



OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Share their experience of getting an HIV test
- Explore ways in which fears of stigma could be tackled at an early stage



TIME

1 hour



MATERIALS

Neater's story

ACTIVITIES

Discussion

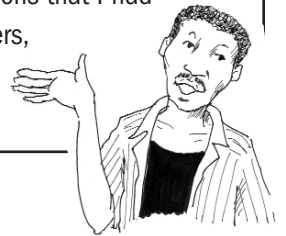
EXPERIENCE OF TESTING

Ask participants to share in pairs:

- When did you go for testing?
- What happened? What went well? What didn't go well?
- What was your biggest fear when you learned you were HIV positive?
- Looking back, if you could change anything about your experience, what would it be?

EXAMPLES OF FEARS

Death. The pain ahead of me. All the uncertainty. Not wanting to deal with things. What people would say about me. Accusations that I had been unfaithful. Losing opportunities—work, partners, sex, having children. Worries about what would happen to my spouse and children.



STORY

Read out Neater's story.

In small groups, discuss:

- Has this happened to anyone you know?
- How can VCT services lessen people's fears of stigma or prepare people to cope with stigma?

CASE STUDIES

Neater is an experienced HIV counselor-trainer in Zambia. When she trains new counselors, she often tells this story about one of her first clients who tested positive. She uses the story to illustrate both shock and stigma.

“I was counseling a young man who came for an HIV test. He was a college student and had been in a relationship with the same girl for two years. He needed to go abroad to study and this is why he came for a test. He trusted his girlfriend and had previously tested negative. He was sure that he would be negative.

His result was positive. To be honest, I was as surprised as him. When I

told him he just went very quiet and stared at me. Finally he said, “Can you cut a door out of this wall?” I was puzzled. He explained that he would not be able to leave by the same door through which he had entered. He said that everyone would see him and know that he was positive. He said he was sure that he had a big plus (+) sign written on his forehead. If I could just make a new door for him in the wall, then he would be able to leave quietly without being seen.

I felt so bad for him. He sat for a long time, unable to move. In the end he left after everyone else had gone. I did not see him for a long time and I couldn’t stop thinking about him.”



Summary

- Going for an HIV test may be the first time we encounter stigma (sometimes the stigma associated with even walking into a special clinic can prevent people from testing)
- As people who have gone through the process, we can advise services about how to better support VCT clients to prepare for coping with stigma.