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Is VCT for me?



40 mins.

OBJECTIVE(S)

- Knowledge: To understand the advantages and disadvantages of HIV testing.
- Skills: To learn to make an informed and thoughtful decision about seeking VCT.

TEACHING METHOD

- Brainstorming, Group discussion

MATERIALS

- 1 worksheet per participant
- pencils / writing utensils

LESSON PLAN

The pros and cons of getting tested

1. Introduce the lesson:
“You might wonder how it would help to know whether or not you are infected. Let’s explore the pros and cons of Voluntary Counselling and Testing together by listening to the testimonials from two Zimbabwean young adults who received different results from their HIV tests, then we will consider the advantages and disadvantages of VCT for each situation.”
2. Break the class into small groups and hand out the worksheets. Ask one participant in each group to read the testimonials aloud, and ask all participants to brainstorm together about the pros and cons of Voluntary Testing and Counselling for the two situations, as well as any other situations that they may think about. Ask them to write down all of the advantages and disadvantages to getting tested for HIV.
3. Now lead a discussion by asking participants to share what they have written, and keep a list of all advantages and disadvantages. Encourage them to mention all possible pros and cons of VCT.

Try to assuage any fears that are based on misconceptions or misunderstandings. Remind them that in post-test counselling they should be given opportunities for ongoing counselling, peer support groups, medical treatment for early symptoms of infections and illnesses related to AIDS, and, if available, anti-retroviral treatments that keep infected people healthy longer.

The following notes on Advantages and Disadvantages can help you facilitate the discussion, but be open to any new answers the participants share:

Advantages

- It is the only way to confirm if you have HIV. You cannot tell by how you look or feel. In fact, you can have HIV and not experience any symptoms for many years, while still being able to infect other people. (Remember the Handout on stages of HIV and AIDS from Lesson 2)
- It's good for your health. If you are not infected, it will be a relief to know that, and from now on you will want to protect yourself to remain negative in the future. Many young people say that after being tested, they valued life more.
- It allows you to start a new relationship off on a healthy note, to know your own status and the status of your partner.
- If you know you are HIV+, you can:
 - Get information and services that can help you live longer, for example, by taking medical treatments (where anti-retroviral treatments are available) or seeking medical attention for early symptoms of infections and illnesses related to AIDS, improving your diet and exercising regularly. (Note: There are medical treatments that can keep infected people healthy longer and prevent diseases that people with AIDS often get. Research is ongoing. They are not vaccines and will not cure AIDS. Also, they are expensive and not generally available to everyone who needs them. Find out if and how they may be available in your area.)
 - Gain the support of others in a similar situation, for example, by joining a support group of peers.
 - Feel the relief of knowing the truth rather than being worried about the unknown.
- It's good for the health of others. If you know you are HIV+ you can:
 - tell your partner(s), who may be at risk.
 - be aware that you can infect others and learn how to avoid infecting others through safe behaviours, not donating blood, deciding not to have a baby or minimising the risk of passing the virus to your baby during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding.
 - if you already have children, you can plan for their future.
 - become a role model by showing that you can live well with HIV.

Disadvantages

- Fear of syringes or needles (if it is a blood rather than saliva or urine test).
- Fear of rumours spreading if you are seen at the testing site or a health care worker knows your result.
- Fear of people reacting with stigma and discrimination.
- Fear of facing violence, abuse or abandonment from your partner or family members.
- If you know you are HIV+, you may:
 - feel angry, resentful, depressed.
 - feel very negative and worried about your future if you don't know ways you can live positively.
 - worry about what you will tell your partner and family.
 - tell people your status without knowing the possible consequences.

SOURCE

- Action with Youth. HIV/AIDS and STD: A training manual for young people. Second Edition. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2000. <http://www.ifrc.org>
- “Guidelines for Counselling Children who are Infected with HIV or Affected by HIV and AIDS”, *HIV Counselling Series* No 7, Southern African AIDS Training Programme, Zimbabwe, & CIDA, January 2003.
- Horizons Program, Kenya Project Partners, Uganda Project Partners. *HIV Voluntary Counseling and Testing among Youth: Results from an Exploratory Study in Nairobi, Kenya, and Kampala and Masaka, Uganda*. Washington, DC: Population Council 2001.
- “What to expect from Counselling and Testing”, pamphlet produced by the New Start Counselling and Testing Centres, coordinated by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and Population Services International Zimbabwe.

Teacher/Facilitator reflection

- How effective do you think the lesson was in terms of:
 - Participation of all students?
 - The pitch or level of the lesson matching the students’ abilities/interests?
 - Achieving the learning objectives?
- How comfortable were you with the content and methods?
- How did you adapt the lesson for your students & local situation?
- Other reflections:

