

Support for Partners

“Marriage is not supposed to be easy and is a constant work in progress.”

“No one’s marriage is perfect, and if they tell you it is, then they are lying.”

FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND COLLEAGUES often said these words to me. I knew marriage was hard work, but it seemed to be especially hard for my husband and me. We had been together nearly twenty years, and during that time we were in and out of counseling. We argued all the time. My husband couldn’t stand to be around me. I felt invisible to him. I didn’t like the person I had become—full of anger and resentment. I was just plain hopeless and depressed. It was a dark and gloomy picture.

When my husband was diagnosed with ADHD a few years ago, I finally got a glimpse of light. His diagnosis gave me hope and opened my eyes to see things in

our marriage differently. I delved into websites, books, forums, and blogs to learn as much as I could about ADHD. It was great to read about ADHD, but I needed more. Through my reading I learned about CHADD. Much to my delight, I found a local chapter practically in my backyard.

I went alone to my first meeting. I was so nervous and worried. I definitely did not want to share anything about my situation. My husband’s diagnosis was still fresh, and he was dealing with a lot of stuff. To this day, he does not share his diagnosis with anyone. Needless to say, he was not supportive of my going to CHADD.



PADD gives us a safe and confidential environment to give each other moral support, to listen, to learn, and to give advice on problems related to our shared experiences in living with a partner who has ADHD

That first CHADD meeting was a parent support meeting. Everyone sat in a circle and a moderator led an open discussion. I joined the circle and listened as people shared their joys, challenges, and questions about raising a child with ADHD.

I still remember the flood of emotions I felt during that meeting. I laughed. I got teary eyed. I'd never felt more connected to people I didn't even know. Even though they were talking about their children with ADHD rather than their marriages, I felt like they "got it." They understood. Positive emotions ran through me, an experience I simply could not get from books and blogs. CHADD meetings offered a human connection. After every meeting, I felt hopeful and happy.

While I always enjoyed the meeting topics, they usually focused on individuals or children with ADHD. Few meetings focused on marriage, specifically for the spouse who does not have ADHD. I knew there had to be others

out there who could benefit from such a support group. We seemed to be an underserved community.

One night, after a meeting, I approached a CHADD board member and asked whether the board had ever given any thought to starting a support group for spouses. I learned that the local chapter was run solely by volunteers. They simply did not have the capacity to add another support group to their task list.

I walked away feeling a bit sad, but still thankful that I had a local and active CHADD chapter so close, while others in the country have none. Over the next year, I continued to attend meetings. I began to become friendly with board members and others in the CHADD community.

Encouraged by board members as well as two close friends who are also in ADHD marriages, I mustered up the courage to start a support group called PADD—People with Partners who have ADHD. PADD is a pilot program of our local CHADD chapter. Before our first meeting last May, I had so many doubts, such as:

- *I am not qualified to moderate a group. I have no formal training doing this type of thing.*
- *I have no education or background in ADHD, mental health, counseling etc.*
- *My husband and I still struggle in our marriage... A LOT.*
- *Are others going to look to me for guidance? Will I feel like a fraud since I don't have all the answers?*

Well, I am here to tell you that I don't have all the answers and I don't need to, either. PADD gives us a safe and confidential environment to give each other moral support, to listen, to learn, and to give advice on problems related to our shared experiences in living with a partner who has ADHD.

While we always have a topic or theme for our PADD meetings, our members can share anything on their minds. We try to keep our conversations positive, but it is okay to vent frustrations, too. We are human after all.

One surprising thing about our meetings is that we laugh. We tend to make light of things that sometimes tend to bring us down in our ADHD marriages—and that laughter feels good. I personally feel much lighter after our meetings with a sense of renewed energy. I hope others in the group do, too! 🗣️

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