

MODULE 6: COMPASSION

Choosing Compassion

Purpose:

Stigma and social rejection can destroy people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. By experiencing stigma themselves, participants gain new insight and empathy for those living with HIV.

Objectives:

- ❖ Participants become aware of their own attitudes toward people living with HIV/AIDS;
- ❖ Participants experience stigma first-hand;
- ❖ Participants re-think their attitudes about people living with HIV/AIDS.

Time: 2 hours

TOPIC	TIME	METHOD	MATERIALS
Feelings About People With HIV/AIDS	15 minutes	Heads or Tails* Activity	None
How Stigma Affects People's Lives	15 minutes	Build A Character*	Paper & Pen
Experiencing Stigma	30 minutes	Cross the Line	None
Experiencing Stigma*	15 minutes	Outside the Circle	None
Stigma In Our Community	30 minutes	Stigma in Different Contexts	Paper & Pen
Choosing Compassion	30 minutes	Small Group Work	Paper & Pen

*Substitute "Cross the Line" with this exercise for younger children

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Key Message: People living with HIV/AIDS need our love and support.

Key Skill: We can comfort them by changing the ways we think and act.

People living with HIV/AIDS suffer terrible isolation and rejection. They face physical and emotional shame from friends, family and their community. They suffer from gossip and name-calling, a loss of rights, decision-making power and access to resources and livelihoods. People with HIV internalize these experiences and feel guilty, ashamed and inferior to others. As a result they may isolate themselves and lose hope. People associated with HIV and AIDS, especially family members, friends and caregivers, face many of these same experiences of social isolation

People living with HIV/AIDS and their families develop different strategies to cope with stigma. Decisions about whether to reveal their HIV status depend on whether disclosure would help the family (through care) or make the situation worse (through added stigma). Some cope by participating in networks of people with HIV. Some confront stigma in their communities. Others seek comfort in religion.

Social status, age and gender all influence the intensity of stigma. The

poor are blamed less for their infection than the rich, but they lack the resources to hide their illness. Youth are blamed for what is perceived as highly risky sexual behavior. Women are blamed more than men. At the same time, the consequences of HIV infection, stigma and the burden of care all fall more heavily on women.

There are many causes of stigma. Foremost among them is a lack of knowledge, incorrect beliefs and fear about how HIV is spread. This unfamiliar disease and its fatal outcome frighten people. Because HIV/AIDS is associated with sex, people make moral judgments, concluding that people living with HIV/AIDS are promiscuous or immoral. People are often unaware of their stigmatizing language and behaviors. Most have good intentions and many provide empathy, care and support to those who are infected. By becoming aware of stigmatizing behaviors, people and communities can change and show greater compassion.

Adapted from Understanding & Challenging HIV Stigma; AED, Manoff Group, ICRW, USAID, 2003

GAME

HEADS OR TAILS

Purpose: To assess our attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS

Age Groups: Children age 7-10

Materials: None

Time: 20 minutes

Delivery:

1. Ask everyone to stand up and close their eyes.
2. Read one attitude statement aloud.
3. After each statement, ask participants to decide if they agree or disagree. If they agree, they should put their hands on their heads. If they disagree, put their hands on their hips.
4. After people respond to each statement have them open their eyes and look around. Then have them explain why they agreed or disagreed.

5. Follow the game with a discussion about stigma. Address any fears or myths that arise about how HIV is spread.

ATTITUDE STATEMENTS

- I would be willing to be in a class with a student who has AIDS.
- I would stop being friends with someone because he or she has AIDS.
- I think people with AIDS deserve what is happening to them.
- I am afraid that someday I could get AIDS.
- I think I can protect myself from infection with HIV and from AIDS.
- I would not buy fruit from a trader with AIDS.

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ACTIVITY

BUILD A CHARACTER

Goal: This exercise encourages people to consider how prejudice affects others

Age Groups: All ages

Time: 1 hour

Materials: One copy of Build a Character Questions for each team; paper, pens

Delivery:

1. Introduce participants to the exercise by explaining that each group will create a character or person.
2. Divide participants into groups of 5. Hand out pens and a Build a Character Questions to each group.
3. Give the groups 10 minutes to answer the questions and build a character.
4. After everyone has finished, ask them now to imagine that their character has just become infected with HIV. Ask them to list 10 ways that life will be different for the character now.
5. Ask groups to read their character descriptions and how life is now different.

6. Reassemble and ask how participants felt when their character got HIV.
7. Ask how this exercise affects the way they feel about what it's like to have HIV. Ask if they think will behave differently in any way in the future.

