

How to help and care when a friend has AIDS / The Wandsworth Oasis AIDS care centre.

Contributors

Wandsworth Oasis
Salvation Army. United Kingdom Territory

Publication/Creation

[1992?]

Persistent URL

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THE WANDSWORTH OASIS

AIDS CARE CENTRE



**HOW TO
HELP AND CARE
WHEN A FRIEND
HAS
AIDS**

While serious illness is a fact of everyday life, AIDS has posed new challenges for everyone involved: not only individuals with AIDS, but also their friends. People who are in the prime of their lives have become ill, and their prospects for a long life may be severely affected. Their situation is not an isolated one, but is shared by people close to them.

When someone you know becomes ill, especially with a serious illness like AIDS, you may feel helpless or inadequate. If this person is a good friend you may say, "just call if you need anything". Then, out of fear or insecurity you may dread the call, if it comes. Here are some thoughts and suggestions that may help you to help someone who is ill.

Try not to avoid your friend. Be there - it instills hope. Be the friend, the loved one you've always been, especially now when it is most important.

Touch your friend. A simple squeeze of the hand or a hug can let him or her know that you care. (You needn't be afraid... you cannot contract AIDS by simply touching... and hugs are very reassuring).

Call and ask if it is okay to come for a visit. Let your friend make the decision. He or she may not feel up to a visitor that day. You can always visit on another occasion. Now is a time when your friendship can help keep fear and loneliness at a distance. She or he may be lonely and afraid.

Respond to your friend's emotions. Weep with your friend when he/she weeps. Laugh when your friend laughs. It's healthy to share these intimate experiences. They enrich you both.

Call and say you would like to bring a favourite dish. Ask what day and time would be best for you to come. Spend time sharing a meal. She/he may have made preparations. Be punctual.

Go for a walk or outing, but ask about and know your friend's limitations. Would she/he like to go to a pub, restaurant or theatre.

Offer to help answer any correspondence which may be giving some difficulty or which your friend may be avoiding, especially official forms.

Call your friend and find out if they need anything from the shops. Ask for a shopping list and make a delivery to your friend's house.

Celebrate holidays and life with your friend by offering to decorate the home or hospital room. Bring

flowers or other special treasures. Include your friend in your holiday festivities. A holiday doesn't have to be marked on a calendar, you can make every day a holiday.

Check in with your friend's lover, care-partner, or room-mate. They may need a break from time to time. Offer to care for the person with AIDS in order to give the loved ones some free time. Invite them out. Remember, they may need someone to talk with as well.

Your friend may be a parent. Ask about the children. Offer to bring them to visit.

Be creative. Bring books, periodicals, taped music, a poster for the wall, homebaked cakes or delicacies to share. All of these can bring warmth and joy.

It's okay to ask about the illness, but be sensitive to whether your friend wants to discuss it. You can find out by asking: "Would you like to talk about how you're feeling?" However, don't pressure, but talking can be comforting.

Like everyone else a person with AIDS can have both good and bad days. On good days treat your friend as you would any other friend. On the bad days, however, treat your friend with extra care and compassion.

You don't always have to talk. It's okay to sit together silently reading, listening to music, watching television... holding hands. Much can be expressed without words.

Can you take your friend somewhere? Transportation may be needed to a treatment centre... to the shops... to the doctor... or perhaps to a film. How about a drive to the country, seaside or a local park?

Tell your friend how good he/she looks, but only if it is realistic. If your friend's appearance has changed, don't ignore it. Be gentle, yet remember, never lie.

Encourage your friend to make decisions. Illness can cause a loss of control over many aspects of life. Don't deny your friend a chance to make decisions, no matter how simple or silly they may seem to you.

Don't allow him or his care-partner to become isolated. Let them know about the support groups.

Tell your friend what you'd like to do to help. If your friend agrees to your request, do it. Keep any promises you make.

Be prepared for your friend to get angry with you "for no obvious reason", although it feels that you've been there and done everything you could. Remember, anger and frustration are often taken out on the people most loved because it's safe and will be understood. Don't take it personally.

Gossip can be healthy. Keep your friend up to date on mutual friends and other common interests. Your friend may be tired of talking about symptoms, doctors and treatments.

What's in the news? Discuss current events. Help keep your friend from feeling that the world is passing by.

Offer to do household chores, perhaps taking out the laundry, washing dishes, watering plants, feeding and walking pets. This may be appreciated more than you realise. However, don't do what your friend wants and can do for her/himself. Ask before doing anything.

Send a card that simply says "I care!"

If your friend is religious, ask if you could pray together. Spirituality can be very important at times such as these. Do not "Burden" your friend with your religious views.

Don't lecture or direct your anger at your friend if she/he seems to be handling the illness in a way that you think is inappropriate. You may not understand what the feelings are and why certain choices are being made.

Help your friend understand any feeling of blame regarding the illness. Remind your friend that lifestyles don't cause diseases, germs do. This may be especially hard for both your friend and you. Help however you can. Do not confuse acceptance with defeat.

If you and your friend are going to engage in sex, be informed about the precautions which make sex safer for both of you. Follow them. Be imaginative... touching, stroking and massage can also be fun.

Talk about the future with him... tomorrow, next week, next year. Hope is important to him.

Bring a positive attitude. It's catching.

Doing things
when a friend has AIDS:

Housekeeping

cleaning
washing
bed-making
shopping
meal preparation
transportation
invitations
outings

Being included
when a friend has AIDS:

Meeting People

community life
socializing
entertainment
companionship
caring

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Terrence Higgins Trust Helpline (071) 242 1010

Body Positive Helpline (071) 373 9124

London Lighthouse (071) 792 1200

Positively Women (071) 430 2342

Black HIV and AIDS Network (071) 485 6756

Blackliners (081) 673 1695

Catholic AIDS Link (081) 986 0807

National AIDS Helpline 0800 567 123 (free).

Wandsworth HIV Team (081) 789 5131

Frontliners (Mildmay Office) 256 0407

Positive Partners 249 6068

Mildmay Mission Hospice (071) 739 2331

Gay Switchboard (071) 873 7324

Frontliners (071) 430 1199

Mainliners (071) 274 4000

Information on the
Salvation Army AIDS Care Work from
Major Trevor A. Smith (071) 383 4230

The Salvation Army

Telephone (081) 871 3567 (Hall)
9 RAM STREET WANDSWORTH SW18 1TJ
Side entrance in Shoreham Close
(*opposite brewery*)

OASIS TELEPHONE: 081-874 3230
(and Answer Machine)

A WARM WELCOME TO ALL WHO ARE
CONCERNED WITH HIV, ARC AND AIDS
WITH THEIR FRIENDS, PARTNERS
AND FAMILIES.

"COME AND GO AS YOU PLEASE" AT THE
SATURDAY DROP IN CENTRE
2 - 7 pm ALL WELCOME
REFRESHMENTS - PAPERS - TELEVISION

THERE IS AN EXPANDING PROGRAMME OF
THEATRE, SPORTS VISITS, OUTINGS
AND SOCIAL EVENINGS.

OASIS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THOSE
UNABLE TO VISIT THE CENTRE

A regular Oasis Newsletter is published.
Would you like to receive copies?



This leaflet is based on material from Gay Men's Health Crisis,
Chelsea Psychotherapy Associates, Metropolitan Community
Church, Chat and the experiences of many people who are caring for
friends living with AIDS.



WE ARE PLEASED TO HELP

