

# TIPS FOR PARENTS

## TALKING ABOUT HIV/AIDS

### A MESSAGE TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS:

Talking to kids about HIV/AIDS can be difficult and uncomfortable because it requires talking about issues such as sex and drugs. Nevertheless, it is a necessary discussion. Young adults face extreme peer pressure regarding sex and drugs. They are curious and adventurous but lack the life experience and the information to fully understand their risks, especially when it comes to sex and drugs. This can lead them to put themselves at risk for HIV infection.

Think back to your own childhood to better understand your children's needs. If you get nervous about talking with your children about sex and HIV/AIDS you must remind yourself that the only way you can protect them is to educate them about making healthy choices.

Since you know your child best, it's up to you to decide exactly what to tell him, or her. If you find it awkward to introduce the topic of HIV/AIDS, here are some suggestions.

### HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN:

Pre-school children do not need to know a lot of details. They do need to be reassured about their safety and yours. Consider telling them that it's very hard for children to get HIV/AIDS and you can't catch HIV/AIDS like you catch a common cold.

To be reassured about their safety and yours, consider telling them that it's very hard for children to get HIV/AIDS and you can't catch HIV/AIDS like you catch a common cold. Teach children not to pick up things that can cut or "stick" them such as broken glass or needles.

Use correct names for body parts. Avoid too much detail. For example, you can say that sex is when two grown-ups snuggle in a special way to show their love. Answer questions honestly, if you don't know the answer say so. With an older child, find out the answer together.

Use concrete examples. For example, when bandaging a cut, you can explain that a cut is one-way germs can get into blood. That's why we cover cuts.

Correct myths. For example, it's a myth that you can get HIV/AIDS from a mosquito. (HIV cannot survive inside insects).

Also, for older elementary school age children, consider telling them, HIV/AIDS is caused by a virus (germ) that can get into the blood. Also, explain that it's safe to go to school and play with a child who has HIV/AIDS but it's not safe to touch anyone else's blood.

### HELPFUL HINTS FOR OLDER CHILDREN/TEENAGERS:

Ask them what they are learning about HIV/AIDS in health, science or any other class. Start a conversation about choices and consequences; point out that every choice has both negative and positive consequences and that they have control over them, and must take responsibility for their decisions. Practice with small decisions - such as the choice between watching television versus doing

homework, or doing chores versus going to the movies prepares them for bigger decisions later on. Let them figure out the positive and negative consequences for each choice. Then move into more complicated choices such as engaging in sexual activity versus abstaining, until ready from a mutually monogamous relationship.

The media is filled with facts about HIV/AIDS. Look to newspapers, magazines, radio, and television shows for stories and advertisements dealing with the infection or disease. Use this as an opportunity to start a dialogue about risky behaviors and HIV/AIDS.

Local events, such as AIDS walks, benefits or information fairs, can serve as conversation starters. You might propose going to such an event with them an educational experience.

Bring home a movie/video that deals with HIV/AIDS and watch it with your kids. Encourage them to talk about the film with you.

## **Dos And Don'ts**

### **Do:**

- Do respect your children's privacy; it's the best way to make them feel comfortable sharing their concerns or interests with you.
- Do teach your children about how HIV is and is not spread and how they can protect themselves from infection.
- Do inform your children that they can avoid getting HIV by making healthy decisions. Include that the negative consequences of risky decisions (STD's, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, etc.) far outweigh the negative consequences of healthy decisions (peer pressure and teasing).
- Do reassure them that just because you want to discuss the topic of HIV/AIDS, you do not assume that they are having sex or taking drugs.
- Do teach your children that discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS is wrong. Tell them that it is okay to be friends with HIV positive kids and that HIV is not spread through casual contact.

### **Don't:**

- Don't speak to your children in a condescending tone. They are more likely to be responsible if they believe that you trust them.
- Don't lecture or be judgmental!!! The last thing you want to do is get them to open up and then make them feel uncomfortable so that they never want to share anything with you again. Let them know that you will always be there for them.
- Don't be discouraged if your attempt at a conversation about HIV/AIDS is cut short. If the first few conversations are interrupted, try again at another time with a new approach. HIV/AIDS is too important a subject to give up quickly.
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- Don't let HIV/AIDS be an isolated issue. Include aids whenever you talk about sexuality, love, drugs, friendship, health and other related topics.
- Don't be ashamed to reach out to other resources if you still are uncomfortable about this discussion. For more suggestions or just for support, contact your local clergy, AIDS organization or Planned Parenthood; CDC National AIDS hotline 1-800-342-AIDS; or Teen AIDS hotline at 1-800-440-TEEN.