

## **When a friend has AIDS... / Catholic AIDS Link.**

### **Contributors**

Catholic AIDS Link

### **Publication/Creation**

1991.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/er9z8sj4>

### **License and attribution**

Conditions of use: it is possible this item is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

**wellcome  
collection**

Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

**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 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. S/he 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.
- \* 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.
- \* Go for a walk or outing, but ask about and know your friend's limitations.
- \* Offer to help answer any correspondence which may be giving some difficulty or which your friend may be avoiding.
- \* 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 with your friend's partner, lover or carer. 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.
- \* 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 s/he 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.

- \* 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.
- \* 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.
- \* Don't lecture or direct your anger at your friend if s/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.
- \* A loving family member can be a source of strength. Remember that by being a friend you are also a part of the family.

- \* Do not confuse acceptance of the illness with defeat. This acceptance may free your friend and give a sense of her/his own power.
  - \* Don't allow your friend or those who care for him or her to become isolated. Let them know about the support groups and other concrete, practical services offered without charge in their locality.
  - \* Talk about the future with your friend...tomorrow, next week, next year. It's good to look forward to the future without denying the reality of today.
  - \* 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

### **Social services**

#### **— when a friend has AIDS;**

Inform \* Plan \* Supervise \* Co-ordinate  
Finance \* Legal \* Personal \* Support

### **Keeping in touch**

---

This leaflet is based on material from Gay Men's Health Crisis and Chelsea Psychotherapy Associates, NYC, USA, 1984, adapted by CHAI (Christians in Hackney AIDS Initiative), 1989. Published, with permission, by CAL, 1991.

# Catholic AIDS Link

P.O. Box 646  
London E9 6QP.

Please remember people with HIV related conditions here and throughout the world; their families and friends; those who care for them, the many agencies who offer support and those involved in research.

*Blessed are you, our God, for in Jesus you show us the image of your glory. We give thanks for the gospel of healing and liberation which is preached to the whole Church in the ministry of those with HIV or AIDS. May we recognise that it is the real body of Christ which suffers at this time through HIV and AIDS. It is the real mind of Christ which is racked by fear and confusion. It is the real image of God in Christ which is blasphemed in prejudice, oppression and poverty. May we see in this crisis, loving God, not punishment but the place where God is most powerfully at work in Jesus Christ, and where, as sisters and brothers, we can lead each other to life in all its fullness, given in the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

## **What is CAL ?**

**Catholic AIDS Link** is a group offering non-judgemental, spiritual, emotional, practical, and financial support to those affected by HIV/AIDS.