

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE\*

## ▶ ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

🕒 **Time:** 45 minutes

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

- Discuss HIV disclosure basics;
- Understand that everyone has a unique experience with disclosure;
- Identify the benefits of, and barriers to, disclosure.

★ **Training Methods:** Large Group Discussions, Dyad Activity

✓ **In This Activity You Will...**

- Go over basic concepts of disclosure (15 minutes)
- Facilitate pairs activity (15 minutes)
- Debrief and wrap up (15 minutes)

✂ **Materials:**

- Newsprint, markers
- Handout - Telling
- Handout - HIV and Disclosure
- Handout - Who Needs To Know You Are HIV+
- Handout - Disclosing to Loved Ones

(continued next page)

## Instructions

1. Lead a brief discussion on the importance of thoughtful disclosure.

*“Disclosure” means telling someone about one’s HIV status. As peer educators conversations about HIV disclosure will come up quite often and you have to be prepared and mindful of how you can help your clients with this process. Who to tell about their HIV status and how to tell can be a very complex and personal decision, which your client will need help with. There is no one best way to tell someone, just as there is no sure way to know what their reaction to the news will be. You cannot tell your clients what to say or who to say it to but you can provide them with support and resources that may help them in their process. You can provide your client with some questions they should ask themselves before:*

2. Review the question words that you have written on the flipchart.

3. Review the roles of the peer advocate.

4. Have discussion of safe/unsafe disclosure using the pre-written flipchart papers.

5. Hand out the Telling handout. Ask them to write their answers to the first two questions only on the worksheet. Pair people up and ask one person to tell their partner about a safe disclosure experience and the other person to tell their partner about an unsafe disclosure experience.

Tell them that each person has about 2 minutes to share. While one person talks, the other person should practice listening without interruptions. Remind them of the class agreements and that each person will share only what they are comfortable sharing.

Tell them to get started! After 5 minutes, tell them the time is half up and to make sure both partners get to share. After another 5 minutes, ask them to stop.

\* 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.

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY (CONT.)

### Preparation:

- Write on flipchart:

Who            Where  
What            How  
When

Role of peer advocate:

Listen, Support, Encourage, Suggest,  
Provide, Share your own experience.

- Write on another sheet of flipchart:

Unsafe Disclosure:

Pressured by a friend or loved one  
Under the influence of drugs or alcohol  
Wasn't honest with self about the situation  
Needed something  
Impulse  
Didn't think of consequences

- Write on another sheet of flipchart:

Safe Disclosure:

You make the choice- the place, the time....  
You are sober, calm,  
You have information/phone number to give if there are any questions and you are ready to answer and/or discuss HIV,  
You have someone to talk with who can support you  
Thought it through for a long time  
Take your time  
Have a trusting relationship with the other person  
Know why you wanted/needed disclose your status to this person

6. Reconvene the group and lead a discussion by asking the following questions:

- How easy or difficult was it to share the good experience you had? Why?
- How easy or difficult was it to share the not-so-good experience you had? Why?

### Points to remember

- Emphasize that what you're looking for here is not what happened, but how it happened: I.e., You're not asking them to share their stories with the group, but to think about what they did that helped make this a good experience.
  - Emphasize that safe disclosure requires more time and work from a person than unsafe disclosure.
  - Acknowledge that we have all made good choice and bad choices about disclosing different things at some point in our lives. This applies to other personal information, not just HIV.
7. Ask them to get out their "Telling" Handouts, and to write their answers to the last two questions on the worksheet.
8. End the session by asking the group: what are the roles of a peer advocate when supporting their client through disclosure?

Responses can include:

- Listening to their concerns, fears, etc
- Reaffirm that is ok not to disclose.
- Help a client process why they should disclose, what they want to come out of it.
- Offer non-directive suggestions instead of telling them what to do and how to do it.
- Staying away from legal issues and scare tactics to convincing them to disclose.
- Encouraging clients to practice harm reduction practices

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## ▶ TRAINING TIP

### Things to stress:

- If anyone starts to share their story, point out that this is a good time to practice not sharing something, not disclosing!

## Summary

Wrap up by reminding the group that making decisions about disclosure are a lot like making other decisions in our lives, and we have excellent tools to make sound decisions, and their clients do, too.

\* 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](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.

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## SESSION HANDOUT # 1 of 4

### TELLING

1. A good experience that I had with telling someone else that I living with HIV...
2. A not-so-good experience that I had with telling someone else that I living with HIV...
3. One thing I do well when deciding who to tell is...
4. One thing I will change about disclosing my HIV status in the future is...

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## SESSION HANDOUT # 2 of 4

### HIV & DISCLOSURE

#### Preparing for Disclosure

“Disclosure” means telling someone that you are HIV+. Who to tell about your HIV status and how to tell them can be a very complex and personal decision.

