

**HIV&AIDS; : what do we say to our children? : an information guide for parents and carers / Lewisham Education, Lewisham Social Services.**

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# HIV & AIDS

What do  
we say  
to our  
children?

an information  
guide for parents  
and carers

## Do they need to know?

Primary schools have now been encouraged by the government to include HIV and AIDS information in their health education programmes. Children may also get information about HIV and AIDS from the television, posters, their friends and family. Often children's playground discussions are triggered by something they've seen, heard or read. For some children this can cause increased fear and concern about the issue. Some children might be directly affected by HIV and AIDS. They, their family or friends may be HIV positive or have AIDS.

Ourselves and our children may experience discrimination or discriminate against others out of fear and ignorance. This is particularly so around HIV and AIDS. Education which deals with the facts and myths and assists understanding of our emotions about HIV and AIDS can help us in overcoming the prejudices around us.

## What might they already know?

We might not always know what our children have seen or heard. Sometimes the information they receive may be confusing or inaccurate. So we need to find out what information our children already have.

Answering children's questions honestly will not make them unduly interested in a subject or harm them. Giving little or no information could lead to confusion.

## When and how to begin?

We may be unsure of answering some of our children's questions. They may ask about subjects that we ourselves find difficult. HIV and AIDS could be one of these subjects. It is important that we do respond to children's questions and statements. Younger children usually need only a short simple answer to their questions. Older

children have longer attention spans and may even enjoy testing our knowledge with question after question.

Our children's age and development can guide us about when and how to begin talking. Young children may have little need to talk about HIV and AIDS unless it directly affects their lives. Talking with our children now helps them to understand how they can keep themselves safe and healthy as they grow older.

- Answer questions when they come up. If we put it off our children might not ask again.
- We need to listen carefully to all questions and statements and respond directly to them.
- Admitting how we feel and not being afraid to say if we are embarrassed can make it easier to talk.
- Answering children's questions encourages them to ask for information when they need it.
- Use words that children are familiar with.
- Children may be too confused or embarrassed to ask questions. Just mentioning the subject lets them know that it's okay to talk about HIV and AIDS.
- HIV and AIDS, like many things, will need to be talked about more than once. We have to make sure our children know they can talk to us again.

## What do we need?

Getting more information on HIV and AIDS offers us the chance to learn more and think about our feelings. This might also help us to be clear about the facts and values we want to give our children. For further information contact the organisations on this leaflet.

Our religious, cultural or personal beliefs may affect the way in which we talk with our children and the information we decide to 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 in 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.

Potentially all people are at risk from HIV infection. It is what you do and not who you are that puts you at risk of HIV.

### **H**ow 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 or 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 blood is screened and blood products 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?

It is important that we show an interest and involve ourselves in what schools are teaching. Our children may ask us questions or come to us for reassurance. As parents and carers we talk with children about different things all the time. Talking gives us the chance to learn with our children and encourages them to talk to us in the future.

- Find out what is happening in your children's school.
- 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.
- Books for children

"Come sit by me" Margaret Merryfield MD, Womens Press.

"Let's talk about AIDS" by Pete Sanders and Clare Farquar published by Gloucester Press.

"Just like me" Somerset Health Authority.

## 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**