Choosing Life: Empowerment, Action, Results!

CLEAR Menu Sessions
Disclosure 1: Should I Disclose My Status?
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Should I Disclose My Status?

(65 Minutes)

Session Aims:

- To identify the client’s comfort level with HIV disclosure.
- To assess the advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure.
- To examine how HIV disclosure can reduce stress, increase social support, and buffer stressful situations.
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.

What Do I Feel About HIV Disclosure? (10 minutes)
- The client describes positive and negative experiences of disclosing his or her HIV status, and shares comfort levels and thoughts about HIV disclosure.

Disclosure: Advantages and Disadvantages (10 minutes)
- The client brainstorms advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure in a variety of life situations.

Who Needs to Know? (20 minutes)
- The client brainstorms a variety of people to whom he or she might disclose his or her HIV status. Using this list, the client assesses the difficulty and importance of disclosing to each person on the list using the Disclosure Importance/Ease Grid.

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 1

Handouts

- Local Laws on HIV Disclosure (to be prepared in advance)

Worksheets

- Advantages and Disadvantages to Disclosure
- Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid
- Disclosure Target: Advantages and Disadvantages
- F-T-D Grid

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 (STIs).**
Introduction to Today’s Session - continued

▶ We’re going to use feelings, thoughts, and actions to help us think about the topic of HIV disclosure. HIV disclosure is a topic that people living with HIV face throughout their life. It occurs with many different people and can be a source of anxiety. It can also be the start of an overwhelming amount of support. Most of the time, there’s a sense of relief once it’s been done. Sometimes the reaction one receives can be surprising.

▶ A big part of living with HIV and staying healthy is dealing with uncomfortable situations. Feeling confident about how to make disclosure decisions is a very powerful skill for making sure that you are in control of your life. Today we are going to talk about some of our disclosure experiences, think about how to assess the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure, and think about the people we will encounter in life whom we probably will want to tell we’re HIV positive.

▶ Any questions before we get started?

Answer any questions the client raises.
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Activity 2: How Do I Feel About HIV Disclosure?

Time

- 10 minutes

Activity Materials

- Worksheet: F-T-D Grid

Counselor Note

The client describes positive and negative experiences of disclosing his or her HIV status, and shares comfort levels and thoughts about HIV disclosure.

▸ For our session today, I would like to talk about disclosure in a broad sense. We are going to discuss disclosure not only with your sexual partners, but also friends, family members, health care providers, and others.

▸ While HIV disclosures can often be very uncomfortable, at other times they can be comfortable. There may be advantages and disadvantages to disclosing your HIV status. For example, HIV disclosure may protect you and other people, and help you to obtain services and care that you need. On the other hand, HIV disclosure may sometimes result in stigma.

▸ I’d like to begin by asking you to share with me a personal experience of HIV disclosure to another person. Describe for me a time when you told that person that you have HIV. It can be an experience that you feel went really well or one that was really rocky.

Listen to the disclosure story and clarify confusing or incomplete details as necessary.

If the client states that he or she has never disclosed his or her HIV status to anyone, ask if he or she has ever disclosed any personal information to others (i.e., pregnancy, sexual orientation, etc.).
► That was a powerful story. Thank you very much for sharing it.

Distribute the F-T-D Grid worksheet. Work with the client to complete it.

► Now let’s use the F-T-D grid to understand your feelings, meaning level of discomfort, thoughts, and actions before, during, and after the disclosure.

► What was your reading before/during/after the disclosure?

► What physical symptoms did you experience?

► What thoughts went through your mind before/during/after the disclosure?

► What did you do before/during/after the disclosure?

Sample Completed F-T-D Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thermometer Reading</th>
<th>Physical Sensations</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before the disclosure</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Shaky hands.</td>
<td>I’m scared. What if my mom gets angry, or what if she cries? She’s going to be so disappointed.</td>
<td>Smoked more cigarettes than usual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the disclosure</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Queasy stomach.</td>
<td>I can’t believe I am telling her. Should I back out?</td>
<td>Told her about my HIV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the disclosure</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Relaxed and smiling.</td>
<td>I am so relieved. That was really tough. I can’t believe I just told her.</td>
<td>Went for a walk with my mom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Completed F-T-D Grid - *continued*

- The F-T-D grid is a great tool for understanding your level of discomfort and the thoughts about sharing your status with various people and in different situations.

