

AIDS

A FAMILY TALKS ABOUT AIDS

***Information
for
Parents***

WHY SHOULD PARENTS TALK ABOUT HIV/AIDS TO THEIR CHILDREN?

Children are naturally curious. They question many things, including things that are not easy to talk about, such as sexuality issues and HIV/AIDS.

Most young children will have heard of HIV/AIDS. They are bound to have questions. HIV/AIDS is a serious issue and when children do not understand how it could affect them, they may feel uncertain and scared. Children need to know they are not at risk of getting HIV since they are unlikely to be sexually active or inject drugs.

Parents can best protect their children against HIV by giving them the facts and helping them make healthy choices. Children need to be able to make wise choices, based on knowledge regarding their sexuality, as well as other aspects of life. If parents do not answer their children's questions, the children may seek answers elsewhere. They may then be given wrong information which could put them in danger.

Talking to your children about HIV shows them you care about their health and well-being. It lets them know you are interested in their future safety. It gives you a chance to share your family values with them.

Because there is no cure for HIV, we must let our children know how to avoid infection. We all want our children to grow into responsible adults. We can help them now to prepare for healthy relationships later.

This pamphlet and a second pamphlet in this series, *Questions Children Might Ask*, give factual information to help parents answer their children's questions about sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Parents may find the information in *Questions Children Might Ask* most suited for 9 to 13 year olds. You may wish to modify your answers for younger children and are encouraged to address the issues according to your own values.

WHY IS IT HARD TO TALK ABOUT HIV/AIDS?

When HIV is discussed, difficult topics come up. Topics such as life and death, sexuality and sexual intimacy, and use of drugs and alcohol, etc., can be difficult to discuss. The disease of HIV itself is frightening.

There is no right or wrong way to talk about HIV. What we as parents do and say will reflect our values and opinions about such things as lifestyle, morality, sexuality, use of alcohol and drugs, life and death. We need to be aware of our own feelings about homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, and drug use.

PREPARING TO TALK ABOUT HIV/AIDS

You do not have to be an expert on HIV infection or AIDS to talk about them with your children.

If you prepare yourself by first trying to answer your own questions about HIV /AIDS, you will be better able to answer your children's questions (which are dealt with in the pamphlet "Your Family Talks About AIDS - Questions Children Might Ask"). Being well informed will help you to feel more confident talking about HIV /AIDS.

Good sources of HIV/AIDS-related information are listed at the end of this brochure. There are other sources:

- Get books or articles from your library
- Call the free STD and AIDS Information Line (1-800-772-2437). You can speak to a Registered Nurse during office hours.
- Talk to a health professional
- Watch a TV documentary about HIV or AIDS
- Discuss HIV/AIDS with informed friends.

If you understand what HIV is, how it is spread and how it is not spread, you have a good place to start. Make sure you are clear on the facts and values you want your children to know. Choose terms which are correct yet comfortable for you.

WHAT'S YOUR ATTITUDE?

We have to be aware of our attitudes when we talk about sexuality and HIV. Each of us has our own opinions and values about sexual behaviour. We must remember that as our children grow, they form their own ideas and values. They may well differ somewhat from ours, but our children will want to know our beliefs.

We can share our views with our children and we must be able to listen to their views. They need to know that we will not judge them or grow angry even if they make statements that make us uncomfortable.

Curiosity is natural. Questions are healthy. We need to let our children feel comfortable and safe to ask questions. We need to listen carefully to exactly what children are asking. We must show them that we are good listeners. Then they will want to share their concerns with us.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Set the scene by mentioning HIV casually in conversation (even if you aren't going to talk about it just then). Let your children know it's okay to ask you questions about it. When they do ask questions, you can be assured that it is a good time for them to hear about HIV. Answer their questions, and provide other helpful information.

Your children won't want to know everything about HIV at once. The information you share will depend on your child's age and needs at the time.

Take advantage of any related topics that come up, such as sexuality, drugs or sexual preferences. Or, you can introduce the subject by telling your children that you'd like to talk to them about HIV. It can be helpful if you choose the moment, but you must do so wisely. A good time is when you are doing something quietly together.

Some openers you can use are:

- Ask your children if they think about HIV/AIDS
- Ask your children's opinions of a TV show about HIV/AIDS they have seen
- Mention a news story or article about HIV and ask their opinion of it
- Ask if they've heard about HIV/AIDS at school
- If you've heard them mention HIV, ask them what they know about it.

