



# *HIV* disclosure

**IF YOUR PARTNER  
tells you they have HIV**

This guide is designed to support individuals whose partners disclose their HIV+ status.

### Positive Women's Network

604-692-3000  
1-866-692-3001 (toll-free in BC)  
www.pwn.bc.ca

### BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre

604-875-2212  
1-888-711-3030 (toll-free in BC)  
www.bcwomens.ca

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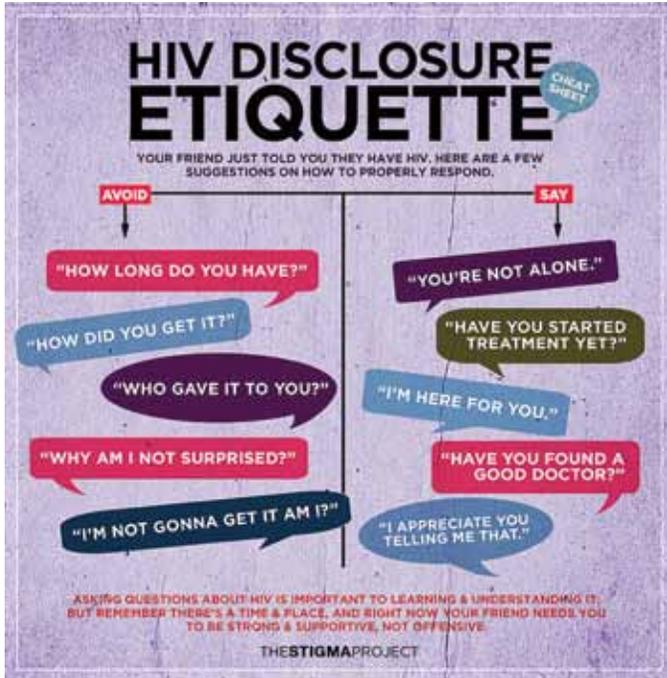
# A POSITIVE RESPONSE

If your partner tells you they have HIV, there's no need to panic. HIV is not a deadly disease like it used to be. There are medicines available that allow people to live long and healthy lives. You can still safely have sex and even plan a family.

Learning your partner has HIV can actually deepen your relationship. When your partner first discloses to you, there are some ways to be supportive and some that aren't so supportive. Do ask how you can help, if your partner has support other than you, and if your partner has a doctor. Don't ask how long your partner will live or how your partner got HIV. (It doesn't matter right now; they have it).

**Most importantly, show appreciation for your partner—disclosure takes courage.**

# SEXUALITY & HIV



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When people find out they have HIV, their feelings about sex may change.

They might have different ideas about how often they want to have sex and what types of sex they like. They may feel worried about infecting someone, or they may feel ashamed they have HIV. Sometimes it takes a while before they want to have sex again. Other times they want to continue on as usual. These are all things that have been experienced by people after getting an HIV diagnosis.

You and your partner can take care of each other by having safer sex and learning about reducing the possibility of transmission (passing on HIV).

**Try to be patient and supportive—when people learn they have HIV, it means big life changes.**

## TRANSMISSION FACTS

HIV is transmitted from person to person mainly through sexual intercourse (penis in vagina or penis in anus) without a condom or the sharing of drug-use equipment (mainly needles). HIV can also be passed through the sharing of sex toys.

When someone who is pregnant does not receive proper health care, HIV can be transmitted during pregnancy, labour, or breastfeeding a baby.

**if your partner is on HIV medication and their level of virus is well controlled, the chance of transmission is very low.** Studies on the impacts of medication on HIV transmission are ongoing.

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

**So your partner has HIV—find out what you need to know.** Learn about transmission. Go to a doctor or a reliable website such as [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca) to learn about HIV so your partner doesn't have to tell you everything. And remember your partner isn't an expert either.

**Understand that HIV prevention is the job of both partners.** For example, if one or both of you wants to use condoms, you should both be responsible for providing them—your partner shouldn't have to bring all the condoms or have to nag you about using them. Your partner also shouldn't be made to feel guilty about having HIV. It's a virus. Lots of people who don't think they're at risk for HIV end up with it.

**Maintain your partner's privacy.** Remember that an HIV diagnosis is personal and private health information that is not yours to share.

## SUPPORT & PRIVACY

**if you feel upset but don't want to talk to your partner, someone else can help.** Ask your partner if it's okay if you talk to someone at an HIV organization—your partner may be able to suggest people to speak with. Support workers at an HIV organization can talk with you, protecting not only your privacy, but your partner's privacy as well.

**Before speaking to a friend, family member, or person in your community about your partner's health, always ask your partner.** There is something about HIV that makes some people think that confidentiality (keeping information private) doesn't apply. It does. Assuming you can trust someone with your partner's private information can turn out to be wrong, and your partner's life can be permanently affected.

## YOUR HIV STATUS

If you don't know your HIV status, it's a good idea for you to get tested. Sexual health screening that includes all sexually transmitted infections is ideal.

**if you're HIV-negative** and your partner is HIV-positive, it is called a serodiscordant or magnetic relationship. Like all couples, you may face special challenges, but with good communication you can develop and enjoy a fulfilling relationship.

**if you're already HIV-positive,** you might have an idea what it's going to be like for your partner. But just because you both have HIV doesn't mean your partner won't need time to adjust to a new diagnosis. Never assume you know exactly what they're feeling—their experience of HIV can be different than yours.

**Whatever your HIV status,** encourage your partner to express their needs and listen to them. Never push your partner to have sex when they don't want to. And remember that you can both live long and healthy lives.

# THE FAMILY & HIV

## Many people with HIV have healthy families.

If you want to talk about having a family, you can. HIV doesn't have to stop you from having children. If a person takes medications during pregnancy, it can significantly reduce the chances of having a baby with HIV.

If you and your partner already have a family together, read about family disclosure. How much you tell children about HIV depends on their age and understanding.

# SUPPORT & INFORMATION

**BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre** provides comprehensive health care for women and families with HIV in BC.  
1-888-711-3030 (toll-free in BC) | [www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca)

**Positive Women's Network** supports women living with HIV in BC and the families and service communities supporting them.  
1-866-692-3001 (toll-free in BC) | [www.pwn.bc.ca](http://www.pwn.bc.ca)

**Positive Living BC** empowers people living with HIV in BC through mutual support.  
1-800-994-2437 (toll-free) | [www.positivelivingbc.org](http://www.positivelivingbc.org)

Other HIV organizations can be located through [www.hiv411.ca](http://www.hiv411.ca)

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## Falling in love with a person who is HIV-positive

[www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/falling-love-person-who-hiv-positive](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/falling-love-person-who-hiv-positive)

## Sex and the serodiscordant

[www.catie.ca/en/positiveside/summer-2013/sex-and-serodiscordant](http://www.catie.ca/en/positiveside/summer-2013/sex-and-serodiscordant)

## Serodiscordant relationships

[www.thebody.com/content/art50150.html](http://www.thebody.com/content/art50150.html)

## If you're HIV positive, safe sex isn't just about condoms

[www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/29/condoms-hiv-treatment-prevention](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/29/condoms-hiv-treatment-prevention)

Disclosure occurs when you share important and private news with someone.

**HIV disclosure is more than a one-time conversation.**

**It's an ongoing process.**

