

# Families Are Talking

**This issue** of *Families Are Talking* includes basic facts about HIV/AIDS, information and messages to share with your children and teens, activities to raise HIV/AIDS awareness, as well as organizations and Web sites for more information.

## Did You Know?\*

- Worldwide, 3.2 million children under the age of 15 are living with HIV/AIDS.
- Worldwide, 5.5 million children have died of AIDS.
- Worldwide, an estimated 25 million children under the age of 15 could lose one or both parents to AIDS by 2010.
- Worldwide, AIDS is now a leading cause of death.
- In the United States, people under the age of 25 account for half of all new HIV infections.

*\*KNOW HIV► AIDS, Key Facts About HIV/AIDS (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Viacom, 2002).*

## Get Informed and Make a Difference

For more information about HIV/AIDS prevention, testing, and treatment, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National AIDS hotline at 800/342-AIDS (English), 800/344-SIDA (Spanish), or 800/243-7889 (TTY). You can also check out the KNOW HIV► AIDS campaign. Call 866/344-KNOW, a toll-free hotline available in both English and Spanish or go to [www.knowhivaids.org](http://www.knowhivaids.org).

## It's Important to talk with Children about HIV/AIDS

You may think that children are too young to learn about HIV/AIDS, but young people hear many messages about it from the media, friends, or other family members. Perhaps they even know someone who is HIV positive. The truth of the matter is that the only way to help prevent HIV/AIDS among young people is to share accurate, age-appropriate information so that they can protect themselves.

## SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

### WHAT IS HIV?

- HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
- The "H" is for "Human" because it survives only in human beings.
- The "I" is for "Immunodeficiency" because it attacks the immune system.
- The "V" is for "Virus." A virus needs a host cell to reproduce.
- HIV attacks a specific type of human white blood cell, the T-cell.
- A person can be infected with HIV and not know it. People who are infected with HIV often have no symptoms and feel healthy.

### WHAT IS AIDS?

- AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.
- The "A" is for "Acquired" because there are very specific ways that a person can get HIV.
- The "I" and "D" are for "Immuno" and "Deficiency" because HIV can damage a person's immune system, making it difficult to fight infection.
- The "S" is for "Syndrome" because AIDS is a collection of symptoms, diseases, or infections.
- AIDS is a diagnosis that's given to an HIV-positive person who has a T-cell count of less than 200 (a person with a healthy immune system has between 500 and 1,800 T-cells) or to someone who is HIV positive who has developed one of the many illness known as "opportunistic infections." These infections include rare types of cancer and pneumonia that often are not a threat to people whose immune systems are healthy. On average, it takes more than 10 years for a person who is infected with the virus to become ill with AIDS.

### HOW DO YOU GET HIV?

Someone who is HIV positive can pass the virus to another person through certain body fluids. The sources are:

- blood
- semen
- vaginal secretions
- breast milk
- other body fluids containing blood

Certain behaviors can put people at risk for HIV infection. The most common means of transmission are:

- having sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal, or anal) with someone who is HIV positive
- sharing needles with someone who is HIV positive—for drug or steroid use, to pierce the ears and body, and to tattoo the body
- from an HIV-positive mother to her baby before or during birth, or after birth through breastfeeding

*Families Are Talking* is a quarterly newsletter supported by a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. It contains information to help families communicate about sexuality-related issues.

## Tips to Help Parents and Caregivers Talk with Their Children about HIV/AIDS

- Do not wait until your children ask questions
- Know and practice the messages that you want to share
- Seek “teachable moments”—daily opportunities that occur when you are with your children—that make it easy to share your messages and values
- Let your children know that you are open to talking with them about sexuality issues
- Listen
- Provide pamphlets, books, and other age-appropriate, medically accurate materials
- If you don't know how to answer your children's questions, offer to find the answers or look them up together
- Find out what your children's schools are teaching about HIV/AIDS

# How Do I Begin to Talk with My Children

### Talking with infants and toddlers (birth to two years)

Of course, infants and toddlers are too young to comprehend HIV/AIDS. But, as their main teachers, it's important for parents and caregivers to help them develop a healthy attitude toward sexuality.

