

POSITIVELY WOMEN

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disclosure
special

when?
where?
should I?
do I dare?

personal stories

news and views

what's on at PW

disclosure

what? when

For people living with HIV, disclosure is very often synonymous with fear, rejection, uncertainty...you name it! Basically the associations are with negative feelings and reactions.

Most of this stems from ignorance where HIV is concerned. The stigma associated with HIV should not be as it is today because a lot more people have access to education, health, sexual health and other information. However, the issue of disclosure will affect all people living with HIV at some point.

Who do you disclose to?

The important thing to remember is that everyone is an individual and therefore when to disclose and to whom will differ accordingly.

Some of the people you might need to disclose to include:

Partners:

Past, present and potential: There are practical reasons for disclosing to partners. Support is one of them. Disclosure to partners becomes difficult where a couple are tested separately or are given their respective diagnoses at different times. Telling potential partners can also get quite complicated, especially as one can never be quite sure when to do this. Do you tell partners as soon as you meet them, after a few dates, before or after you get intimate? As for past partners – there are no right answers.

Children:

This is an area a lot of parents/guardians find very hard to cope with. But again for obvious reasons the subject will have to be broached with children. Whether it is to disclose the parent's/guardian's status or the children's own status, the debate is often around what age is appropriate to tell children? Will they be able to understand? Will they be able to keep it to themselves? Will their attitude change towards their parents/guardians? Many parents/guardians put across the argument that they are protecting their children by not telling them, but another point of view asks whom are they really protecting?

Close family members/friends/people you share a house with:

People who are very close to you are more likely than not to provide a lot of support. It is extremely hard to hide one's HIV status from people close to you as they are with you day in and day out. Again, at some point or other it is inevitable that the issue of disclosure comes up.

Employers:

Some employers have good policies around HIV but many still don't. So it's always worth checking this out.

GPs:

Quite a lot of people do not disclose their HIV status to their GPs. They may have previously been treated badly because of it, or they may have heard stories about GPs not being sympathetic to people with HIV. Equally however, many people have had positive experiences where GPs are concerned. It also makes a lot of sense, particularly for people taking anti-retrovirals, to let their GPs know so as to ensure that they are not prescribed medicines that may interact badly with their HIV medication.

disclosure: to make known or to expose to view

sure ? how? who?

BY
ANGELINA
NAMIBA



These are just some of the people a person living with HIV might have to think about disclosing to. However, before you do decide to disclose, it is important to ask yourself a few questions. For example:

- Why do I want to disclose to that particular person?
- What will they do with the information?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of telling them?
- How are they likely to cope with the information?
- Am I ready to deal with or cope with their reaction?

Planning the disclosure of your status is advisable but it might not always be possible to have the time to ask yourself all of these questions. Sometimes the choice to disclose can be taken out of a person's hands as others take it upon themselves to disclose HIV status on someone else's behalf. There have been incidences where a parent, a partner, a friend or others have disclosed a person's HIV status without their consent.

Some pros and cons of disclosure:

Pros (benefits)

- Support – many people who have disclosed have received invaluable support from their friends, families and service providers.
- Stress relief – it is extremely stressful having to hide one's HIV status from those closest to us. It is even harder for those on treatments as some of these need to be stored in the fridge and taking it becomes a hassle when people are around.
- Easing isolation – many people choose to lead reclusive lives rather than have to face the stress of hiding anything to do with HIV when they have visitors.

- Freedom – People have felt relief at not having to keep secrets and tell lies.
- Planning for the future – it is easier to make wills and other legal documents as a person then feels more able to approach those who can assist.
- No fear – many people fear being 'found out' and having to face the consequences if they have not disclosed in a particular situation.

Cons (disadvantages)

- Potential rejection from the person/ people you are disclosing to.
- Fear and rejection, if experienced, can result in depression and isolation and can sometimes lead to violence within the home.

Who can help?

There are people who can help once you have decided to disclose your status. Below are just a few:

- Doctors/health advisers
- Friends and family members
- Peers
- Child psychologists

Conclusion

The decision to disclose one's HIV status is not an easy one. This is because there can be no guarantees that people being told will react favourably. However, the benefits seem to outweigh the disadvantages. As already mentioned, all people living with HIV have to face the issue of disclosure at some point in their lives, but the decision as to whom, when, why and how to disclose remains a personal and very individual one.

Resources

See page 10/11 for reviews of some publications that can be helpful. [PW](#)