

# SESSION 14:

## Visiting a person with AIDS

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### Objectives

1. Participants will become personally acquainted with a person with AIDS.
2. Participants will recognize that AIDS is related to high risk behavior and not who you are as a person.

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### Rationale

Many adolescents believe stereotypes about who gets AIDS. They tend to think that it is the person and his or her characteristics that are the primary factors rather than risky behaviors.

One important way to change an adolescent's views is through direct exposure to someone with AIDS. The intent is to present the adolescent to a situation which will create some cognitive dissonance and thereby shake some fundamental assumptions.

Because of the desire to create a different picture than the one expected careful selection of the person with AIDS is critical. The choices must be far away from what the media might portray as typical. Presenting people who are victims can be very useful. For example, a visit to a facility which cared for babies with AIDS had a very powerful effect on a group of adolescents. Women partners of HIV drug users are a group with the potential to break stereotypes. Also older women who unknowing contacted HIV and then AIDS through a long term partner should be considered. Because of the strong homophobia found in early adolescent males it is unwise to meet with a gay adolescent or adult.

It is best to find a person with AIDS who is open, honest and willing to tell his or her story with dignity. The person needs to understand both the anxiety that this visit can generate in the group and the potential directness of questions, once a comfort level has been established. The more the person with AIDS can share thoughts, feelings and actions taken the better. A person who has made a number of successful presentations is desirable.

The visit can be either one where the group goes some place, such as to a home for AIDS children or where the person comes to talk to them. In either case, it is highly recommended that the visit end with sharing a meal in an intimate fashion. This act will again demonstrate that risky behaviors and neither people's personalities or casual contact with them are the precursors of AIDS.

It is also recommended that there be an opportunity for preparing the adolescents for the visit and a chance for debriefing afterwards. Doing both on the day of the visit is preferred. Having the place to have these two meetings should be considered.

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### Procedures

1. Arrange for the visit.
2. Prepare group members for the visit so they are comfortable asking questions in an appropriate manner.

3. Make the visit.
4. Have the group give appreciation to the person with AIDS.
5. Have an informal meal with the person with AIDS after the visit.
6. Discuss privately with the group members what their reactions were to the visit.
7. Have the group members give strokes to each other.

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## Materials

Directions - if the visit is not at home base.

Tokens

Private meeting space before and after the visit.

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## ***Exercise 1: Preparing for the visit***

### ***Leader says***

Today we are going to visit someone with AIDS.

We have found that people with the disease prefer to be called "People with AIDS" so that they maintain a sense of dignity and can be an active partner in their care and treatment.

How do you feel about sitting right next to someone with AIDS and asking them all kinds of questions about their personal life?

What is your feeling level right now?

### ***Encourage sharing of feeling levels.***

Do you think you will have trouble asking personal questions?

### ***Seek opinions about asking personal questions. Be reassuring that it is OK to ask questions and at the same time to be friendly and respectful.***

What could you do if you were not sure whether the person with AIDS would be uncomfortable?

### ***Seek suggestions.***

Yes, you could ask right at the beginning what kinds of questions the person would answer and what kinds would they rather not answer.

I would like to see you be comfortable and feel free to find out about the person's life - their thoughts, feelings and actions.

I would also like to see you treat the person with respect and to accept whatever the boundaries the person wants.

The person with AIDS is interested in sharing her (his) story with you and looks forward to the visit.

We are going to visit with \_\_\_\_\_.

Do you have any questions before we have the visit?

**Answer questions.**

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## **Exercise 2: The visit**

**Have each group member introduce her/himself to the person with AIDS or in the case of a visit to a facility such as a foundling home for babies with AIDS to the person conducting the visit. Also have each group member say when they introduce themselves what they are interested in learning more about.**

**Keep the visit to about an hour's length.**

**End the formal part of the visit with the group members giving their appreciation for the person with AIDS or the person from the facility.**

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## **Exercise 3: The informal meal together**

**After the presentation have an informal, casual meal with the persons with AIDS. Again have the group express goodbye comments.**

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## **Exercise 4: Debriefing the visit**

**Have a place ready where the group can freely discuss what went on.**

**Leader says**

First, how do you feel now?

**Encourage sharing of feelings. Assess feeling thermometer. Give out tokens.**

What really stuck with you about this visit?

**Discuss reactions to the visit.**

What meaning did this visit have to you?

For example, do you think any differently now than before the visit?

**Discuss group member's change in beliefs and the meaning of the visit for them.**

I'm really impressed with the way you handled this visit.

**Give out tokens.**

You did a great job showing your appreciation to \_\_\_\_\_ (the person with AIDS).

Now let's give some strokes to the members of the group.

***Encourage showing appreciation to the group members.***

For homework, first, you need a little time to think about this visit.

Then I would like you to answer three questions for the homework assignment.

Number one, before the visit what did you expect a person with AIDS to be like?

In other words, what were your stereotypes?

Number two, how did you treat people with AIDS whom you had met before the visit?

Number three, did you have fears that turned out to be unrealistic?

Has everyone got that?

You are to answer those three questions for homework.

I'll meet you for the next session at \_\_\_\_\_ (location) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time).

**END OF SESSION 14**