You can begin by naming all the parts of their bodies, teaching them that their entire body is natural and healthy. (“This is your arm. This is your elbow. This is your vulva/penis. This is your knee.”) By reacting calmly when they touch their genitals, you are teaching them that sexual feelings are normal and healthy. By holding them, hugging them, talking with them, and responding to their needs, you are laying the groundwork for trust and open discussions as they grow up.

### Talking with preschool children (three to four years)

Children at this age are learning about their bodies. They learn about their world through play. They begin to ask questions about where babies come from.

They can understand simple answers. They do not understand abstract ideas or adult sexual behaviors. They can learn simple things about health, such as bathing, washing their hands, brushing their teeth, eating nutritiously, and napping. They can begin to accept the need for privacy.

The best thing a parent can do at this stage is to create an environment where children will feel comfortable asking questions about their bodies, health, and sexuality. Children will then learn that sexuality is something that you are comfortable discussing in your home.

### Talking with young children (five to eight years)

Children at this age understand more complex issues about health, disease, and sexuality. They are interested in birth, families, and death. They have probably heard about HIV/AIDS from television, friends, or adults.

They may have questions or fears about HIV/AIDS. They may have heard that people get HIV/AIDS because they are bad. They understand answers to questions based upon concrete examples from their lives.

For example, if your children cut their fingers and blood appears, you have an excellent opportunity to explain how germs (things that make you sick) can get into the blood system from cuts in the body. If they are in a school with a child who is infected with HIV, they need to know that they cannot get HIV/AIDS from playing, studying, eating with, or talking with that child.

## Sharing Specific Messages with Young Children about HIV/AIDS

Today, children grow up in a world where they are surrounded by messages about HIV/AIDS. To be sure that your young children know about HIV/AIDS infection and prevention, share the facts in simple, clear, age-appropriate language. The following are questions kids ask and messages that you can share with them.

### What is HIV?

- HIV is caused by a small germ in a person's blood that is so little it can't be seen with the eyes.
- Some people with HIV feel and look healthy. Other people feel and look sick.

### How do people get HIV?

- HIV can only live inside the body. There are very specific ways that HIV goes from the inside of one person's body to the inside of another person's body.

- You can mention that during sex, someone who has HIV can pass the germ from their body to the other person's through certain body fluids.

### Can kids get HIV?

- Very few children get HIV.
- If a woman who has HIV is pregnant, sometimes her baby is born with HIV.
- Some kids don't have enough good cells in their blood and may need more by having a transfusion. That's when they go to the hospital and receive a treatment that gives them another person's blood to make their blood stronger. It's rare, but sometimes the blood that they received at the hospital may have had HIV.

### How can kids protect themselves from HIV?

- If someone is bleeding, don't touch their blood. Find an adult to help.
- If you find a needle in the playground, street, or anywhere else, don't touch it. Find an adult to help.

### Can kids be friends with people who have HIV?

- A person cannot become infected with HIV by being around someone who has HIV or AIDS.
- People with HIV or AIDS are just like other people, but their bodies may work harder to keep them healthy.

# about HIV/AIDS?\*

## Talking with preteens (nine to 12 years)

Because of the strong social pressures that start at this age, it is important that you talk about HIV/AIDS regardless of what you know about your children's sexual or drug experiences. As a concerned parent or caregiver, you must make certain your children know about prevention *now*.

During the changes of puberty, preteens are very curious about sex and need basic, accurate information. They need to know that sex has consequences, including pregnancy, diseases, and HIV infection. They need to know why sexual intercourse—oral, vaginal, and anal—is an adult behavior and why it is a good idea for young people to wait to have sex. They need to know how HIV is transmitted, how it is not transmitted, and how to prevent transmission, including talking about condoms.

This may seem like a difficult task, but it will give you a chance to teach your children the values that you hope they will adopt in their lives. It is also the time to remind your children that they can come to you with questions about HIV/AIDS or sexuality.

## Talking with teens (13 to 19 years)

Social pressure to try sex and drugs are often very strong for teens. In fact, almost 50 percent of young people in grades nine through 12 have had sexual intercourse. Whether your child is among the 50 percent who have had sex or the 50 percent who have not, it's important to share your values with your children.

