

How can you fight Stigma and Discrimination?

It's simple. Treat HIV positive people the same way you would treat a person who is HIV negative. When they are ill, show them the same care you would show anyone with any life-threatening disease.

As an individual...

- Watch your language and avoid words that are stigmatizing.
- Find time to listen and give support to people living with HIV.
- Visit and help people who are sick.
- Encourage people living with HIV to get treatment, counseling, and medical care.
- Involve others by challenging stigmatizing words when you hear them, correcting myths and misperceptions about HIV/AIDS and encouraging people to talk about their fears and concerns about the disease.

In the workplace....

- Hire the most qualified people regardless of their HIV status.
- Never fire someone because they are HIV positive.
- Encourage positive attitudes toward employees who are living with HIV.
- Discourage gossip and negativity towards people suspected of being HIV positive.
- Hold workshops in the workplace to educate employees about HIV/AIDS.

"When I found out, my boyfriend was so mad he told a lot of people. Word got around to my work and they fired me."

At home....

- Show people living with HIV that you care about them.
- Listen to them when they need to talk.
- Support them to stay healthy by encouraging them to take their medication, eat healthy foods and maintain a positive lifestyle.

"One day my son looked at me and said I wasn't his mommy. He said his mommy was fat and I was a skinny witch so I couldn't be her."

In faith-based organizations....

- Talk about HIV/AIDS and the effects of stigma and discrimination.
- Hold educational workshops about HIV.
- Organize community projects that involve or support people living with HIV.
- Get persons living with HIV to give testimonies.
- Discuss portions of the religious writings which talk about compassion for the sick.

In schools....

- Create a culture that understands HIV and fights stigma and discrimination.
- Bring in speakers to inform students.
- Have zero-tolerance for gossip and hurtful language.

In healthcare facilities....

- Hold workshops to sensitize staff about HIV/AIDS.
- Treat all people the same regardless of their HIV status.

People who are HIV positive need the same things you do.

Support them.
They need YOU.

How can laws help fight stigma and discrimination?

Many countries have laws, policies and regulations that have led to a more supportive environment for people living with HIV. In Guyana, draft legislation to specifically protect people living with HIV from discrimination is being prepared.

Guidelines are in place in Guyana which give HIV positive employees the same rights and social benefits as all the other employees. They are entitled to the same training, career development and promotion opportunities. They can't be restricted from any areas in the workplace and can not be fired because of their HIV status.

"Stigma, discrimination and ostracism are the real killers."

Nelson Mandela

14th International AIDS Conference 2002

DO the RIGHT Thing.

Fight Stigma and Discrimination aimed at people who are HIV positive.



We ALL need support from our families. We need people who are HIV positive need the same things you do. Support them. They need YOU. Stop Stigma and Discrimination.

Contact the
National AIDS Programme Secretariat
Hadfield Street & College Road, Brickdam, any Regional Hospital
or call the AIDS HOTLINE: 223-7138.
Visit us online at www.hiv.gov.gy

The first case of AIDS in Guyana was diagnosed in 1987. Today in Guyana, UNAIDS estimates that more than 11,000 adults and children have HIV. Because so many people are unwilling to disclose their status and so many are living with HIV and don't know it, the number is probably much higher.



Becoming infected with HIV can happen to anybody regardless of their class, race, age, marital status or education. Even though getting HIV is linked to social taboos such as promiscuous sex, homosexuality and drug use, some people are infected through no fault of their own by blood transfusions or were born with HIV. Some people became infected when they were raped- a double injustice. Some people got infected because their partners were unfaithful. People living with HIV have many different stories but experience the same problems and challenges.

The scorn and hurt felt by people living with HIV can be as bad as the disease itself. People can be shunned by their friends, families and co-workers, lose their jobs, be evicted from their homes or have their children taken away. Some are divorced by their spouses or suffer from mental and physical violence.

The shame and stigma attached to HIV is often extend to the next generation, placing an emotional burden on children who may also be trying to cope with the death of their parents from AIDS.

There are high levels of ignorance, denial, fear and intolerance in our communities which lead to stigma and discrimination.

What does stigma mean?

It is an expression of disgrace or scorn caused by what someone believes is shameful conduct. People who are HIV positive are often disgraced publicly or personally. Religious or moral beliefs lead some people to think that having HIV is the result of a moral fault that deserves punishment.

“A few days after I told my husband that I had HIV, he committed suicide.”

“After my mother died, children at school called me all kinds of names. My granny says to ignore them but it's hard.”



There are different types of stigma:

1. Self stigma -- self-hatred, shame, blame which leads the affected persons to isolate themselves from others. Some people living with HIV isolate themselves from their families and communities.
2. Perceived stigma -- perceptions or feelings towards people living with HIV.
3. Enacted stigma -- (Discrimination)-putting your perceptions of stigma into action.

What does discrimination mean?

It is the unfair treatment of a person or group based on prejudice or bias. It generally refers to treating one group of people worse than another based on their ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or political views. People who are HIV positive are discriminated against because of social prejudices about HIV/AIDS. They are often shunned and isolated and sometimes denied jobs, housing or access to social and health services.

People who are HIV positive experience the strong combination of stigma and discrimination and it has a powerful impact on their lives. Discovering that one is HIV positive brings with it not only fears about health and death but very real anxieties about how other people will react.

People who face stigma and discrimination often blame themselves. This is called the “internalization of negative perceptions” and it has very powerful psychological consequences. People feel despair, depression, lack of self worth and anger. This internalization occasionally causes a level of anger that leads to having unprotected sex and deliberately exposing others to HIV. It can also lead to violent acts and suicide.

“When people heard I was HIV positive, none of the other children would play with my son.”

How does Fighting Stigma and Discrimination help stop the spread of HIV?

The scorn shown by many people in Guyana fuels the spread of the infection because it keeps HIV positive people from finding out or revealing their status, getting treatment, or protecting their partners. It keeps all of us from talking about it and practicing safe sex, abstinence or faithfulness. As a result, we as a society

“For the first four years after I found out I was HIV positive, I kept to myself. One of the reasons I talk about it now is that I decided that no one who is HIV positive should have to go through the hell that I went through.”

“My mother-in-law would see me on the street and call out to everybody, saying that I had AIDS. One day I went to her church and stood up and told my story. She had to leave that church.”

don't take a good, straight-forward look at the magnitude and impact of the disease.

It not only causes pain and grief for families and loved ones, it affects the economic and social fabric of Guyanese society. People are affected economically as breadwinners die or family savings are used during ill health. The work force is reduced and precious monetary resources are needed to control and fight the disease.

Until we accept the disease, understand it and find the compassion needed to eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with it, HIV/AIDS will continue to be a serious problem.

“Sometimes living with HIV is like living in a dark hole. And nobody seems to care.”

Today, we know more than ever about the disease. We know how to prevent it and how to treat it. Despite what we know, behaviors and attitudes toward people living with HIV haven't changed much since the first cases of HIV were discovered.