Information can be given to children or left around the house to encourage further interest, or to serve as reference material for your children and the rest of your family.

TEST YOUR TECHNIQUE

To become more comfortable talking about HIV, think of several different ways to start. You might want to mentally rehearse what you are going to say, or practice in front of the mirror, in the shower, cutting the grass, doing the dishes or on the way to work.

Talk to your family or friends about HIV and AIDS. This will help you feel more comfortable with some of the words and ideas you need to use.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

- Children can feel that you are lecturing
- They can feel that you are prying into their personal lives
- They can feel you are forcing your ideas on them
- The timing may be poor for one of you
- You may feel unhappy about what was said.

However the conversation ends, it is important to ask your children how they feel. What part of the conversation was most helpful? How did it go for them? Ask for suggestions for next time.

YOUR NEXT AIDS CONVERSATION

Remember that a single conversation about HIV isn't enough and the subject should be brought up several times. In fact, as your children grow up, you will need to share more and different information about HIV.

You may feel your first discussion was difficult, but it has been a beginning. Here are several ways you might bring the topic up again:

- "That talk we had about HIV/AIDS yesterday—I didn't feel it went too well. It's important for us to talk about it. Let's try again."
- "Remember when we talked about sex and drugs last week? I don't feel that you had a chance to tell me what you think."
- "I don't think we finished our conversation on HIV/AIDS the other night. Are there other things you've thought about since?"

If it turns out that you and your children simply cannot talk about HIV or sexuality together, what you can do is make sure your children know who they can talk to and where to find more information.

Talking openly about sexuality and HIV will help set the stage for a positive relationship where you and your child can learn and grow together!

INFORMATION SOURCES

For additional copies of this series please fax Alberta Health and Wellness at (403) 272-7774.

A Family Talks About AIDS: Information for Parents and Questions Children Might Ask. 1999.

Available from book stores or public libraries.

Does AIDS Hurt? Educating Young Children About AIDS. 1988.

Quakenbush, Maria and Villarreal, Sylvia.

AIDS: What Every Responsible Canadian Should Know. Revised 1987.

Grieg, James D.

David Suzuki Talks About AIDS. Revised 1989.

Suzuki, David.

Come Sit by Me. 1990.

Merrifield, Margaret.

Morning Light. 1995.

Merrifield, Margaret.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

STD and AIDS Information Line:

You can speak with a Registered Nurse during office hours

1-800-772-2437

HIV Clinics:

(Referral needed and appointments recommended)

Calgary, Southern Alberta HIV Clinic (403) 234-2399

www.crha-health.ab.ca/clin/sac/sac.htm

Edmonton, Northern Alberta HIV Clinic (780) 407-1852

STD Clinics:

Calgary (403) 297-6562

Edmonton (780) 413-5156

Fort McMurray (780) 791-6263

Community HIV/AIDS Organizations:

Alberta Community Council on HIV (403) 314-0892

www.acch.ca

AIDS Bow Valley (Banff) (403) 762-0690

AIDS Calgary (403) 508-2500

HIV West Yellowhead (formerly AIDS Jasper) (780) 852-5274

Central Alberta AIDS Network (Red Deer) 1-877-346-8858

or (403) 346-8858

HIV/AIDS Network of South Eastern

Alberta (Medicine Hat)

(403) 527-7099

HIV Edmonton (780) 488-5742

HIV North Society (Grand Prairie) (780) 538-3388

Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation (780) 913-9036

Lethbridge HIV Connection (403) 328-8186

Living Positive (Edmonton) (780) 488-5768

Wood Buffalo HIV & AIDS Society (780) 743-9200

(Fort McMurray)

Harm Reduction/Needle Exchange Programs:

Safeworks (Calgary) (403) 699-8216 am

or (403) 410-1180 pm

Streetworks (Edmonton) (780) 424-4106, ext. 210

Central Alberta AIDS Network (Red Deer) 1-877-346-8858

or (403) 346-8858

HIV North Society (Grand Prairie) (780) 538-3388

Lethbridge HIV Connection (403) 328-8186

HIV/AIDS Network of South Eastern

Alberta (Medicine Hat)

(403) 527-7099

HIV Residential Services:

Kairos House (Edmonton) (780) 432-1137

SHARP Foundation (Calgary) (403) 272-2912

**AADAC offices are listed in local phone books.
Regional Health Authority offices are listed in
phone books or visit:**

www.health.gov.ab.ca

