



*This discussion guide is designed to be just that--a guide. You don't need to use all of it. As a facilitator, you can pick and choose which questions to ask. Questions are in bold italics, marked "Q". Facilitation notes and suggestions (not necessarily to be read aloud) are in italics.*

**For more information about the PWNcares series and for links to stream or download the PWNcares video, visit [pwn-usa.org/pwncares](http://pwn-usa.org/pwncares).**

## *Active Listening Activity*

*This can be done either as a large group activity or a partner activity. If as a partner activity, you can use or adapt this script below.*

Turn to the person next to you. We're going to do a short activity. Practice active listening when you're not speaking. That means when you're listening, you're not practicing what you're saying. You are truly listening to your partner. Put your hands together. The partner with larger hands is partner B. Partner A will answer the questions first, and Partner B's job is to actively listen and silently show your partner, with your face and your body, that you are paying attention to what they are sharing with you.

## *Opening Up*

In the video, four women speak about their experiences in disclosing their status to family, friends and employer. Stacy called her mom immediately upon learning her diagnosis. Venita disclosed to someone she trusted in recovery. Shyronn first disclosed to her godmother's sister, whom she considered a trusted friend, and later in one-on-one situations, after assessing whether the person needed to know. Barb disclosed to her employer, thinking it would



not impact her livelihood.

***Q: What was your experience in disclosing for the first time?***

*Give participants 2-3 minutes to answer this question.*

***Q: Has disclosing your status become any easier since that first time? Why or why not?***

*Give participants 2-3 minutes to answer this question.*

Stacy first disclosed to her mother; in the video,

she states she regrets having done so because her mother told other people in her church, who gave Stacy looks and talked about her behind her back. Not everyone knows how to keep a secret or understands how harmful and impactful disclosing a loved one's status may be.

**Q: Have you ever regretted having disclosed your status to a loved one?**

Give participants 2-3 minutes to answer this question.

After telling her employer, Barb found that the job she loved was no longer hers, and was told straight-up that it was because of her HIV status. This is

employment discrimination and is illegal; while this happened to Barb in the '90s, it unfortunately still happens today, though probably less often.

**Q: Can you see any reason why you would need to disclose to your employer and/or your coworkers? How do you feel about it?**

Give participants 2-3 minutes to answer this



## Branching Out

Shyronn found disclosing to her children to be most challenging, for fear they would think she wouldn't be around throughout their lives. Stacy had to reveal her truth to her son after his schoolmates began taunting him. She explained to him that she was not dying but rather living, and educated him

continuously about HIV from that point on. Venita slowly began to disclose her status to friends and people she felt safe with.



**Q: Have you experienced having to reveal your status to a loved one before you were ready?**

Give participants 2-3 minutes to answer this question.

**Q: Who was, or would be, the hardest person for you to tell? Have you told that person? How did it go?**

Give participants 3-5 minutes to answer this question.

**Q: Have you experienced any problems or difficulties after disclosing your status to family? How did you handle them?**

Give participants 3-5 minutes to answer this question.

## Going Public

All four women in the video are public about their status, though all of them took their time to begin disclosing publicly. Venita describes going public as "freeing"—she says she no longer feels like she has to hide in shame, and no longer has to let stigmatizing remarks go unchallenged. Stacy received a warm reception after openly sharing her story in a local television interview, and she then realized it could be an important tool for advocacy, education and community-building. Shyronn went public when she was named one of the 75 Most Amazing HIV-Positive People by HIV Plus magazine, and was relieved to have told everyone at once and

that it was done in a very positive way.

**Q: Have you disclosed publicly? What made you decide to do so, or what prevents you from doing so?**

**Q: How would you feel about disclosing your status in a media interview, knowing that once it's out, you can't go back?**

**Q: What are some potential benefits or consequences of disclosing your status publicly?**

## Sharing the Love

In the last couple of minutes of the video, Barb, Shyronn and Stacy offer suggestions and encouragement for women who have recently been



diagnosed. Barb advises women to take as much time as they need before feeling like they need to disclose to anyone, and to give themselves a break. Shyronn suggests newly diagnosed women “reset what they know about HIV,”

since so much of what we hear is based on stigma rather than fact. Stacy reminds us that courage and knowledge are essential for accepting ourselves and thriving with HIV.

**Q:** *What did you know or think you knew about HIV before you were diagnosed? Has that changed since your diagnosis? How?*

**Q:** *What do you think you need most to feel at peace with your diagnosis? Are you currently getting that?*

## Resources

Social support is critical for women living with HIV to thrive and leads to better health outcomes. In-person support groups can be very therapeutic. Your local AIDS service organization or clinic may offer support groups. You can locate local services at [www.poz.com/directory](http://www.poz.com/directory)

In addition to local in-person services and groups, there are national and international groups that host calls, webinars, videoconferences, and periodic events, as well as sharing information, blogs and other resources for women living with HIV. Here are a few:

**Positive Women’s Network - USA**  
[www.pwn-usa.org](http://www.pwn-usa.org)

**The Well Project**  
[thewellproject.org](http://thewellproject.org)

**The International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW)**  
[www.icwglobal.org](http://www.icwglobal.org)

**Global Network of People Living with HIV**  
[www.gnpplus.net](http://www.gnpplus.net)

Make sure you are getting accurate information about HIV, treatment options and issues relevant to people living with HIV! Here are a few good sources of HIV-related information and resources:

[www.thebody.com](http://www.thebody.com)

[www.poz.com](http://www.poz.com)

[www.hivplusmag.com](http://www.hivplusmag.com)

Fear of intimate partner violence may prevent women living with HIV from disclosing their HIV status to their partners. If you are worried about this or about any signs of intimate partner violence, call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233)**  
[thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)