

Why We Crave the Drama That Sabotages Relationships

ADHD brains crave stimulation, and they just might chase relationship drama to get it. Next time you catch yourself (or your partner) falling into these common traps – outlined here by Dr. Daniel Amen – take a step back and re-evaluate.

Marriage is a partnership in which two people depend on each other for support, intimacy, and companionship. A person with ADHD can be undependable and unpredictable, which complicates this partnership but hardly makes it impossible. When you understand what goes on in the mind of an ADHDer, you are better able to develop systems for healthy functioning – together. That’s when you can enjoy the thrilling, scary, fun roller coaster ride of loving a person with ADHD.

Many people with attention deficit disorder unnecessarily create too much drama in their lives as a way to boost adrenaline and stimulate their frontal lobes. These interpersonal “games” are not engaged in willingly; they are driven by the needs of the ADHD brain. Most deny that they engage in such behaviors, but I’ve heard about them from many patients with all 7 types of ADD.

Let’s look at these games, so you can catch yourself when you are “playing” them.

“Let’s Have a Problem”

Many people with [ADHD](#) pick on others to get a rise out of them, to get them upset, to make them crazy. Family members of my patients say, “I’m tired of fighting with my brother (sister, mother, son). He (she) always has to have a problem.”

There is a reason why people with ADHD play this game: When the ADHD brain doesn’t have enough stimulation, it looks for ways to increase its activity. Being angry or negative has an immediate stimulating effect on the brain. When you get upset, your body produces increased amounts of adrenaline, raising the heart rate and brain activity.

“I Bet I Can Get You to Yell at Me”

Many with ADHD are masters at getting others to scream and yell. Such behaviors give an adrenaline rush to the individual with ADHD, but they may lead to serious consequences, such as divorce, fights at school, or being fired from a job. This game is not planned. The individual with ADHD senses vulnerability in others and works on them until something gives.

When I teach parents, siblings, and spouses to become less reactive, the individual with ADHD may step up the bad behavior. It seems that the they go through withdrawal as others become more tolerant. When he can no longer get the adrenaline-anger rush, he goes after it full force.

“I Like to Say the First Thing That Comes to Mind”

A number of my patients have said to me, “I am brutally honest.” They wear the trait like a badge. I reply that “brutal” honesty is not helpful. [Relationships require tact](#). When you say the first thing that comes to mind, you may hurt someone’s feelings or give away secrets that were entrusted to you.

“It’s Your Fault”

This may be the most dangerous ADHD game of all. Here, the person with ADHD reasons that he or she is not responsible for the problems in his or her life. Everything is someone else’s fault. People who play this game do not perform properly at school, on the job, or at home because of the lousy boss, the ineffective teacher, or the mean brother or sister. Playing this game too much can ruin a life. When you blame someone else for your problems, you become a victim of that other person, and you give up the power to change anything.

Opposition seems to increase adrenaline in the ADHD brain. Some people with ADHD are argumentative and oppositional with all the people in their lives. This game has one rule: The first reaction to any request is “no, no way, never.” I often ask my patients, “How many times, out of 10, when your mother (father, teacher, boss) asks you to do something, will you do it the first time without arguing or fighting?” Many of them say, “Maybe two or three times out of 10.”

“I Say the Opposite of What You Say”

People who play this game take the opposite position of the other person in the conversation, whether they believe the opposite or not. If your spouse complains that you do not listen to him, you deny it and say that he doesn't listen to you. If a parent tells a child to clean his messy room, he says that his room isn't messy. The need to oppose seems more important than the truth.

“My Thoughts Are More Terrible Than Your Thoughts”

Many people with ADHD are experts at finding [negative thoughts](#) and focusing on them for long periods of time. They need the negativity to generate the mental energy to get work done. If 10 good things and one bad thing happen, this person focuses on the bad thing. Brain imaging specialist Mark S. George, M.D., demonstrated that negative thoughts have a stimulating effect on the brain and positive thoughts cooled overall brain activity.

“Let's Call It Even”

Whenever someone has a complaint or criticism, the player of this game takes on the complaint as his own. If a husband is unhappy because the house isn't clean, the wife complains that he doesn't help enough. If a wife complains that her husband doesn't listen enough, the husband complains about the same thing.

“Fighting as Foreplay”

Many couples have described this fascinating game: There is an intense fight, then a period of making up, which includes [making love](#). The swing of emotions is quick and dramatic. One minute you are fighting, ready to leave the relationship, the next, you are making love and feeling blissful.

The first step in eliminating these behaviors is to notice that you engage in them. The way to take control is to get the best treatment for your ADD, whether that be medication, counseling, or coaching.

Excerpted from [Healing ADD: The Break-Through Program that Allows You to See and Heal the 7 types of ADD](#), by Daniel G. Amen, M.D. Copyright 2013