

HIV & Disclosing to your Child

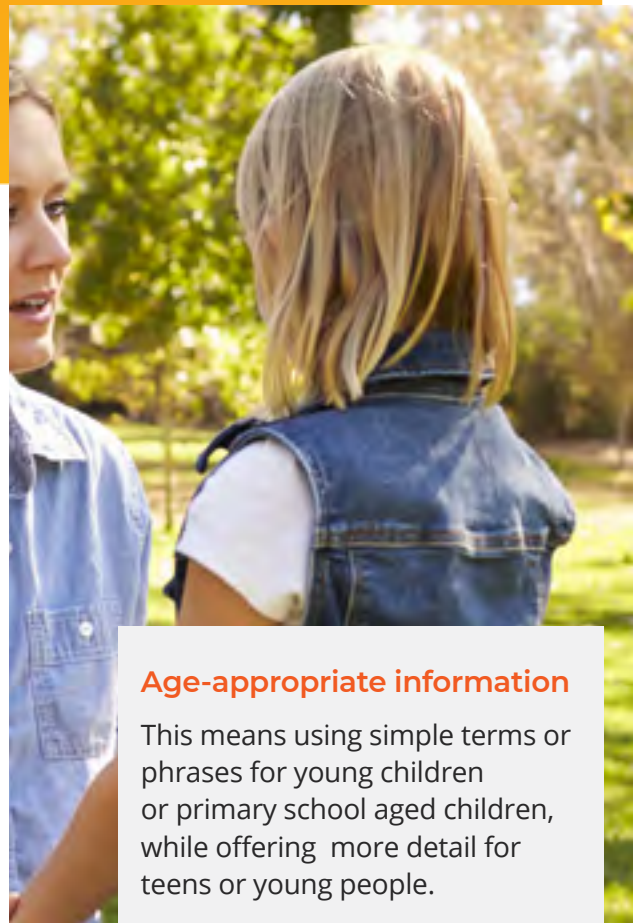
To tell or not to tell a child when you're living with HIV

The Facts

- Some parents choose to tell earlier rather than later
- Some parents choose to disclose gradually over time
- Some parents wait for their child to ask questions
- Parents living with HIV can decide when to talk about their HIV, how to talk about it and how much to say
- Disclosure is the beginning of an ongoing conversation
- It can be useful to prepare yourself beforehand by thinking about their questions based on their age and maturity
- It's important to provide age-appropriate information
- It's important to reassure your child that you are well, and that you and your doctor are taking care of your health
- Often parents carry the burden of keeping this information a secret to later discover the child knew all along

Questions your child may ask you

- How did you get it?
- Are you going to die?
- Why didn't you tell me earlier?
- Have I got it?
- Can I get it?
- Who else has it?
- Who else knows?
- Who can I tell?



Age-appropriate information

This means using simple terms or phrases for young children or primary school aged children, while offering more detail for teens or young people.

It can be important for children to know who they can talk to besides their parent, which can be especially important to teenagers or young people.

“We've explained that I've got something in my blood that makes me tired, and makes me sick sometimes, and I've got pills for it.”

“I told my children because I had their best interests at heart. I didn’t want them to find out from someone else.”

Every family is different

- You know your child and your family better than anyone else
- You might feel that one child is too young or too anxious to be told
- When you disclose, you’re in control of the information you provide your child
- Some parents find that it’s a weight off their shoulders to disclose
- Some children may have studied or read about HIV at school
- There is not one right way to share your HIV status

Before talking with your child

- Have you dealt with your feelings about HIV first?
- Ask yourself, for whose benefit are you sharing this news with your child?
- Think about what you’re comfortable sharing with them and what you’re not comfortable sharing
- Consider talking about who they can or cannot talk to about your HIV status
- It can help to write a list of the things you’d like your child to know
- Learn as much as you can about HIV yourself first, and where to get support.
- You can ask your child what they already know about HIV
- Be prepared for questions about your personal history
- Choose a private, quiet and familiar place and time to have the conversation
- Talk to your partner as well as other parents who have already been through this process

Be reassuring

Your attitude will have an effect on your child. Try not to make too big a deal of it and that this is just a small part of your life.

You may need to spell out to your child that you are ok, and that you’re taking care of yourself with your doctor.

Your child may have any number of reactions to your news. Some children may blame themselves. It’ll be important to reassure them that this is not their fault. You might need to have a counsellor ready to support your child after your disclosure.

For more information phone 02 9206 2177 or 1800 245 677 (freecall) or visit www.positivelife.org.au

Updated July 2021

Camp Goodtime

A national camp for children and families living with HIV in Australia. Camp Goodtime provides a place where families come together to talk, share and develop friendships with other families affected by HIV in a stigma free environment.

There must be a family member (a parent, carer or child) diagnosed with HIV. Children must be aged less than 17 years and children cannot attend the camp without the supervision of a parent or carer.

Please call (02) 9382 1851 for more information about the next Camp Goodtime.

Resources for children living with HIV

The Paediatric HIV Service at Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick, works with children, families and pregnant women living with HIV. It is the only service in Australia to provide medical management, psycho-social support, research, consultation and education to children and families affected by HIV.

Randwick HIV Clinic appointments, call (02) 9382 1508 and fax your referral to (02) 9382 1580 or [complete the webform here](#).

The Paediatric Immune Deficiency and HIV Services at The Children’s Hospital, Westmead, offers an outpatients’ service for children who have congenital or acquired HIV.

Westmead Immune Deficiency Clinic appointments, call (02) 9845 2525.

Finding Support

Think about a friend, peer living with HIV or counsellor who may be able to support you when you talk with your children. Ultimately, trust yourself that you’ll do what’s best at the right time for you and your family.

Talking with someone else living with HIV from Positive Life NSW might be useful to start your planning: (02) 9206 2177 or 1800 245 677 (freecall).

