

# HELPING PLHAS COPE WITH DEPRESSION

## 17 EXERCISE



### OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate the skills needed to help someone with depression
- Explain what helps and what does not help when supporting someone with depression



### TIME

1-2 hours

### ACTIVITIES

#### *Role Playing*

#### **SUPPORTING A PLHA WITH DEPRESSION**

Ask participants to make a role play using the scenario given below.

Sara and Solomon have been best friends for a long time. Solomon has been HIV positive for a while and recently has been quite depressed. He does not visit his friends much any more. He no longer goes to the church that he and Sara used to attend. He denies that he is upset about anything, but he has been in a bad mood for a long period of time and Sara is concerned. Solomon is very withdrawn and uncommunicative. Sara does not know what to do or how to approach him.

#### **Discuss**

- How did both of you feel in those roles?
- What skills or techniques did Sara use that seemed to help?
- What methods did not work?

#### **Summary**

- Many PLHAs do go through times of feeling depressed and low.
- It is important that families stick by PLHAs during these times and try to offer support and advice.
- It is important for family members to get support themselves to help cope with the depression.
- If a PLHA is depressed for a long time or family members are concerned, seek professional help.

## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO IS DEPRESSED

### What works

- Acknowledge the problem but offer hope “I know it must be really hard, but I also know you’re going to make it.”
- Remind the person of other times “You know, we have been friends for a long time, and you haven’t always been like this,” also helps. It allows the PLHA to reflect on their behavior and see that they can be a happier person. The depression won’t last forever
- Being frank: “What’s wrong? Please tell me.”
- Changing the environment always helps—take person out for a drink, to visit friends
- Promise confidentiality. Don’t assume it just because you are a friend.
- Listen more than you talk and show that you are listening.
- Ask how you can help.
- Resist the temptation to “take over,” let the person stay in control.
- Get support for yourself: being around a depressed person can have an impact on you!
- If you are worried about the person or their depression becomes long-term, seek professional advice or counseling.

### What to avoid

- Avoid saying things like “Hey, we are all going through a hard time” and then talking about your own problems. This does not work and was demonstrated by the PLHA who ended the conversation saying: “Yeah, you will eventually pay your phone bill but I will never stop being HIV!”
- Don’t condemn or label the person.
- Don’t tell the person not to cry—they may need to.
- Don’t ignore what the person is saying.
- Don’t get sucked into the PLHA’s negativity.
- Don’t give up on your friend—he or she needs to know you will be there no matter what.
- Don’t gossip about the person

