an appetizer and it's on me." This way the friend doesn't expect you to be on time and then get resentful when you're not.

This doesn't mean that you get a free pass whenever you tell someone that you're not good at something. Most people probably won't go for that one-sided arrangement. Rather, expectation management has the goal of preventing bad feelings, misinterpretations, and resentment.

We all make our own choices in life. It isn't your job to be perfect for anyone or to make choices for others. However, by being clear about what you do and what the other person can do in response, you are both in a better position to be happy in the friendship.

**Be open to fair criticism.**

Friendships should have more good moments than bad, but conflict, anger, frustration, and disappointment are an inherent part of relationships. So the challenge is to find a way to deal with these other emotions in a manner that doesn't interfere too much with enjoying the good parts of the relationship.

If your goal is to have a strong friendship that lasts over time, then you need to be able to be honest with each other. This means not just the good news, compliments, and things that you agree on, but also the bad news, criticisms, and disagreements. You may not always like what you hear, but it may be good to hear it.

We all blow it sometimes. If you have ADHD, especially if untreated, it probably feels as if you blow it a lot more than you wish. Fortunately, treatment can improve




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your batting average. For those other times, the ability to give a good apology is a great skill to have. When you need to mend fences, remember to take the following steps:

- › Admit what you did wrong, even if it wasn't your intention.
- › Recognize the impact on the other person.
- › Say what you will (try to) do differently in the future.
- › Make amends, if necessary.

You may not have complete control over your ability to do all the right things at the right times, but you do have the ability to fix things afterward. Remember that the hallmark of a good friendship is resilience—the ability to rebound from trouble spots. We're judged only partly by our actions, but mostly by our intentions—a good apology may not change the action, but it can reveal the intention. **A**

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