Choosing Life: Empowerment, Action, Results!

CLEAR Menu Sessions
Disclosure 2: When and How Should I Disclose My HIV Status?
When and How Should I Disclose My HIV Status?

(60 Minutes)

Session Aims:

- To review guidelines for HIV disclosures.
- To learn a disclosure strategy and practice it through role-playing.
- To learn a new relaxation technique to reduce discomfort and regulate emotions.
Summary of Activities:

**Check-In** (10 minutes)
- The purposes of this activity are to set a positive tone for the session, create a safe environment, increase self-esteem, and shape positive behaviors. Goals set during the previous session are reviewed, and the activities and purposes of the session are outlined.

**Review of “Whether to Disclose Your Status” Session** (5 minutes)
- In this activity some of the concepts and materials developed in the previous session are reviewed.

**Practicing Disclosure** (25 minutes)
- The “Guidelines for Disclosure” are reviewed and practiced through role-playing.

**Relaxation** (5 minutes)
- The client learns a relaxation technique.

**What’s Next?** (15 minutes)
- The purposes of this activity are to reinforce today’s learning, set weekly goals, and to motivate the client to return to the next session by wrapping up on a positive note.
Required Materials for Disclosure Session 2

Handouts
- Guidelines for Disclosing That You are HIV Positive
- Relaxation Sequence: On the Beach

Worksheets completed in Disclosure Session 1
- Advantages and Disadvantages of Disclosure
- Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid
- F-T-D Grid
- Disclosure Target: Advantages and Disadvantages

Wall Charts
- Feeling Thermometer
- Guidelines for Goal Setting
- SMART Problem-Solving Guidelines

Laminated Cards and Additional Items
- None

Materials Needed in Every Session
- Client Workbook
- Goal Card
- Handout: Guidelines for Goal Setting
- Worksheet: Individual Prevention Plan
- Worksheet: Substance Use Weekly Schedule
Activity 1: Check-in

Time

- 10 minutes

Activity Materials

- Worksheet: Individual Prevention Plan

Counselor Note

The purposes of this activity are to set a positive tone for the session, create a safe environment, increase self-esteem, and shape positive behaviors. Goals set during the previous session are reviewed and the activities and purposes of the session are outlined.

Goal Check-In

- Welcome back! Let’s start off by sharing the positive steps you’ve taken over the past week.

- These positive steps might include the progress you made on your goals, something beneficial you did for yourself, or an important insight you gained about your thoughts, feelings, or behavior.

Engage the client in a discussion. Encourage the client to report progress on the two goals set at the end of the last session:

1. A short-term weekly goal that supports accomplishment of the client’s long-term life goal identified during Core Skill Session 2.

2. A short-term weekly goal that relates to the last session’s topic and supports the client’s prevention goal.

In response to accomplished goals:

- Praise the client’s efforts and success.

- Relate the accomplished goal to the F-T-D framework.
In response to unaccomplished goals:

- Praise any small effort and approximations to achieving the goal.
  - In order to maintain a safe and non-judgmental environment and in response to clients who may lose their motivation by not having accomplished their goals, positively reframe the unaccomplished goal (i.e., “You did not accomplish your goal because you were trying to take care of yourself by not creating more stress.”).
  - Model goal setting by suggesting that perhaps the “right” goal was not chosen the previous week (e.g., “Maybe the goal was too difficult or could not realistically be accomplished within the designated time frame.”). Use this as an opportunity to emphasize the importance of setting realistic goals in order to optimize success.

- Identify barrier(s) to goal accomplishment and apply SMART Problem-Solving steps to any barrier(s).

- Relate the unaccomplished goal to the F-T-D framework.

Use the client’s Individual Prevention Plan worksheet to record his or her progress against each goal.

**Substance Use Weekly Schedule**

If the client has set a substance use prevention goal and completed the first Substance Use Risk Session, review the Substance Use Weekly Schedule worksheet. Allow time for the client to complete the worksheet if it has not been completed in advance of the meeting.

**Introduction to Today’s Session**

Introduce today’s session.

- **Great, I see you’ve been working really hard.** Unless there is something pressing that you feel we need to discuss today, let me introduce you to today’s session topic.

