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# HIV & AIDS

What do  
we say  
to young  
people?

an information  
guide for parents  
and carers

## Why do they need to know?

Secondary schools have now been directed by the government to include HIV and AIDS information in their health education and science programmes. Young people may also get information about HIV and AIDS from the television, posters, their friends and family. Some young people might be directly affected by HIV and AIDS. They, their family or friends may be HIV positive or have AIDS.

## What might they already know?

Young people may not talk to us about everything they do and we might not always know what information they see or hear. Sometimes the information they receive may be confusing or inaccurate. The common myth that heterosexuals are not at risk of HIV infection, no matter what sort of sex they have, shows that information can also be wrong. It is important that we work together with schools and youth groups to provide young people with clear information and the chance to talk.

As parents/carers we might worry that giving young people information is allowing or even encouraging them to do things that we do not agree with or which might be harmful. This is not proven. In fact having little or no information about HIV and AIDS is confusing and potentially harmful. If young people are going to do things which we do not agree with as parents, and they often will, they need information to stay safe and healthy. Talking with young people and providing clear, accurate information can help young people make decisions for themselves.

## When and how to begin?

Young people might ask us questions or want to talk about subjects that we ourselves find difficult. HIV and AIDS could be one of these subjects. We may be worried about why they are asking certain questions or anxious that they know more than us.

Talking about HIV and AIDS with young people involves talking about sex and sexuality. Young



people are learning about their own sexuality and may be starting to think about, or to have sexual relationships. Talking about these things can be difficult for parents/carers as well as young people.

There may be some things, like body changes or sex, that we or young people feel should be talked about with someone of the same sex. Talking with someone about things you have in common can be reassuring and feel more comfortable. It is important we understand this. There may be subjects that young people prefer to discuss with friends, youthworkers or other adults. If young people do not feel able to talk with us it is important that we respect this and encourage them to talk to someone else.

- Answer questions when they come up. If we put it off young people might not ask again.
- We need to listen carefully to all questions and statements and respond directly to them.
- We need to be clear about what is our opinion and what is fact and that people's opinion may differ from ours. This will help us to give information without it sounding like a lecture.
- Admitting how we feel and not being afraid to say if we are embarrassed can make it easier to talk.
- Answering young people's questions encourages them to ask for information when they need it.
- Use words that you both understand and are familiar with.
- Young people may be too confused or embarrassed to ask questions. Just mentioning HIV and AIDS lets them know that it's okay to talk about it.
- HIV and AIDS, like many things, will need to be talked about more than once. We have to make sure that young people know they can talk to us again.

## What do we need?

Young people may question their parent/carer's views and develop opinions of their own. It can be

difficult to accept that they have different values than us. A conversation can easily turn into a lecture or an argument. Getting more information for ourselves on HIV and AIDS offers us the chance to learn more and think about our feelings. This might also help us to separate out our own views from the facts when deciding what to tell young people.

Our religious, cultural or personal beliefs may affect the way in which we talk with young people and the information we give them. It is important to find a way of talking that we feel comfortable with.

## **I**NFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

### **W**hat is HIV?

**H .....HUMAN**  
**I .....IMMUNODEFICIENCY**  
**V .....VIRUS**

HIV is the virus which can go on to cause AIDS. HIV infection is passed from person to person only in a few very specific ways. People may have HIV infection and remain perfectly well and be unaware they are infected for a long time.

### **W**hat is AIDS?

**A .....ACQUIRED**  
**I .....IMMUNE**  
**D .....DEFICIENCY**  
**S .....SYNDROME**

HIV infection may go on to break down the body's natural defence system. When the immune system breaks down, the body is vulnerable to serious illnesses and infections. When this happens a person is diagnosed as having AIDS. Some people live with HIV infection for years without developing AIDS. ➤



You can not tell who has HIV or AIDS. Anyone is potentially at risk from HIV infection. Remember it is what you do and not who you are that puts you at risk of HIV.

## How is HIV passed on?

HIV is passed on in very specific ways.

- having unprotected penetrative sex, vaginal or anal, with someone who has HIV.
- sharing needles, syringes or other drug injecting equipment with someone who's infected with the virus.
- possibly from mother to baby during pregnancy and from breast milk.
- infected blood and blood products. In Britain all blood is screened for HIV and blood products are heat treated. This is not the case in all countries.
- using semen from a man who is infected with HIV for donor insemination. Donor insemination clinics screen all donors for HIV infection.

HIV infection is not transmitted by sharing cups, using swimming pools, kissing, shaking hands, using toilet seats or towels.

## Where do we go from here?

As parents and carers we talk with young people about different things all the time. Talking gives us the chance to learn together and encourages young people to talk to us.

- Find out what is happening in the young person's school and local youth groups. Encourage them to educate young people about HIV and AIDS.
- Get more information. Further literature on HIV and AIDS is available from libraries and other public buildings and your local HIV Unit and Health Promotion Unit.



## Some useful addresses

### NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Positively Women  
5 Sebastian Street,  
London EC1V 0HE  
☎ 071 490 5501

Black HIV and AIDS  
Network  
111 Devonport Road,  
Shepherds Bush,  
London W12 8PB  
☎ 081 749 2828

Barnardo's –  
Positive Options  
354 Goswell Road,  
London EC1V 7LQ  
☎ 071 278 5039

Terrence Higgins Trust  
52-54 Grays Inn Road  
London WC1N 8JU  
☎ 071 242 1010

Childline  
Freepost 1111,  
London N1 0BR  
☎ 0800 1111

### LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Lewisham Professional  
Development Centre  
Kilmorie Road,  
Forest Hill  
London SE23 2SP  
☎ 081 291 5005

Lewisham Social Services  
HIV/AIDS Unit  
1st Floor Laurence Ho,  
1 Catford Road,  
London SE6 4SW  
☎ 081 695 6000 x8609

Health Promotion Service  
S. Wing, Nurses Home,  
Lewisham Hospital,  
London SE13 6LH  
☎ 081 690 4311 x6289


The Positive Place  
Regent House (Office 115)  
291 Kirkdale, Sydenham  
London SE26 4QE

BM Foodchain  
London WC1N 3XX

The Landmark  
47A Tulse Hill  
London SW2 2TN  
☎ 081 678 6686

SE London Support Group  
(can be contacted through  
the Social Services HIV  
Unit-see above)

 **Lewisham Education**

 **Lewisham Social Services**