



Communication Tools that Make SENSE!

Anita Robertson ([00:00](#)):

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I am Anita Robertson, a relationship therapist and the author of ADHD and S, and I am so excited ADDA invited me to be with you today. In ADHD relationships communication can be tricky because things get misinterpreted frequently. This is because most of us were taught that paying attention is sitting still in order to listen. And then on top of that, remember what we heard. Partners will start to believe that their ADHDer doesn't care about what say, or that they even want to prioritize them. This happens when an ADHDer is on the go, while the other is talking, maybe doing dishes or laundry or scrolling on their phone or just looking restless. This can happen during important conversations or even a shared activity like watching TV and an ADHDer is sitting still while talking.

Anita Robertson ([01:00](#)):

They often won't remember what they heard because looking like they're paying attention. And the way that we were taught uses a lot of mental effort. One of the reasons that sitting still is challenging is because of our sensory systems. Now, everyone's sensory system needs the right input to stay regulated. It's kind of like eating. If you're hungry, it is harder to do anything if you're overly full. It is also hard to do anything, and everyone needs a different amount of food for their body. And our sensory needs are similar. Sensory needs have to be met in order to engage in higher cognitive tasks like learning and listening. And if any of your sensory systems are not regulated, you are working a lot harder to do the task. Just like if you're hungry or tired, your brain and body are not as efficient when a basic need isn't met.

Anita Robertson ([01:57](#)):

ADHDers have sensory differences which vary from person to person because, hey, what is consistent with ADHD? This means we need different environments and tools to get our basic needs met in order to function well or remember what your partner just told you. So if you find it hard to sit still and listen, most likely your body is needing input to know where it is in space and stay upright, which is pretty important. This means ADHDers communicate best using different tools and in different environments. Many times these tools are so simple, many dismiss them as unnecessary, but it actually makes a huge difference. So I want you to take a moment and grab a water bottle or a glass. If you have ADHD, most likely you have several close by. All right, so grab your water bottle and hold it close to you.

Anita Robertson ([02:51](#)):



How heavy does it feel? Now, extend your arm with the water bottle and hold it as far away from you as possible. Does it feel lighter or heavier? Which one is easier for you to do? Most likely holding it closer because it feels lighter. Despite that you're doing the exact same activity of holding a bottle that weighs the same. Now, using sensory tools might feel silly or uncomfortable at first for you and your partner. However, when your sensory needs aren't being met, you are working so much harder than you need to be. It's just like carrying your water bottle at arm's length at all times while your partner is carrying theirs close by. So when they think the task or communicating isn't that hard, it is because they're having a different experience than you are. So let's get you some tools that work for your brain and body to make communication and tasks easier. We all learned about our five senses in school, but probably not the three hidden sensory systems. I'm going to go over today and share both individual and partner sensory tools for that system. Alright, so first, let's feel it. I want you to look at your environment and make sure there are no objects you might fall on. Now, once you're in a clear space, take a moment and stand on one foot. How's your balance?

Anita Robertson ([04:16](#)):

Good. Not good. It's going to vary from person to person. Okay? Take a break both feet on the floor, and now I want you to stand on the foot again, but with your eyes closed. So what's happening? Is it harder for you to stay balanced? Well, that is your vestibular system at work helping you stay balanced and know how fast you're moving in space. We often use our eyesight to support our vestibular system, which is why it's harder to keep our balance when our eyes are shut. Okay, so how does your vestibular system show up if it isn't getting the input that it needs? This often looks like running into people or tripping easily. Maybe your body tends to sway when standing or fidgeting a lot when you're sitting or maybe even shaking your leg or tapping your fingers when your vestibular system doesn't have enough input.

Anita Robertson ([05:18](#)):

It also shortens your attention span because your body is needing to know how to keep you upright. That seems more important than whatever somebody else is telling you, right? All right, so this means that it's easier for ADHDers to miss things that their partner is saying. Their need for movement means that they're often doing something else when talking, which can be interpreted as not listening or value what the other person is saying. Sometimes fidgeting is dysregulating for the other person, or they interpret fidgeting as, Hey, my person's bored with what I'm saying. So let's talk about the tools that can

Anita Robertson ([05:56](#)):

Help help with this. First individual tools. Change up your seating. Yep. Sitting on a yoga ball, a rocking chair, or even a wiggle seat is a great way to have a conversation or do a task while sitting that will feel good to you and your partner. I often have clients use a yoga ball in my office, and it makes a huge difference in the work we are able to do. Doing yoga, jumping on a trampoline or cycling are great activities to get a lot of vestibular input. These are also great partner activities to do during or before an important talk. So what are the partner tools? My favorite one is walk and talks, especially outside.



Walking and talking can make it easier to engage in conversation and remember what you're hearing because you're getting a lot of sensory input. The other one is car talks.

Anita Robertson ([06:49](#)):

You might notice that being in the car is another way to have really good conversations. As long as neither of you are getting motion sickness, which actually means you're getting way too much input for your vestibular system. All right. The next system I'm going to talk about is your proprioceptive system. So let's feel it first. Close your eyes unless you're driving. Now, touch your nose and your head. All right, open your eyes. How did you know it was there? Well, that is your proprioceptive system telling you where you are in space. Proprioceptive system also keeps us regulated as well. So if we're having any conversations that bring up some big feelings, these sensory tools help a lot. When we are needing more proprioceptive input. It shows up as dropping objects like your keys, randomly bumping into objects, being clumsier, injury prone, and not realizing how much force you're using with people or objects.

Anita Robertson ([07:53](#)):

So if you're one of those people who tends to grab a drink only to spill it everywhere, that's your proprioceptive system, needing a little bit more regulation. All right, so what are the individual tools you can use for this? Using resistive fidgets. That means the ones that take a lot of effort to squeeze. That's a great way to get proprioceptive input. Wall presses pressing your hands together, or even using a TheraBand to engage your muscles are good tools to use in a conversation or just throughout the day. If you find that working out makes your brain function better, one of the reasons is because of the proprioceptive and vestibular input you are getting from it. All right, so what are the partner tools you can use? First one, bear hugs. Yep. Giving each other a big squeeze and hug when you see each other before you start a conversation or when you start realizing the conversation is going in a different direction than what you want.

Anita Robertson ([08:56](#)):

This is a great way to stay connected and get some of those sensory needs met. The other is a weighted ball toss. Tossing a ball back and forth, especially outside, and if it's weighted, really helps a conversation flow. I use this with couples all the time for when they're having hard conversations or when practicing a skill like validation. When couples come into my office frustrated, they're wanting the same thing to be connected, to be understood, and to work together as a team, they're often surprised at how well these tools make it easier to communicate. If you wanna learn more, I have courses, free resources, a lot of things on social media, and more on my website, anitarobertson.com. I hope you can stay curious about your hidden senses and discover what works best for you. Thanks for listening.