Children with ADHD often have poor social skills, are prone to interrupting and irritability, whilst quieter, inattentive children can be anxious and withdrawn. Many ADHD adults will have early experiences of rejection that can have lasting effects and ongoing social difficulties and they show higher rates of relationship breakdown. You may make friends very easily but have more problems keeping them, or have difficulty getting close to people. Many with the condition are outgoing good company, and have many great strengths to build on.

**ADHD symptoms that cause relationship difficulties**

- **Difficulties listening and sustaining attention** – You may not pay attention during conversations, which can make others feel ignored. This can also mean you miss important details.
- **Memory problems** – Even when you are paying attention, you may later forget what you have promised, and then others think you are unreliable.
- **Poor organisation** – This can mean you often do not finish tasks. This can make others feel that they are doing most of the work.
- **Impulsivity** – You may say things without thinking and upset people.
- **Short temper or emotional outbursts** – Because of a difficulty regulating emotions, people with ADHD may be volatile or have trouble discussing things calmly. People cannot relax around you.
- **Hyperactivity** – You talk a lot, and cannot sit still to do things with people – you fidget and give the impression that you are bored.
If you and/or the other person do not know that this is due to ADHD, your behaviour may be attributed to selfishness or not caring.

**Set goals to work on this**

- You may have problems with starting conversations, listening or asking questions of others.
- You may take over conversations.
- Or your problems might relate to long-term relationships or with parenting.

Ask other people for feedback if you are not sure. Choose one or two main areas to work on.

**What are you good at? Why do people like you?**

**Better communication is the key to building better relationships**

**Do you communicate well?**

- Do you keep the right personal space?
- Do you look people in the eyes?
- Do you smile and make gestures?
- Do you speak loudly enough, but not too loudly?
- Do you talk too fast so that others cannot keep up?
- Do you stick to the subject?

**Many people with ADHD talk too much and interrupt others** – These are two of the key symptoms of the condition. You may feel that you must say everything that goes through your busy mind, and others may barely get a word in. Speaking quickly may overwhelm others and prevent them from taking in what you say.

**Helpful strategies**

Consciously *speak more slowly*, taking a breath and pausing between each sentence.

Make yourself *wait* – Concentrate on what the other person is saying, and allow them to finish before you allow yourself to open your mouth. Many people worry that they will
forget what they were going to say if they don’t interrupt. Note it down if you like, but it may be better (if frustrating) to forget it than to interrupt. It will come back to you later if it is important.

For some situations, such as a work meeting, you could prepare and write down the main points that you want to say beforehand. Then try to stick with this and no more – it may stop you from going off at tangents, too.

Notice if you are talking about yourself too much. Listening to the other person helps!

Not seeming to listen when others are speaking is also one of the key symptoms of ADHD. Your mind may be wandering, you may be feeling bored or distracted, but this can be frustrating to others who are getting the message that you don’t care about what they have to say or about them. However, listening is a skill which can be practised and improved, with huge benefit to your relationships.

**Strategies for better listening**

**Make good eye contact**

Think actively about what the person is saying, focussing on key points, and perhaps visualise them to make them more interesting. Imagine that you will be tested on them later.

Make listening sounds (mmmhh, uh-huh) and non-verbal signals such as smiling and nodding to show your interest. Comment on what the person has said.

Ask questions about the other person from the outset, before you can start on your own thoughts and news.

Prevent zoning out, especially in important or work conversations, by repeating back what has been said, taking notes or even recording the conversation.

Poor attention can also mean that you don’t pay proper attention to people’s body language, facial expressions or don’t notice the subtleties of what they say or their tone of voice. Try to think much more about how the other person is reacting or might be feeling. If you feel you are poor at this, you could practice by watching social encounters in a TV drama with a friend. Have them tell you whether your perceptions were the same as theirs.
Social skills for unfamiliar or formal situations

You may lack confidence in such situations, perhaps remembering things which went wrong in the past. Think ahead – what has worked for you before? Choose some suitable conversation topics beforehand.

When you get there, be aware of what is appropriate, watch others and follow the social cues. Do people use formal titles? Do they patiently take turns? Is it okay to make jokes? Err on the side of caution, if you are unsure.

Relationships at work

It may be helpful to find your allies in the workplace, and look out for colleagues whose skills complement yours. People who are good at finishing tasks, or have an eye for detail, are worth cultivating!

Telling your employer about your ADHD

You may wonder whether you should tell your employer about your ADHD. Only you know your manager and the ethos of your workplace well enough to decide how well the news of your diagnosis will be received. If you do decide to inform your employer, there are a number of advantages. You will then come under the protection of the Disability Discrimination Act, and your employer must make "reasonable adjustments" for you. You may be entitled to the help of the government's Access to Work scheme (see Useful Resources list).

Improving close relationships

We all juggle different relationships, from more formal ones at work to the informal ones with friends, family, partners and children. Keeping good close relationships is vital to our well-being.

