

SYMBOL OF PEER ADVOCACY*

▶ ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

🕒 **Time:** 40 minutes

➔ **Objectives:** By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Begin to develop a comfort level and trust with one another and the trainers.
- Discuss the concept of the lotus as a theme for a peer advocacy training and an HIV+ individual's role as peer advocate to others living with HIV.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of a peer educator/advocate.
- Discuss the theoretical basis of peer education.

★ **Training Methods:** Large Group Activity, Visualization

✓ **In This Activity You Will...**

- Describe the Lotus metaphor (5 minutes).
- Lead a guided visualization and process it (10 minutes).
- Have the peer facilitator share the story of her journey (10 minutes).
- Facilitate an activity to define peer advocacy (15 minutes).

(continued next page)

Instructions

1. Post the Lotus laminated poster somewhere visible in the room, where all participants can see it.
2. Tell the group: We want to start today's training by doing a visualization to help you understand how peer advocacy is like a beautiful Lotus flower.
3. Ask: How many of you have done visualizations before?
4. Explain: visualization is creating an image or a vision in your mind. We are going to visualize how the Lotus grows from the beginning to the end.
5. Read the following history and description of the Lotus flower:

The Lotus flower is used as a symbol in many traditions such as Egyptian, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In some traditions it symbolizes, femininity and rebirth. The Lotus flower is the only plant to fruit and flower simultaneously. The flower emerges from the depths of the muddy swamp. Growing from the mud at the bottom of ponds and streams, the exquisite Lotus flower rises above the water and is usually white or pink with 15 or more oval, spreading petals, and a flat seedcase at its center.

The Lotus was chosen to represent a women-centered peer educator project because it reminds us of womanhood, healing, and giving.

The swamp can be seen as representing the confusion and pain that arises when a woman has been diagnosed with HIV or AIDS. With inner strength and the support of others, a woman can rise out of the swamp, just like the Lotus flower.

The blossom of the Lotus flower reminds us that if we allow ourselves to heal, we can open our selves and share with other

* This module comes from the Lotus Women's Peer Education Training Manual, Center for Health Training and Women Organized to Respond to Life Threatening Diseases (WORLD), 2008.

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ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY (CONT.)

✂ Materials:

- Large picture of a lotus that is laminated (Picture found at http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/photos/new_zealand_II/pages/lotus%20flower.htm)
- Tape or push pins
- 2 different color post-it notes
- Flipchart & Markers
- Handout - Peer Education/ Advocacy
- Handout - Key Definition in Peer Advocacy

🕒 Preparation:

- Write on a sheet of flipchart:
 1. What is the role of the peer advocate? ---color of post-it
 2. What are advantages of peer advocacy?
- Give the peer facilitator(s) the following questions to help them prepare for telling their stories: In a few words, tell us your story of finding out that you were HIV positive and what that was like for you.
 - How did you become a peer advocate?
 - How did you deal with HIV disclosure in different relationships?
 - What are your strengths??
 - What are some things you do to take care of yourself (self-care)?
 - What are some challenges and successes of peer advocacy for you?

women how we have risen from the swamp. We can be role models and helpers in other women's process of healing.

6. Slowly read the following meditation that can assist us in getting in touch with the spirit of the lotus flower in ourselves:

The Journey of the Lotus Meditation/Visualization

Find a comfortable position in your chair. You may close your eyes if you like, or keep them open.

Imagine that you and the other women in this training are sitting on a grassy meadow, under a bright blue, sunny sky. Feel the ground beneath you—and breathe in and out, feeling how your breath gives you life? Let the sun dissolve your thoughts from your mind. It is okay if thoughts continue to rise—just let them come and go. Notice if you feel tension anywhere in your body. You may want to take a deep breath and send fresh air to those tense places. Take a moment to breathe and relax.

Imagine that you are still sitting under the sunny blue sky, and in front of you is a magnificent swamp that resembles the surface of a small lake. Out of the swamp arise many lotus flowers—as many flowers as there are women in this training. Choose one of the flowers in the swamp, and focus your attention on that flower, zooming in on it as if your eyes are a telescope. The flower is pearly white, and it has dozens of long wide silky petals that extend outward as if embracing the sky. Tucked inside the flower is a case full of seeds. The flower is so shiny that it brightens the air around it—as if it is glowing.

Gaze at the lotus, and allow yourself to connect with the flower from the center of your heart.

Now, with compassion for yourself, if you feel able, recall some of the confusion and pain that you felt when you were diagnosed with HIV. You do not need to remember everything, just some of the feelings. If the feelings become too strong, you can always allow the glow of the lotus flower to soothe your heart.

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We're there to let them know that we are just as human as they are. And that there's nothing wrong with feeling a feeling, there's nothing wrong with talking about it, and there's nothing wrong with being afraid.

Jackie Howell
Peer Educator
New York, NY



Imagine that all of your feelings are a part of the muddiness of the swamp from which the lotus flower grows. You have survived a very difficult experience. You have risen from the swamp like the lotus flower.

Now bring your attention to your heart. Imagine there is a lotus flower blooming in the very center of your heart. Allow the glow of the lotus to fill your body.

Now imagine the glow is extending from your heart to all of the women in this room. As you send out your glow, see if you can also receive the glow from others.

Now imagine that the glow of the lotus is extending to all women who are suffering from an HIV diagnosis.

The glow brings comfort, wisdom and hope to you and all women. This is the glow of peer advocacy.

Now become aware of your breathing, and posture. You may want to wiggle your fingers and toes as we finish the meditation. I will count backwards from 5, and at one we will conclude the meditation.

