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ADHD: A Destiny of Heartbreak and Divorce

Posted by [carolyncastiglia](#) on June 7th, 2010 at 6:15 pm



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On Friday, Lisa Belkin's Motherlode blog re-printed the story of a mother torn about [placing her 5-year-old son in a home for psychiatric patients](#). Her son, identified as E-Niner, suffers from "ADHD, pervasive developmental disorder, and psychosis," and the strain of the decision is breaking her marriage in two. Her husband does not want their son to leave their home, yet everyone else in the family – including all four grandparents – feels E-Niner needs round-the-clock professional care.

If you've been divorced, you can probably relate to the sense of imminent disaster this mother feels. When a marriage is under heavy strain, it's often impossible to deny the inevitability of a split. She asks, "Will my husband feel bullied into accepting the placement, and then decide to tear up our family afterward? Will I ultimately follow my husband's desire not to place, squelching my own sense of what is absolutely right and necessary for E-Niner, and turn the tables on our marriage? Is the marriage dissolving right now, right before my very eyes?"

Belkin points to research covered recently by Strollerderby that indicates [parents of autistic children are not more likely to get divorced](#) than anyone else. However, studies suggest that an ADHD diagnosis is a sign of impending marital doom. "Disruptive child behavior likely interacts over time with other existing stress in the family to spark conflict in a marriage and, ultimately, divorce," according to Dr. William E. Pelham, Jr., professor of psychology and pediatrics at the University at Buffalo and director of UB's Center for Children and Families. His study, published October 2008 in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, indicates that "parents of a child with ADHD are nearly twice as likely to divorce by the time the child is 8 years old than parents of children without ADHD."

I really feel for this family, and I wonder if there's anything the couple can do to save their marriage. No matter what happens with their son's placement, both parents are going to have to reconcile with intense feelings of regret, anger and sadness. I wonder, can a really strong marriage overcome insurmountable odds? Or is it true that sometimes love just ain't enough?

Photo: doctorsolve.com

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"However, studies suggest that an ADHD diagnosis is a sign of impending marital doom."

Well that's ridiculously depressing! Wow. Maybe our little family can beat those odds – only two and 1/2 more years until my oldest turns eight. His ADHD was diagnosed early and he is being treated with a non-stimulant drug as well as another for possible behavior disorder. He's doing awesome. Our family is doing pretty awesome, however their Dad (being the great guy he is) hasn't been here from the get-go, which could be why it's easier for him to handle. I'm a handle-anything-and-move-on kinda gal and when he and I got our kid's diagnosis when our little guy was 4, we ran with it. We discussed all of our options and did what we thought was best. Perhaps the marriage strain comes from starting a family together and then having the "perfection" shattered by something like a behavioral disorder diagnosis. Don't know, but I know we're not bailing out any time soon.

LolaLane commented on [Jun 08 10 at 10:48 am](#)

For those interested, we've blogged quite a bit about both issues raised here, ADHD and how to deal with parent splitting up.

Take a look [littleheroes.com/blog](#)

Martin commented on [Jun 08 10 at 11:44 am](#)

That's good to hear! And I think you're right about the dissolution of the idea of a perfect family. Certainly in my own marriage that happened for other reasons, and I think that is one of the main causes of divorce: when reality doesn't meet our expectations. But of course, that's not the only

factor in ADHD divorces. I think Dr. Pelham really distills the dynamic in his quote. Best of luck to you!

carolyncastiglia commented on [Jun 08 10 at 11:47 am](#)

My husband and I separated one month ago. One of our huge giant problems was my ADHD daughter (husband is stepdad). We tried and tried and TRIED for two years to work through our issues. No luck. I will never ever tell my daughter this though...

brokemom commented on [Jun 08 10 at 4:26 pm](#)

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