



Eliane

Facts about HIV and social support

- Having support from family and friends can be very helpful when dealing with your diagnoses.
- Peer-support from other people living with HIV can give you the motivation to empower yourself.
- Disclosure should be your own choice, but some countries have laws on disclosing your HIV status to others.
- Stigma can be a barrier to not talk about your status, but try and find someone who you can trust.
- Social support can be your friend, partner, close family but also your neighbour, or other person living with HIV.

Social support makes a difference

Nowadays people living with HIV can have a good and healthy life. Having support from friends and family is key to create a sustainable healthy life.

Living with HIV and not being open about it was the hardest part. It took me ten years to be able to free myself. Every time my in-laws were visiting, I used to hide my medication. When friends came to our house, I moved my medication from the bathroom to my bedroom. And every time I needed to go to the hospital for my check up, I asked my neighbour to pick up my kids from school, and I told her that I needed to go for a control of my diabetes. She told me then that her husband has his controls at his GP and that I may not need to go to the hospital for that. So then I made up another story and that made it all very complicated! What did I tell to whom? There was a point that I did not want to live with lies anymore. I told my neighbour that I am HIV positive and that all those times I was just going for HIV check up in the hospital. I brought up the subject in a positive way. I told her how desperately I wanted to have children without HIV and therefore went to the hospital. This brought a smile upon her face, she could relate to that. She was, and still is, very supportive to me and my family. I decided that my time to open up had come. And it was a relief. My in-laws and friends were very supportive. No one rejected me because of HIV. When I was in Burundi in 2014, I told my own brother, but he did not believe me, until I showed him my HIV medication and the travel document from my doctor. Some time after my disclosure I took part in the national HIV antistigma campaign 'HIV uit de kast', which made me become

the face of HIV in my hometown Amersfoort and even in The Netherlands. Parents at school came to compliment me personally. People at the sports club who saw the poster in our local pharmacy, asked me questions about HIV. They really wanted to get up to date information, because many were still stuck with the images from the eighties, with people dying from AIDS. My husband and my friends around me make me feel loved and supported and I know they are here for me when I need them.

Now I am helping people every day because I use social media to share my stories, so people can connect and share their concerns or ask me advice. I came out and met many sisters and my HIV family has grown, I am connected to people living with HIV throughout the world. I used to feel alone with this, but not anymore. I have become a stigma fighter to speak for the ones who remain in silence. Thanks to the support of the people around me I have become the voice and the face of HIV in my community.

Hiv Vereniging

The Dutch Association of People Living with HIV (Hiv Vereniging) represents the interests of all people with HIV in the Netherlands, irrespective of background.

We provide information about living with HIV and organise all kinds of meet-ups.

Servicepunt

Our team of expert volunteers can be contacted for any question about living with HIV, by telephone on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 14:00 – 22:00 hrs, or by email: servicepunt@hivvereniging.nl.

See www.hivvereniging.nl