- **Remember that our sessions are about looking at how our feelings, meaning our Feeling Thermometer and body reactions, thoughts, and actions are related to each other. Understanding how our feelings, thoughts and actions affect each other can help us to make healthy choices, to think and act like our Ideal Self, to have less stress, and to protect ourselves and other people from transmitting or acquiring HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).**
Introduction to Today’s Session - continued

► Today we are going to continue the HIV disclosure discussion we began last time we met. I want to share some tips about HIV disclosure with you and give you the opportunity to practice disclosure by doing some role-plays. The role-plays will give you the opportunity to plan and try out a disclosure strategy.

► We will end today’s session with a relaxation activity.

► Any questions before we get started

Answer any questions the client raises.
Activity 2: Review of “Whether to Disclose Your Status” Session

Time
- 5 minutes

Activity Materials
- Worksheets completed in Disclosure Session 1
  - Advantages and Disadvantages of Disclosure
  - Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid
  - F-T-D Grid
  - Disclosure Target: Advantages and Disadvantages

Counselor Note
In this activity some of the concepts and materials developed in the previous session are reviewed.

Review the worksheets completed during the first session on disclosure.

» Before we get started on today’s session, let’s review some of what we did the last time we met.

» Last time, we developed this list of advantages and disadvantages of sharing your status with others. We also developed a list of people in your life with whom the issue of HIV disclosure may come up. For each person on that list, you weighed the pros and cons for sharing your status with that person, and then decided if it was important and comfortable to tell.

» Here is the grid we filled out. Is there anything you want to change?

» Do you have any questions before we move on?

Answer any questions that the client has.
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Activity 3: Practicing Disclosure

Time
- 25 minutes

Activity Materials
- Handout: Guidelines for Disclosing That You Are HIV Positive

Counselor Note
The “Guidelines for Disclosure” are reviewed and practiced through role-playing.

Disclosure Guidelines

- Last time you came up with some ideas on how to make uncomfortable disclosures more comfortable. We’re going to build on your suggestions and practice different strategies.

Give the client a copy of the Guidelines for Disclosing that You Are HIV Positive handout.

Instead of reading each point, guide a brief discussion for each bullet point.

- Who would you like to tell? Who do you think needs to know?
- What are some things to consider before you tell? How can you prepare in advance?
- What are some things to consider as you are telling someone?
- What do you think is the best approach for telling someone?
Guidelines for Disclosing That You are HIV Positive

Who to Tell

Some people you might want to tell include:

- **Sexual partners.** If they’re at risk, they should know you’re HIV positive. They should know so they can get tested.

- **Health care providers.** Doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, and alternative healers all need to know. They might be at risk for infection. You want the best care you can get. If they don’t know you have HIV, you might not get the best care.

- **Anyone who can help you plan your future.** Tell anyone who will help you decide what happens to your possessions, children, apartment or house.

- **Anyone who can help you right now.** Tell anyone who can help you out if you’re sick.

- **Anyone who’s important in your life.**

These are all important people to tell. But you do not have to tell anyone if you don’t want to. You only have two obligations: You need to take care of your health, and you should not put others at risk.

Before You Tell

Here are some things to think about before telling someone you have HIV:

- **Will they keep the news to themselves?** Don’t tell if you think they’ll tell others without your permission.

- **Are they in a position to make your life difficult?** They might react badly. For instance, your landlord could make apartment life uncomfortable. HIV discrimination is illegal, but it happens.

- **Will you get beat up or worse?** Don’t put yourself in any danger.
Guidelines for Disclosing That You are HIV Positive - continued

When to Tell Someone You Have HIV

Knowing when to tell can be hard. Here are some things to think about:

- Why do you want the person to know?
- Are you prepared for all the possible responses they could have?
- Are you prepared to have the person reject you?
- Are you prepared to have the person feel much closer to you?
- Are you prepared for all the emotions this talk might bring up?

Be prepared to give the person a lot of support. This might seem strange since you’re the one with HIV. You’ve known for a while, though. They’re just finding out.

How to Tell Someone You Have HIV

When you tell someone you have HIV, they’ll usually take their cues from you. If you’re calm about dealing with HIV, they will be calm. If you’re not ashamed of having HIV, they won’t think it’s anything to be ashamed of. It’s important to “be in the right space” beforehand. You have a lot of control over the outcome.