Let your teenagers and preteens know that the best way to prevent HIV infection is by not engaging in any behavior that puts them at risk for infection, including having any type of sexual intercourse or using any type of drugs. At the same time, explain that if they are going to be sexually active, they must protect themselves against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. This is also a time when you might consider talking with your teens about the full range of sexual behaviors that people find pleasurable but do not involve any exchange of body fluids and therefore lessen the risk of HIV/STD infection and pregnancy.

\*Adapted from *How to Talk to your Children about AIDS* (New York, NY: SIECUS, 1997). For a free copy of this publication, go to [www.siecus.org/parent/talk/talk0000.html](http://www.siecus.org/parent/talk/talk0000.html). If you don't have Internet access, call SIECUS at 212/819-9770, extension 0, for ordering information.

## Sharing Specific Messages with Young People about HIV/AIDS

Social pressures to have sex and use drugs are often a very real issue for teens. All young people must, therefore, know that:

- not having sexual intercourse (abstinence) is the best method for preventing HIV infection. It is also the best method for preventing other STDs and pregnancy.
- lifelong monogamy with an uninfected and honest partner is as effective in preventing HIV infection as abstinence.
- teenagers who have intercourse must use latex condoms for each and every act of intercourse, including oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
- teenagers should avoid all drugs including alcohol. Drugs and alcohol impair good decision-making and may suppress the immune system. Sharing needles of any kind puts people at risk for HIV and other infections. This includes sharing needles for injecting drugs, injecting steroids, piercing the ears and body, and tattooing.

# TALKING WITH Young Children about HIV/AIDS:

## An Activity for Parents and Caregivers to Communicate with Young Children

Since young children learn best by example, it is helpful to give them the information that they need by sharing stories or reading books together that address HIV/AIDS. The following resources can help parents and caregivers create "teachable moments" to begin to have conversations about this important topic.

### The AIDS Awareness Library Anna Forbes, M.S.S.

This is a series of eight books for elementary school children that provide basic information about HIV/AIDS. Titles include: *What Is AIDS?*, *Where Did AIDS Come From?*, *When Someone You Know Has AIDS*, *Myths and Facts About AIDS*, and *What You Can Do About AIDS*.

1996; \$18.75/individual titles and \$150/set; PowerKids Press, 888/436-4643; Web site: [www.powerkidspress.com](http://www.powerkidspress.com)

### Alex, the Kid with AIDS

Linda Walvoord Girard  
Illustrated by Blanche Sims

This book for elementary school children tells the story of Alex, a new student infected with AIDS. Although the book does not mention HIV, it provides young children with basic information about the virus and AIDS. It helps children understand that Alex is the same as the other children, that they cannot "catch AIDS" by being around Alex.

1991; \$14.95; ISBN 0-8075-0245-6; Albert Whitman & Company, 800/255-7675; Web site: [www.awhitmanco.com](http://www.awhitmanco.com)

### HIV Positive

Bernard Wolf

This book tells the story of Sara, a 29-year-old mother of two whose life and family are affected by her contracting AIDS. This touching story details the daily life of Sara and her family as they go to the doctor, deal with her illness, and participate in family therapy sessions.

1997; ISBN 0-925190-99-3; out of print but may be available through online bookstores and libraries.

### My Dad Has HIV

Earl Alexander, Sheila Rudin, and Pam Sejkora

Illustrated by Ronnie Walker Shipman

This book discusses HIV/AIDS in a colorful, sensitive, and hopeful way that young children can easily understand. The narrative is a simple science lesson. Its main focus is on a person who lives with HIV.

1996; ISBN 0-525-45459-4; out of print but may be available through online bookstores and libraries.

Try these fun, informative workbooks to help your children learn more about HIV/AIDS: *Know What? We Know About HIV!* (for ages 6 to 8, \$1.68); *Who Knew? The HIV Facts Issue* (for ages 9 to 11, \$1.68); *What's Up With HIV & AIDS* (for ages 12 to 14, \$2.95); and *On Beating HIV* (for ages 15 to 17, \$2.95). To order, call the Channing Bete Company at 800/628-7733 or go to [www.channing-bete.com](http://www.channing-bete.com).