There is no one best way to tell someone, just as there is no sure way to gauge their reaction to your news. But it will help to ask yourself a few questions before disclosing:

1. Who do I want to tell and why do I want them to know?
2. How much am I ready to share or are they ready to hear?
3. How will disclosing my HIV status affect me and how will it affect the people around me?
4. Think about the people you rely on for support, like family, friends, or coworkers.
5. Figure out your relationship with each of these people and the advantages and disadvantages of telling them.
6. Determine any issues the person might have that will affect how much he or she can support you. For example, does the person have any health problems of her own? Can you trust her?
7. Look at the person’s attitude and knowledge about HIV. Do they have fears or preconceived ideas about HIV?
8. Think about why you’d want to disclose to this person. What kind of support can this person provide?
9. For each person, decide if the person should be told now, later, or to wait and see.

**Deciding who to tell may take a short time or a long time.**

**There is no right way to do this.**

**It is a very personal decision that only you can make.**

Julianne Serovich, PhD, Professor, Marriage and Family Therapy

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## SESSION HANDOUT # 3 of 4

### WHO NEEDS TO KNOW YOU ARE HIV+

You do not have to tell everyone that you are HIV+. You should tell people that you may have exposed to HIV so that they can be tested and seek medical attention if required.

These people could be sexual contacts or people with whom you have shared needles. If you do not want to tell them yourself, The Department of Health can inform your contacts without even using your name.

In about 27 states, the law requires that you disclose your HIV status before knowingly exposing or transmitting HIV to someone else. Penalties vary from state to state.

You need to tell your doctors and other healthcare providers to ensure you receive appropriate care. Your doctor also needs to know how you were infected to determine if you are at risk for other diseases, such as hepatitis C for injection drug users and other sexually transmitted diseases for women infected through sex.

### Who Does Not Need to Know

You do not have to tell your employer that you are HIV+. If you do tell, remember that, as long as you are performing your job, your employer cannot legally discriminate against you. People with disabilities, including HIV, are protected from job discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### Who You May Want to Tell

Women often choose to disclose their status to close friends and family. For many, telling those closest to them provides them with both emotional and practical support.

Some people decide to become more public and use their stories to advocate for others with government or media. Others may disclose for educational purposes to neighbors, community and religious groups, schools, other HIV+ people, or healthcare providers.

Many women find a sense of purpose and increased self-esteem by telling their story.

You may want to consider how much of your story you are ready to tell. Many people will ask you how you became infected. If you decide not to share that information, have a reply ready such as, “does it really matter?” or simply state that you are not ready to talk about that.

# SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS THROUGH DISCLOSURE

## SESSION HANDOUT # 4 of 4

### DISCLOSING TO LOVED ONES

#### Disclosing to Children

For moms considering telling their children, it is important to ask yourself why you want to tell them:

- Will they be angry if you keep a secret?
- Do they suspect something?
- Are you sick?

Children can react to the news of HIV in the family in many different ways. Older kids may be upset that you kept a secret from them. Younger children may just want to go back to their toys. Partial truths can be helpful when telling children. You may decide only to tell them as much as you consider appropriate for their age.

Do not forget that kids need support too. If you can, give them the name of another adult they can talk to, perhaps an aunt or grandparent. Several books are available that deal with the issue of disclosure to children. (Find books at Let's Talk.)

#### Disclosure and Relationships

Women who are dating find it difficult to know when to disclose. Should you tell on the first date or only if the relationship is getting serious? While there is no correct answer, the longer you wait, the more difficult it becomes.

Be aware that women are at risk for violence when disclosing their HIV status, especially pregnant women. If you are worried that your partner may become violent, think about having the discussion with a neutral third party present: a therapist, an HIV advocate, or a health professional.

In close relationships, studies show that living with a secret, such as HIV, can be more emotionally harmful than the rejection that could result from disclosure. Many women who have kept a secret for a long time feel a sense of relief after telling. Community based organizations and AIDS clinics can offer resources to guide women through the disclosure process.

1 Gielen, A.C., et.al. (1997). Women's disclosure of HIV status: Experiences of mistreatment and violence in urban setting. *Women's Health* 25(3). 19-31.

2 Lee, M.B. & Rotherman-Borus, M.J. (2002). Parents disclosure of HIV to their children. *AIDS*, 16(16). 2201-2207: Retrieved July 2003 from [http://thebody.com/cdc/news\\_updates\\_archive/nov11\\_02/hiv\\_disclosure.html](http://thebody.com/cdc/news_updates_archive/nov11_02/hiv_disclosure.html).

3 Margolese, S.L. (2002). Telling your story, how to decide: A skills-building workshop designed to increase involvement of people with HIV in education, advocacy, and prevention. XIV International AIDS Conference, Barcelona. Abs. TuPeF5496.

4 Schmidt, C.K. & Goggin, K. (2002). Disclosure patterns among HIV+ women. *American Clinical Laboratory*. 40-43: Retrieved July 2003 from <http://www.iscpubs.com/articles/acl/c0203sch.pdf>.

©2003-2006 The Well Project, Inc. A Not For Profit Corporation.