- Make sure the time is right. Don’t rush into it and don’t rush through it.
- Make sure the place is right. Find a private spot.
- Let the person know beforehand. Tell them you have something very important to discuss.
- Make sure the time is right for you. If you don’t feel well, try to reschedule.
- Practice in advance. Rehearse with a friend what you will say.
- Be honest and direct. Beating around the bush doesn’t make it easier.
- Ask how the other person is feeling. Knowing what emotions you are dealing with can help you cope.
- End with a discussion of the next step. This helps move the conversation along and give you a graceful exit if necessary.
You are not responsible for how they respond. No matter how they react, they’ll probably need time to think.

Sometimes it’s appropriate to disclose your HIV status in a letter. Try to follow up with a phone call or a visit to find out how the person is reacting. If you write and don’t follow up, they may feel cut off. Give them a chance to respond.

Unscripted Role-Play

➤ Now we are going to practice telling someone by doing some role-playing. For our first role-play, I will be the one telling. Who would you like to be?

Suggest the client play the role of someone from the grid completed during Disclosure Session 1. Select someone who client is moderately uncomfortable (40-60 on the Feeling Thermometer) disclosing to. Using the guidelines, model the role-play.

➤ Great. How did you feel as the person receiving the news? Where was your Feeling Thermometer? What thoughts were going through your mind?

➤ What is one thing that you liked about the disclosure, what is something that you would have done differently?

Encourage the client to share his or her feelings and thoughts.

➤ Now I would like for you to practice telling me. What person would you like me to play? It can be someone from the grid you completed who you are moderately uncomfortable disclosing to or it can be some other specific person. I will play the role of that person.

If the client selects a new person, assess the client’s Feeling Thermometer in response to disclosing to this person. Make sure that client is moderately uncomfortable disclosing to the identified person.

If the client expresses that he or she is not ready yet to disclose, validate and normalize the client’s feelings. State that the activity merely provides an opportunity for the client to practice disclosure so that if and when the client is ready and comfortable about disclosing, he or she may feel more prepared.
Unscripted Role-Play - continued

Do as many role-plays as time allows. After each role-play, debrief by asking the following questions:

- How did you feel, meaning your Feeling Thermometer reading and associated physical sensations, throughout the disclosure?
- What is one thing that you liked about the disclosure?
- What is one thing that you would do differently?
- What was comfortable and what was uncomfortable to do?

Encourage discussion.

Remind the client that the guidelines for disclosure are intended to help him or her feel more prepared and comfortable about disclosure. However, there are no guarantees about the outcome of the disclosure experience. Regardless of how well-prepared and comfortable the client may be, the disclosure experience may still not turn out as he or she may have liked.
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Activity 4: Relaxation Technique

Time
- 5 minutes

Activity Materials
- Handout: Relaxation Technique: On The Beach

Counselor Note

Some clients may find the discussion of disclosure uncomfortable. CLEAR emphasizes that thoughts and feelings produce body responses. This activity is designed to help the client relax.

- You’ve worked really hard today. Let’s spend some time relaxing.
- Over and over again relaxation has been shown to help people deal with many emotions, as well as tension.
- There is even evidence to show that relaxation can strengthen the immune system in people with HIV.
- Relaxation can help you think through the pros and cons of disclosure. It can also reduce your discomfort before sharing your status with someone. You can even build in some relaxation during your disclosure, such as taking in a few deep breaths or tightening and relaxing tense muscles. Relaxation may also help when you are evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing your HIV status. The more comfortable and relaxed you are, the more likely it is that you will be able to think and assess a situation clearly.
- I want to share with you a technique that can help you relax before and after a disclosure. It’s a visualization activity. I’ll give you instructions on what to do.
Relaxation Sequence: On The Beach

Get yourself in a comfortable position. Pause.

Observe your breathing. Pause.

Now, breathe out deeply three times.

One. Pause.

Two. Pause.

Three. Pause.

Close your eyes, if you wish, as we take a little journey.

You are in a little house by the beach. Pause.

You open the door to the deck, and, before you can even step outside, the sun greets you warmly.

See how blue the sky is. Pause.

Just a few wispy clouds.

Smell the tangy salt air. Pause.

You walk to the edge of the deck and step down into the fine white sand.

Feel the warm sand between your toes. Pause.

You hear the surf breaking and the sea gulls crying.

See the waves slowly rolling on the shore. Pause.

You walk on the soft sand, moving closer to the ocean, and spread your towel.

You sit watching the soothing rhythm of the sea.

Breathe in and out. Pause.

