

HIV/AIDS AND TAKING CARE

COMING TO GRIPS WITH HIV/AIDS

- . Following a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS, feelings and emotions can be very complex and confusing
- . Your reaction may be clouded by the attitudes of others who do not understand this disease
- . It is very important to work through your emotions in order to approach HIV/AIDS in a positive way
- . Consolidating - reviewing and evaluating the quality of relationships
- . Rejoining - coming together with family and friends
- . Realigning - the shifting of priorities
- . Solidarity - the coming together of people in a common experience

Points to make for transparency #1

- It is essential that feelings and emotions are worked through. Living well cannot begin until the reality of the disease is accepted.
- Common feelings include disbelief, confusion, anxiety, fear and anger. These feelings are perfectly normal, and need to be recognized for what they are.
- Other people's reactions will affect your reaction; therefore, it is essential that you talk to people who have the right facts and a good attitude.
- Consolidating: Relationships will be re-evaluated, and with it will come the realization that the most important relationships are based on loving, caring, understanding, open and honest communication.
- Rejoining: It is very important to be able to talk with family members and loved ones, as such communication will help enhance your quality of life.
- Realigning: Following diagnosis priorities may shift. Things that were once important may now take on a different meaning. The most personal experiences may now be based on quality, not quantity
- Solidarity: Associating with other people is very important, and protects against isolation and despair. In addition, it serves to slow down the spread of HIV/AIDS because people are communicating and discussing ways of preventing HIV/AIDS.

Transparency #2

Your Immune System

- . It is very important to strengthen or maintain your immune system
- . A strong immune system may.
 - (1) Postpone the onset of AIDS symptoms
 - (2) Improve your quality of life after symptoms have appeared
- . Monitoring immune health:
 - (1) Symptom observation
 - (2) Lab studies and Blood analysis
 - Antibody testing
 - T-cell testing
 - CBC - basic blood studies
- . You can improve your immune system by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Points to make for transparency #2

- A strong immune system is the key to preventin the onset of AIDS symptoms and improving your level of health.
- *More Specific information on the make-up of the immune system can be found in the AIDS 101 section.
- Monitoring your immune system can give you a picture of the health of it - this can aid in making medical decisions.
- Symptoms observation consists of watching for symptoms of opportunistic infections, such as pneu-mocyshts, KS lesions, thrush.
- However, HIV may progress quite far before symptoms appear, and the immune system may be quite compromised by this time.
- Lav studies and blood analysis offer early indication of a decline in the immune system, and illnesses can be prevented before they occur.
- T-cell testing is the most common method of monitoring the immune system.
- Information on a healthy lifestyles is detailed in the next section.

Transparency #3

LIVING WELL

- A healthy lifestyle can go a long way towards maintaining your health and strengthening your immune system.

- General measures include:

- (1) no stress, or stress reduction
- (2) a healthy, well-rounded diet
- (3) no drugs
- (4) no tobacco
- (5) moderate alcohol consumption
- (6) exercise
- (7) following safe pet guidelines

Points to make for transparency #3

- Stress affects our level of health, and we should try to reduce it. Three methods include

- (1) awareness and regulation of breathing
- (2) muscle relaxation
- (3) meditation

- You should be aware of the 3 aspects of life in which stress is especially high:

- (1) everyday living
- (2) living in a world which discriminates against gays, lesbians, and women in general in addition to Blacks and other minority groups
- (3) the AIDS crisis itself, in which stress results from stigmatization, sorrow, anger, and profound loss.

- A diet high in vitamins and minerals can help prevent nutritional deficiencies associated with HIV/AIDS.

- Be cautious of foods which may contain microbes, such as very ripe fruits, non-pasteurized milk, undercooked meats, and raw eggs. These microbes can be dangerous for someone with a compromised immune system.

- Alcohol and drug use depress the immune system, and make it easier for the AIDS virus to overcome your body's defenses.

- Also, alcohol and drugs reduce the ability to make judgements about safe sex practices.

- Sharing IV-drug needles will allow transmission of the AIDS virus from an infected person to the bloodstream of an uninfected person. Either don't use IV-drugs, or don't share needles.

- There are diseases (called zoonotic diseases) which can be passed from animals to people. Pet owners with HIV/AIDS need to be careful with regard to living with their pets.

- Pet owners should ensure that:

- all vaccinations are current and that your pet is healthy
- they maintain good hygiene when handling their pets and litter boxes.
- they keep their pets clean
- their pets are fed only commercial pet foods only

PLAYING SAFE WITH SEX

- . There is no medical reason why persons with HIV/AIDS should abstain from sexual expression.
- . Regardless of whether or not your partner is HIV +, it is still advisable to practice safer sex.
- . HIV - partners it is important to practice safer sex to prevent transmission of HIV the uninfected person.
- HIV + partners practicing safer sex will:
 - (1) prevent infection with ASTDS
 - (2) prevent reinfection
- Your views as to what sex really is may have to be extended so that intimacy can be achieved in ways that protect and satisfy you and your partner.

Many people have asked, "Why is there a Black Outreach Project", and for many of us, the need for community-based AIDS work in our community, and by our community is obvious. The name AIDS was given to this disease in 1981, and shortly thereafter White Gay men decided to take an active stand against it. Though AIDS work & still is was very needed in the gay male community, it is a very common perception that AIDS is a gay disease. Though we have Black gay men in our communities, AIDS has not been viewed to truly affect Black people here in Nova Scotia.

There is no doubt that AIDS has hit the gay community very hard but AIDS does not discriminate. There have been Black gay males, Black straight males, Black women, whether they are lesbians, bisexual, or heterosexual, all infected with HIV in Nova Scotia. You may know some people and you may not know, but unfortunately - there are people infected. It is very difficult for an HIV positive person to share his/her circumstance in a community where everyone knows each other, and where they know they will suffer ostracization, in whatever form that takes. We have had many barriers with not only issues on HIV/AIDS but with every single aspect of our lives, whether it is the education system, the government, or employment. We have worked very hard and come for in all of these areas but we still live in a racist society, so the struggle continues. We must further embrace AIDS as an issue in our communities for this approach will save lives, our lives, and our lives are precious.

2. Since 1981, and specifically since the AIDS movement which includes initiatives on education, information and support services, very little AIDS work was done in the Black community. The Black Outreach Project, which started in 1991 has been trying to play "catch up" with AIDS work in our communities, but the truth is, we are about 8 years behind "mainstream" AIDS work. This has meant us denying that AIDS affects us, the existence of several myths and misconceptions, and a reluctance to embrace AIDS as an issue. This has also meant people being infected with HIV. Some of our urban communities may have received some specific information due to living in the city, but many of our rural communities never had any pamphlets or brochures sent, no access to speakers, no support for infected persons and their families & friends, and a non-realistic view that it has nothing to do with us. Our history shows that we can endure this epidemic, just as we have endured so many incredible hardships in the past. We must be a team and keep fighting to stop HIV infection.