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We invite you to visit [www.familiesaretalking.org](http://www.familiesaretalking.org) for more information and publications including the Spanish translation of this newsletter, *La familia habla*. The Spanish Web site [www.lafamiliahbla.org](http://www.lafamiliahbla.org) is currently under construction.

Join our listserv to receive future *Families Are Talking* newsletters and information. E-mail [families\\_are\\_talking\\_subscribe@topica.com](mailto:families_are_talking_subscribe@topica.com) to subscribe. You must e-mail from the address you want to receive the information.

# An Activity for Young People TO COMMUNICATE WITH Parents and Caregivers

HIV/AIDS is a worldwide epidemic. Countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East are some places where the numbers of young people infected with HIV are rising. Ask a parent or caregiver to spend some time with you researching how HIV/AIDS impacts the rest of the world, and then compare the information to the United States. You can visit your local public library or use the Internet to gather information. Perhaps you'll be able to find out:

- how poverty contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS

- any laws that protect people who are HIV positive
- if people who are HIV positive have access to necessary treatments and medications
- what life is like for someone who is HIV positive

Pick a country and talk about what you would do to help with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. How could you help make a difference in that country even though you live in the United States?

Then, find ways to make a difference in your community. Perhaps you can volunteer by

donating your time to an organization that helps people that are HIV positive, raising money by participating in a fundraiser like AIDS Walk, or working with your school or public library to organize an event for World AIDS Day (December 1).

For more ideas and ways to get involved, check out the book *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship* by Marc and Craig Kielburger. 2002; \$16.95; ISBN 0-471-27132-2; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; 877/762-2974; Web site: [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

## To find out about HIV/AIDS in the United States and the rest of the world, contact the following organizations for information and publications:

**American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR)**, 120 Wall Street, 13th Floor, New York, NY 10005-3902; Phone: 212/806-1600; Web site: [www.amfar.org](http://www.amfar.org)

**AVERT**, 4 Brighton Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 5BA, England; Web site: [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org)

**The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation**, 2400 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025; Phone: 800/656-4533; Web site: [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)

**UNAIDS, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS**, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland; Web site: [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

**UNICEF House**, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017; Phone: 212/326-7240; Web site: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

**The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington, DC 20523-1000; Phone: 202/712-4810; Web site: [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

**World Health Organization (WHO)**, Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland; Web site: [www.who.org](http://www.who.org)

## Additional Resources on HIV/AIDS

### Advocates for Youth

[www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)  
Information for parents, caregivers, and young people on sexual health and sexuality education in the United States and abroad.

### AIDS Basics from HIV InSite (University of California—San Francisco)

[hivinsite.ucsf.edu/InSite?page=FAQ](http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/InSite?page=FAQ)  
Answers to common questions about HIV/AIDS.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Prevention Information Network**  
[www.cdcnpi.org](http://www.cdcnpi.org)  
Information on HIV/AIDS and STDs.

### Go Ask Alice!

[www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)  
Q & A Internet service that addresses sexuality-and health-related issues.

### Scarleteen

[www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)  
Information for young people that addresses a range of sexuality-related issues.

### SEX, etc.

[www.sxetc.org](http://www.sxetc.org)  
Sexuality and health newsletter and Web site written by teens for teens.

For books and other organizations, check out *HIV/AIDS Prevention Resources: A SIECUS Annotated Bibliography*. For a free copy, go to [www.siecus.org/pubs/pubs0004.html](http://www.siecus.org/pubs/pubs0004.html). If you don't have Internet access, call SIECUS at 212/819-9770, extension 0, for ordering information.

The book *Does AIDS Hurt? Educating Young Children About AIDS*, Second Edition, by Marcia Quackenbush, M.S., M.F.C.C. and Sylvia Villarreal, M.D. can also be helpful. 1992; ISBN 1-56071-084-5; ETR Associates; out of print but may be available through online bookstores and libraries.