- By understanding your feelings and thoughts you can better prepare for a successful disclosure.
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Activity 3: Disclosure: Advantages and Disadvantages

Time
- 10 minutes

Activity Materials
- Worksheet: Advantages and Disadvantages to Disclosure

Counselor Note
The client brainstorms advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure in a variety of life situations.

- Disclosing one’s HIV status can have advantages and disadvantages. They’re different for each person who does the disclosing and also depending on to whom you are disclosing.

- Assessing the pros and cons is helpful to any situation when you are trying to make a decision. It is a skill you can bring to any disclosure.

Distribute the Advantages and Disadvantages to Disclosure worksheet.

- Let’s take some time to do some brainstorming about the pros and cons. I have a worksheet here, and I will jot down your answers as we go along.

- What were the advantages and disadvantages of the disclosure you just described?

- What are some other possible advantages and disadvantages to HIV disclosure?
Possible Advantages of Disclosing

- Can make negotiating abstinence or safer sex easier.
- Can make accessing better health and dental care easier.
- Reduces loneliness, stress, denial, and isolation.
- Allows other people to be supportive.
- Don’t have to carry the burden alone.
- May make for a closer relationship with the other person.
- Can then develop cooperative ways to handle demands.
- Can plan for the future with people close to me.
- The person being told could learn from others in a shocking and hurtful way, instead of being told by you.
- Don’t have to be on guard as much.
- People may resent you if they hear it from others.
- Can provide others accurate information about the disease.
- Family can be less isolated and get support.
- Can feel part of a worldwide group of people living with HIV.
- Can advocate on behalf of one’s needs better.
- Can feel better about self by being completely honest.

Possible Disadvantages of Disclosure

- May lose people you care about.
- May loose access to romantic or sexual partners.
- Can’t be 100% positive how people will react. The other person may not keep the secret.
- Family and friends may experience stigma.
- Family and friends may want to know personal things about you (e.g., sexual behaviors or drug use).
- Prejudiced people may retaliate.
- When telling others, may feel guilty and bad.
Possible Disadvantages of Disclosure - continued

- People may make assumptions about you (e.g., gay, drug user, reckless, promiscuous, etc.).

- Family may suffer from stigma and rejection if others find out.

- It may lead to a frightening discussion of getting sicker.

- May feel and experience discrimination from employment or in the workplace.

- Those are good lists of advantages and disadvantages.

- The advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure really vary from situation to situation and individual to individual.

- When you think about your personal future, it’s clear that there will be many potential people in your lives to disclose your HIV status to. Weighing possible advantages and disadvantages is an important skill that can help to make for good disclosure decisions and experiences.

- This was a great activity. Thank you!
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Activity 4: Who Needs to Know?

Time
- 20 minutes

Activity Materials
- Handout: Local Laws on HIV Disclosure (to be prepared in advance)
- Worksheet: Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid
- Worksheet: Disclosure Target: Advantages and Disadvantages

Counselor Note
The client brainstorms a variety of people to whom he or she might disclose his or her HIV status. Using this list, the client assesses the comfort level and importance of disclosing to each person on the list using the Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid.

Brainstorm Targets of Disclosure

- Living a long life with HIV means that there will be many people who may need to know you are HIV positive, or with whom you wish to share this part of yourself.

- Think for a minute about your life now and your life as you imagine it in the future. Let’s brainstorm a list of potential people in our lives with whom the issue of HIV disclosure may come up with.

- For now, let’s not focus on actual individuals; let’s focus on different types of people in your lives. For example, instead of focusing on your particular friend, Maria, just say “a friend.”

- Who are some people in your life with whom the issue of HIV disclosure may come up?
Distribute the Disclosure Comfort/Importance Grid worksheet. Work with the client to generate a list of people in his or her life with whom the issue of HIV disclosure may come up. Write the people in the column on the worksheet labeled “Disclosure Targets.” The list may include:

- Health care provider
- Dentist
- Family member
- New friend
- Romantic interest
- Sexual interest
- Religious or faith leader
- Employer
- Teacher

▶ We will be using this grid for the remainder of our activity. Let’s begin by writing down some of the people in your life with whom the issue of HIV disclosure may come up.

▶ This is a good list. Thank you!

Assess Comfort Level and Importance of Disclosure Targets

Use the Feeling Thermometer to assess the client’s comfort with disclosing to each disclosure target that has been identified. Write the client’s Feeling Thermometer reading in the column on the worksheet labeled “Feeling Thermometer.”