Deepening friendships and relationships

Some people with ADHD can be the life and soul of the party and appear to have many friends. Yet these friendships are not always as close and meaningful as they could be. If you are easily bored, you may flit from one friend to another, or may not be good at putting in the effort required to maintain the relationship long term.
Some tips

- Cultivate tolerance and persistence – expect to make compromises at times.
- Remember to apologise when you blurt something out or let someone down.
- Work hard to remember birthdays, dates and arrangements and keep them (try not to be too late – others may take it personally).
- Make staying in touch a priority, perhaps making a regular date or time to call. Socialising does not have to be complicated, like inviting people over for a three-course dinner; just meet casually over coffee or for a walk.
- Do things together, such as chores, shopping, or exercise.

The satisfaction of having and keeping a good friend who likes and accepts you as you are is more than worth it. Friendships are important to our happiness and a source of advice and support.

What positive things does ADHD bring to your relationships?

Romantic and sexual relationships

If you have ADHD, you can be a very exciting partner, and the initial courtship when your partner is the centre of your hyper-focussed attention can be very flattering and intense. You may find that later your hyper-focus shifts to something else, leaving your partner feeling flat and neglected.

You love stimulation and excitement, and so may become quickly enthusiastic in the face of a new love interest, but may risk moving too fast and acting impulsively. Promiscuity and infidelity are common among people with ADHD. In lovemaking, some people with ADHD show a kind of
hyper-focused hyper-sexuality. Others find it hard to relax or keep their attention focussed enough to enjoy it, or are unhelpfully hypersensitive to touch or smell.

- Be aware of how your ADHD brain works, and alert to how you behave.
- Try not to take risks or come on too strong or too quickly.
- Be honest with your partners.
- Once you meet the right person, keep the relationship fresh with novelty, making sure that you do hyper-focus on them enough for them to feel the old magic.
- Relax together, remove distractions and be in the moment.

_difficulties and conflict in relationships_

Being in a relationship with someone with ADHD can sometimes feel like being on a roller coaster. You are great fun but can also be up and down in your moods and behaviours. Conflict does, of course, arise in any relationship, and will not necessarily be related to ADHD. However, if you have a short temper, arguments easily arise, and impulsive behaviours like overspending or inappropriate comments are a frequent cause of rows. Other common themes are problems concerning:

- Attention and feeling cared for
- Not getting things done and subsequent criticism

One common pattern is that the person with ADHD is poor at paying attention and the other person then does not feel cared for. Another common pattern is that you are poor at organising yourself to complete tasks, and your partner/friend feels that they have to be the one to finish everything or be responsible for everything. Others can become irritated, start criticising you and then you become discouraged and don’t feel like trying anymore.
Sometimes the two issues can come together in a vicious spiral, as illustrated here regarding Craig and his flatmate Helen:

### Craig and Helen

- Craig does not complete tasks/
  - Craig does not appear to listen

- Helen feels she has to do all the work. She feels overburdened/un-cared for

- Helen criticises Craig

- Craig withdraws, loses confidence to try task again, fearing further criticism/nagging

- Helen feels even less supported and even more annoyed

Try to notice what the patterns are in your relationships. How can you reduce these kinds of conflict?

**Get your ADHD treated**

This is something that you are already doing as you are reading this!
Find out about ADHD
The more that you understand ADHD and your symptoms, the easier it becomes to realise how these symptoms are affecting your life and your relationships.

Acknowledge the effects your ADHD symptoms have on others
Rather than just thinking that the other person is being unreasonable, try to understand how your symptoms might be affecting others. Others may then begin to understand how their reactions to your symptoms may affect you. Your symptoms may spark things off, but they are not to blame for the relationship problem. The way you cooperate and communicate about the issue plays a large role.

Try to imagine what it is like for the other person
The best way to do this is to ask them what is going on for them, and listen to everything they say. Do not do this when either of you is upset. Be careful not to get defensive, or interrupt, just listen. Clarifying what has been said, by saying back to the person what you think you have heard, can be very useful. It helps you to make sure that you have not misinterpreted and tells the person that what they are saying matters enough to you that you want to get it right.

You may think that you already understand where they are coming from, but it is very easy to ‘mind read’ or misinterpret. You may have spoken about a particular issue before, but that does not mean that you have truly acknowledged what they have told you, particularly if emotions were running high.

Communicate rather than argue
Ensure that you are clear about your intent before you start communication (e.g. “I am not trying to upset you . . .”).
• Think about what you are really arguing about.
• Work together to resolve issues.
• Cool off before you talk and try not to get defensive.
• Be straightforward and honest about your feelings even if it’s difficult.
• Don’t assume that you know how the other person feels or what they think.
• Be aware of how you say it – tone of voice is very important.
• Listen and do not interrupt – make an effort to maintain eye contact. Mentally repeating their words will help you to remain focused.
• Ask questions about what has been said – this allows the other person to know you are paying attention to them.
• If you do miss something, ask them to repeat.

**Commit to working better as a team**

• If one person is doing too much, sit down and make a list of chores and responsibilities and share these out.
• Commit to your tasks and try to work to both of your strengths. Your flatmate, for example, might sort out the bills and you do the cooking.
• Arrange a regular time to sit down together and address issues.
• You don’t have to do everything. You might get food deliveries to your home, set up direct debits or even get a cleaner in to help with the housework.
### Planning for the future

This is a chance to review how far you have come and set some achievable goals for the future, with plans of how you can do this.

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<th>My past achievements that give me confidence:</th>
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<th>My goals for the future:</th>
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<th>My top strategies:</th>
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<th>My plan for when things go wrong:</th>
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