Character Questions

- What is your character's name?
Age?
- Are they male or female?
- Who does s/he live with?
- Who are his/her friends?
- Does s/he have a boy or girlfriend?
- (What is his/her name?)
- Is s/he married?
- Does s/he go to school? Or does s/he have a job? What kind of work does s/he do?
- What does s/he do for fun?
- What is his/her favorite music?
Favorite food?

Adapted from Lesson Plans for HIV/AIDS and Safer Sex, AVERT, West Sussex, England

GAME

CROSS THE LINE

Purpose: By experiencing the feeling of being stigmatized, participants begin to empathize with persons with HIV

Age Groups: All ages

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: List of positive or negative attributes

Preparation: Adapt the list of sample questions to fit the group. Keep the items “light” and non-threatening. Use a string or other marker to divide the area.

Delivery:

1. Have all participants assemble on one side of the line.
2. Explain that you are going to read a statement. If the statement applies to them, they are invited to cross the line. For example, “If you are married, cross the line.”
3. No one is forced to cross the line. If they don’t want to they should simply stay where they are.
4. After crossing the line, participants should turn and face the group on the other side. After a moment of silence, ask them to return to the side they started on. Then read another statement.
5. There is no talking during this game.
6. You should end this exercise when participants begin to lose interest or you have gone through the list.

7. After participants reassemble in the large group, ask the following questions:

- How did you feel during this exercise?
- What did it feel like to be in the larger group? The smaller group?
- If there were times when you decided not to cross, what were your feelings?
- What does this game have to do with HIV/AIDS?
- How do you think people with HIV/AIDS cope with being on one side of the line?

Sample Questions

Cross the line if you...

Passed your exams
Smoke cigarettes
Have a car
Are married
Are married with children
Are not married
Are Catholic, Protestant,
Jewish, Muslim, other faith
Are male
Have a cell phone
Never traveled overseas
Have divorced parents
Ever worried about being
pregnant or your partner being
pregnant
Are divorced

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GAME

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

Purpose: To understand stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS

Materials: None

Age Group: Children age 7-10

Time: 20 minutes

Delivery:

1. Participants form a close and tight circle so that nobody can get into the middle.
2. Ask two or three group members to be outside the circle and to try to get back in.

3. Note what the players who were excluded do and say.
4. Raise these discussion points:
 - How did the excluded participants feel?
 - How did the participants in the circle feel?
 - Did the fact that the other players had their backs turned and were ignoring the others make it more difficult?
 - How does this activity relate to HIV-related discrimination?

GAME

STIGMA IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Purpose: Participants will identify different forms of stigma in different contexts

Age Groups: All ages

Time: 2 hours

Materials: Label context cards: FAMILY HOME, CLINIC, SCHOOL, CHURCH or MOSQUE, MARKET, BAR, FUNERAL

Preparation: Place cards in different areas.

Delivery:

1. With the cards in different parts of the room, ask people to join the context group they want to.
2. Ask each group to identify how people with HIV/AIDS are treated badly (stigmatized) in that particular context. Write down these ideas.
3. Develop a short role-play showing how the stigma occurs.

4. Report back. Have each group present their list and perform the role-play. After each role-play ask:

- What happened? Why?
- What are the attitudes here?
- What else contributes to this situation?

5. Ask the group:

- What do these situations have in common?
- What are the effects on people who have been stigmatized?
- What do you think are the root causes of stigma and discrimination?

Adapted from Understanding & Challenging HIV Stigma; AED, Manoff Group, ICRW, USAID, 2003

ACTIVITY

CHOOSING COMPASSION

Purpose: Participants consider how to act with compassion

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper or board helpful;

Delivery:

1. Explain that now we have looked at how we feel about People Living with HIV/AIDS from outside (Heads or Tails Game) and inside (Cross the Line or Outside the Circle). Do you feel at all differently about them now?
2. The challenge is to consider how we will act differently in the future. How will we act more compassionately toward those with HIV as a result of our **Discussions**?
3. We'll think through this in groups of 3. Each group will have 10 minutes to come up with a list of how they can act more compassionately. Your ideas can include talking to people, caring for the sick, assisting

orphans, activities through your church or mosque, etc. You have 5 minutes for discussion.

4. Reconvene as a large group. Before each group reads their list, explain that before we are through, each participant will commit themselves to 3 compassionate actions. Encourage each person to listen carefully.
5. When all the ideas have been presented, ask each person to write down 3 actions they will take to be more compassionate. They should choose things that they really can and will do and sign their name at the bottom of the paper. Then ask them to share the list with the person next to them.
6. Conclude this exercise by asking for examples of compassionate action. Emphasize that simply knowing something is not enough. Doing something different or acting compassionately is what we are really after.