



Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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Living With HIV/AIDS: A Lesson in Protection

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“I’m sorry, your test results came back positive. You’ve been infected with the HIV virus.” These words are spoken to several hundred teenagers every year.

One is Lawrence from Missouri, now 21. He became sexually active when he turned 17. A year later, he found out his partner had infected him with the HIV virus. Even though he blames his one-time partner, he also shoulders some of the blame, saying, “I didn’t ask, and he didn’t tell me.” Lawrence decided to get tested at his college only after a friend found out he was positive.

Lawrence has been living with HIV ever since. He takes a total of 14 pills a day.

Even though he has been diagnosed with HIV, Lawrence is still able to have sexual relations. He is very selective in telling people about his infection, but usually informs a partner of his sexual history before he enters into a long-term relationship.

Sometimes, though, when he thinks the relationship won’t go anywhere, he doesn’t tell his partner. Whether he tells or not, he makes sure he and his partner are “100 percent protected” with a latex condom and water-based lubricant.

Is this a safe approach? Is it OK for Lawrence not to tell some of his partners?

According to Dr. Robert Johnson, of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, “Using a condom is not 100 percent safe because it can break. You’re fooling yourself to think otherwise.” Not having sex, he says, is the only way to keep you and others 100 percent protected.



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And Dr. Johnson thinks you should tell all your partners. There really is no “good” way to do it, but, he says, you should “sit them down, tell them how much you care about them, and come right out and tell them.”

Lawrence says being diagnosed with HIV has opened his eyes. For one thing, he has become more cautious about entering relationships. “I have started taking things a lot slower. I take the time to get to know the person before getting physical. That’s a lesson I had to learn the hard way.”

He also wishes that he had developed a greater sense of self-worth before becoming sexually active. With his former boyfriend, Lawrence did what his partner wanted because he thought that refusing would hinder the relationship. “Now I know that kind of relationship is not going anywhere,” he says.

Dr. Johnson agrees that a healthy sense of self-worth is a big part of self-preservation, one of the keys to protecting yourself from AIDS. He stresses that the number one way to keep yourself and others protected is by remaining abstinent, but for those who choose to engage in sexual activity, using a condom is absolutely necessary. He also advises being careful in choosing a partner, getting tested before getting into a relationship, and remaining monogamous.

Lawrence has forgiven his partner (who died in March 1998). “I had to forgive him in order to forgive myself,” he says.

Editors' Note: For more HIV/AIDS information, including where to get tested, visit the National HIV Testing Resources site at www.hivtest.org. Or call **1-800-232-4636**, the 24-hour National STD and AIDS Hotlines sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

For answers to the most frequently asked questions on HIV/AIDS, check out Avert.org.

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