▶ Where is your Feeling Thermometer rating when you think about disclosing to the first person on your list? The second person?

▶ What is it about these disclosures that make you feel intense discomfort?

▶ How could you make the disclosure more comfortable?

▶ Is it important to tell each of these people? When I say “important” I mean it is important for you personally or important for your health.
Assess Comfort Level and Importance of Disclosure Targets - continued

Go through the list of disclosure targets and have the client assess if disclosure to each target is important or not. Write the client’s answer on the worksheet column labeled “Important Yes/No.”

Assess the Pros and Cons of Disclosure that Cause Moderate Discomfort

Review the worksheet with the client. Identify disclosure targets that are important to the client and that cause moderate discomfort on the Feeling Thermometer (i.e., a reading of 40-60). From these, ask the client to select one disclosure target they would like to discuss.

▶ We are focusing on people that you are moderately uncomfortable disclosing to because we don’t want this to be too easy or too difficult for you.

▶ In the last activity you listed some of the advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure in general. Now, let’s focus on the individual you have identified. What are the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing to this particular individual?

Distribute the Disclosure Target: Advantages and Disadvantages worksheet.

▶ We’ll use this worksheet to help us. Try to come up with the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing to this person that really matter to you.

▶ Whether you disclose or not is your decision. We will discuss when and how to make HIV disclosures in the next session.

Repeat the exercise with additional targets if time allows. Remember that the purpose of this activity is to model assessing pros and cons as a step in decision making.
Counselor Note

The purpose of this section is to provide important information that clients need to know. Presenting this information in a matter-of-fact manner with no editorial comment may advance the process. Some clients may have a strong negative reaction to mention of these laws. They may perceive them as stigmatizing or unfair. If this occurs, the counselor should empathize with any feelings expressed and then refocus the client’s energy on the next activity. Prior to the start of the session, the counselor should investigate their local and state laws regarding disclosure of HIV status to sexual and/or needle-sharing partners. Use this information to prepare the optional handout on HIV disclosure law.

Legal Issues Related to Disclosure: Willful Exposure

Discuss legal issues related to disclosure.

- There is an important legal issue related to disclosure I need to mention.

- Consider this when you are thinking about whether or not to disclose your HIV status to your sex partners.

- Some states, about half, have laws that make not telling your partner a crime under certain conditions. These are often called “willful exposure” laws. This means you knowingly expose someone to HIV without telling the person.

- Another thing to think about is the possibility that a sex partner may bring a civil lawsuit against you if you did not let that person know that you are HIV-positive.

- Such laws are seldom applied, and nondisclosure lawsuits are seldom filed, but they are nonetheless something to keep in mind.

Say whether or not your state has a “willful exposure” law. If there is such a law in your area, describe its basic provisions.

Give the client the optional handout on Local Laws on HIV Disclosure.
Legal Issues Related to Workplace Disclosure

- There are a few important points about workplace disclosures of HIV I want to bring up now.

- Disclosing your HIV status to your employer or co-workers may result in great support and encouragement.

- However, it may also result in unexpected stigma or even illegal discrimination.

- There may be times when you need reasonable accommodation to store or take medications, take extra rest breaks, or attend extra health care appointments.

- People living with HIV meet the definition of disability in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). To access reasonable accommodation, a formal request must be made of employers. Typically, this involves a signed letter from a physician saying that you are being treated for a disabling condition that requires a specific type of reasonable accommodation that is then described. The exact diagnosis of your disabling condition, e.g., HIV disease, does not need to be mentioned in the physician’s letter. Some physicians need to be reminded of this fact.

- Workplace HIV disclosures have many different facets. They can be complicated. They should always be decided on an individual basis after a consultation with a trusted person who is also knowledgeable about the law.
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 talked about disclosing one’s HIV status to other people. First, we shared some personal experiences of telling another person about being HIV positive. Then we listed some of the advantages and disadvantages of HIV disclosure. We discussed potential HIV disclosure situations in our futures and how easy and important they may or may not be. We generated a list of tips of how to make difficult disclosures easier.

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:

- Make up a list of people with whom you would like to share your HIV positive status and list why you want this person to know.

- Talk to a friend about the advantages and disadvantages of telling your sexual partner you’re positive.
Suggestions for Weekly Goals - continued

- Write a story or poem about one of your HIV disclosure experiences.
- Discuss whether or not to tell someone whose advice you respect.

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