(Note to facilitator: It is often helpful to allow for some reflection after the close of the meditation.)

7. Ask group: How did you feel doing this visualization?
8. We did this visualization to help us realize that we are like lotus flowers as well. Remember to keep coming back to this exercise. As peers we have to visualize our efforts as a lotus flower. Something beautiful can come out of something so difficult. You all are on your way to becoming peer advocates, to help other

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people using your personal struggles to guide others to deal with their struggles. And through doing that, you'll continue to blossom and grow in your own skills and abilities to deal with your own struggles and challenges.

9. Peer facilitator should share her story at this time about her journey to becoming a peer educator.

In a few words, tell us your story of finding out that you were HIV positive and what that was like for you.

How did you deal with HIV disclosure in different relationships?

How did you become a peer advocate?

What are your strengths?

What are some things you do to take care of yourself (self-care)?

What are some challenges and successes peer advocacy for you?

10. Since we are all here to become "Peer Educators", let's talk about what it means to be a peer educator or peer advocate. You will hear us using both the terms educator and advocate which is basically the same thing.
11. Show the flipchart you prepared earlier with the following questions:
 - a. What is the role of the peer advocate?
 - b. What are the advantages of peer advocacy?

12. Distribute a few post-it notes of each color to every participant. Have participants write "the roles" of a peer advocate on one color post-it and "the advantages" of peer advocacy on another color post-it.

13. After a few minutes, facilitator should collect the post-it notes and put them on the Lotus Poster.

14. Facilitator should read few responses to the larger group.

15. Refer them to the Defining Peer Advocacy handout to fill in responses. Tell participants that it is just as important to remember what a peer advocate does and what they don't do, so that they can get help from the appropriate people if necessary. An example could be a peer advocate is not a HIV treatment educator so you don't have to know everything about HIV treatment.

16. Leave the Lotus poster up on the wall visible to participants throughout the training so they can add more post-its and to reflect on how important and needed peers are to the community!

Summary

Wrap up: Ask if there are any comments or questions. Tell the group that throughout the training we will be adding to our understanding of being peers. We hope by the end of the training you are able to walk out of here feeling as though you are a newly blossomed Lotus flower and an educated "Peer Advocate."

* This module is part of the online toolkit Building Blocks to Peer Success. For more information, visit http://www.hdwg.org/peer_center/training_toolkit. This module comes from the Lotus Women's Peer Education Training Manual, Center for Health Training and Women Organized to Respond to Life Threatening Diseases (WORLD), 2008.

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SESSION HANDOUT # 1 of 2

PEER EDUCATION/ADVOCACY

A **peer** is a person who belongs to the same social group as another person or group. The social group can be based on age, sex, sexual orientation, occupation, health status, or other factors.

Education/Advocacy refers to the development of a person's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs or behaviors as a result of the learning process.

What are the advantages of Peer Education? _____

What does Peer Education/Advocacy mean to you? _____

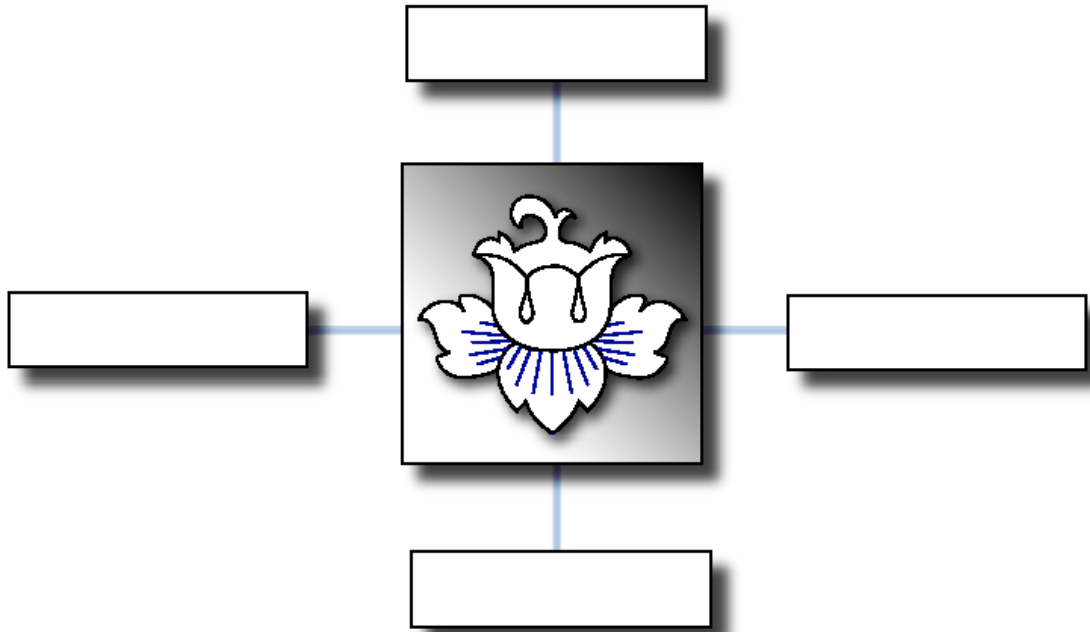
What are the various roles of Peer Educators?

A Peer Advocate is NOT a _____

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SESSION HANDOUT # 2 of 2

What are the various roles of Peer Educators?



A Peer Advocate is NOT a _____

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SESSION PICTURE



Picture found at http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/photos/new_zealand_II/pages/lotus%20flower.htm