In and out. Pause.

In and out. Pause.

You lie there on the empty beach.

Your whole body becomes one with the sun, waves, sand, and sky.

Can you see the gulls gliding without effort, nodding on the breeze as if they were asleep? Pause.
Relaxation Sequence  - continued

Can you see the gulls gracefully swoop and bank and turn?  
*Pause.*

Feel the breeze blowing softly, cooling, and cleansing you.

You seem to sink into the sand.

Can you feel your breath becoming deep and slow?  *Pause.*

Can you feel your heartbeat--regular, an easy rhythm, strong?  
*Pause.*

You rest.  *Pause.*

You rest a little longer.  *Pause.*

Slowly you sit up.  *Pause.*

You see a little purple shell carved by the sea, so that it seems to have magical writing on it.

Put it in your pocket.

You stand up.  *Pause.*

Walk slowly back to the beach house.  *Pause.*

The sand covers your feet and you dig with your toes.

You are almost at the step to the deck.

Step up.  *Pause.*

You look back at the ocean feeling so refreshed.

So peaceful. Open the door to the house and go in.

Ask the client how he or she felt about the relaxation.

►  **How did that relaxation make you feel?**

Encourage comments.

Give the client a copy of Relaxation Technique: On The Beach handout.
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Activity 5: What’s Next?

Time

- 15 minutes

Activity Materials

- Goal Cards
- Handout: Guidelines for Goal Setting
- Worksheet: Individual Prevention Plan
- Worksheet: Substance Use Weekly Schedule

Counselor Note

The purposes of this activity are to reinforce today’s learning, set weekly goals, and to motivate the client to return to the next session by wrapping up on a positive note.

Review of Session Content

Review today’s session.

- We are at the end of our session. Before we set our weekly goal, I want to review what we learned and share some observations that I noticed about you during the session.

- Today we practiced disclosing your HIV status to other people. We used the ideas you came up with and supplemented them with tips from the guidelines.

Praise the client for something positive he or she did during the session. For example, “I really liked that you engaged in every activity we did today.”
Review of Goal Guidelines

Review the Guidelines for Goal Setting.

Guidelines for Goal Setting

- Important to you, and you are committed to it.
- Realistic. Not too hard and not too easy (40-60 on the Feeling Thermometer).
- Brief, specific, and clearly stated.
- Easy to tell when you have accomplished it.

Answer questions and clarify as necessary.

Refer to the client’s prevention goal related to disclosure.

The client’s Ideal Self characteristics, prevention, and life goals should be consistently integrated into weekly short-term goal setting.

The client is encouraged to identify two goals:

1. A short term weekly goal that supports the client’s accomplishment of the long-term life goal identified during Core Session 2.

2. A short term weekly goal that relates to today’s session topic.

If the client appears to struggle with having two simultaneous goals, the client may select only one goal related to today’s session.

Suggestions for Weekly Goals

Give the client suggestions for weekly goals.

► Some examples of possible goals for this week could be:

- Think about a difficult HIV disclosure experience. Knowing what you know now, describe how you could make it better.

- With a friend playing a new potential sexual partner, practice telling your partner about your HIV status.

- Write a letter to someone you care for about your HIV status. You don’t have to send it, just practice.
Suggestions for Weekly Goals - continued

Discuss the goal with the client. Have the client record it on the Weekly Goal Card. Record it on the Individual Prevention Plan in the client’s workbook.

▸ I also would like to follow up with you about your life goal. Is there a weekly goal that you would like to set related to your Life Goal? We will review your goal at the beginning of our next session to see how you did.

Discuss the goal with the client. Have the client record it on the Weekly Goal Card. Record it on the Individual Prevention Plan in the client’s workbook.

Substance Use Weekly Schedule

Distribute the Substance Use Weekly Schedule

If the client has set a substance use prevention goal and completed the first Substance Use Risk Session, distribute the Substance Use Weekly Schedule worksheet. Ask the client to complete it prior to the next session.

Closing

Announce the day, date, and time of the next session.

Ask the client to share something he or she got out of, or liked best about today’s session. Model this by going first. Acknowledge and praise the client as appropriate.

Have the client identify benefits of participation in CLEAR. Ask the client the following questions:

▸ What did you like most about today’s session?
▸ What did you learn that you can apply to your life?
▸ What could be improved about today’s session?

END OF SESSION