

A LOVING RELATIONSHIP

Finding it and keeping it



Be Faithful
use condoms consistently
respect between women & men

Funded by Expanded Support Programme

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

It is good to care for our partners. It can be hard sometimes to make sure they know we care. An important thing to remember is that people cannot read minds. If we don't talk about our feelings, people may not know how we feel.

This booklet will help couples talk to one another and improve their relationship. It is not mainly about HIV. Research has shown that problems in a relationship may lead to risk taking behaviour, which increases a couple's chance of getting HIV. There is information in here on how to effectively communicate within a relationship.

It is a good idea to read this booklet as a couple.

SETTING A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

In the beginning of a relationship, attraction and pleasure in sex are often mistaken for love. Spend time together doing other things, not just having sex. Don't confuse sex with love. Take some time to get to know each other, whether your partner does what he or she says and what they believe in. It is also an important time to talk about your previous risk to HIV and how you are going to protect each other in this new relationship. It would be wise for both of you to go for HIV testing. Remember that even if both of you test HIV negative, it may be that you are in the window period.

Know your needs and talk about them

A relationship is not a guessing game. Sometimes men and women are scared to say what they want. Then they are disappointed and angry with their partner for not making them happy. Speak up. Your partner is not a mind-reader.

SIMON REMEMBERS A RELATIONSHIP HE HAD WITH CHIPO

All I wanted was for her to support me when I played soccer. But she always went out with her friends while I played soccer matches. I felt like she didn't care about me or what I was doing. Many years later, after we broke up, I found out that she thought I wanted to be alone with my friends on Saturday afternoons. That's why she never came to the matches.

- Why do you think Simon and Chipo broke up?
- Do you think things would have been different if Simon had asked Chipo to come to soccer matches?

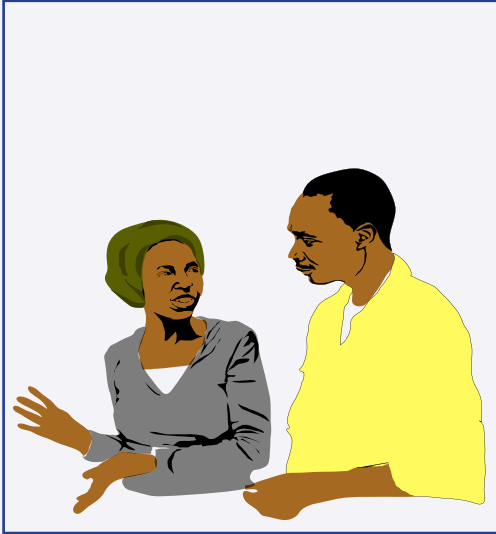
Do things together

- Relationships of today don't have to rely on ideas from the past. For example, we have been taught that certain tasks should be done by women while other tasks are reserved for men. It's fun to find new ways of doing things together. As two people spend more time together, they begin to learn more about each other. Exploring your partner's deepest needs and expectations from the relationship will help your love grow.



Learning to talk to each other

The first thing to remember about having a loving relationship is that relationships are built on communication, openness and trust. Here are some communication tips:

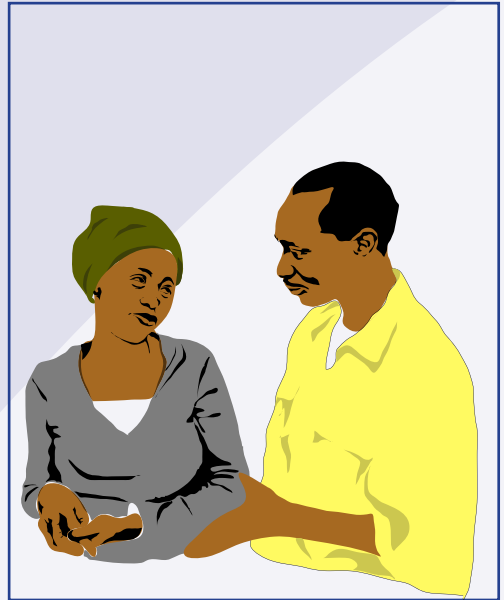


- Be genuine – what you say must be real and true.
- Be accepting – you should treat the person you are talking to as a human being with feelings and behaviours that matter.
- Observe and comment – if you point out to your partner how they are looking and acting, you will make them more aware. For instance, if they say it's okay to talk, but then don't pay attention to you, you could say: "You say it's okay, but you don't seem to be listening to me".

- Question – you can use open-ended questions to learn more. For example, if you have asked your partner to help you make dinner, you can ask, "How do you feel about that?"
- Listen actively – while you are listening, pay attention to what the person you are talking to is saying, as well as how they are saying it, and what they are doing with their facial expressions and body movements while they are saying it.



- Clarify – check that you have understood by asking questions. For instance you could say to your partner, “Am I right that you don’t really want to make dinner?”
- Tolerate Silence – Give the person you are talking to time to think – don’t jump in and talk when there is a silence.
- Do not judge – Accept your partners’ thoughts and actions without imposing your opinions or values.
- Empathise – try to understand your partner’s experience and let them know that you understand – for example, “I care about what is happening to you right now”.



- Summarize - A good summary includes what has been said as well as the thoughts and feelings around what has been said. It helps people see where they were, where they are and where they are going. It shows that you have listened to what your partner has expressed.
- Conclude – if you have been talking about an important issue, it is important that you end the discussion by clarifying what actions both of you have decided to take.

If you both use these tips when you talk to one another, then communicating will be easier.

Remember you need to work at talking. Start by asking one another about your day. If you talk every day, using these skills you will get used to communicating and can then move to deeper issues.

Talking about difficulties

In any relationship there are things that are difficult to talk about. For instance, you could have been unfaithful to your partner, you might want to talk about having a child, or going for HIV testing together or you might want to talk about your household budget or how you spend your money. It is important, if you want the relationship to carry on and be a good one, to be brave enough to discuss difficult things with your partner.

Some things to consider:

- It's important to do this when you both have time. Think about a time when you will not be busy and you will not be disturbed.
- You should be prepared that your partner will react very emotionally. Your partner may become upset or angry. Prepare yourself to react with patience and as quietly as possible. Be prepared that your partner may not even want to listen.
- You might want to think about asking someone you respect from outside, to help you get through this difficult time in your relationship.
- Think carefully about how to start the dialogue. You could say things like, "There is something I wanted to talk to you about. I am not doing this to hurt you, but because I respect you and you have a right to know."

Maintaining a good sex life within a relationship

Sometimes we might feel that our sex lives have become boring and routine. It might be very difficult to know how to talk to our partner about this, and it might be tempting to look outside the relationship for sex. Having sex outside of the relationship exposes you to HIV and the fear of it will make you enjoy sex even less. It helps if you have practiced communicating about things, because then it is easier to talk about sex in your relationship.

Did you know that you could maintain a good sex life in a relationship?

Think about these things:

- Both women and men have the right to enjoy sex.
- Sex helps to keep love and attraction alive on both sides and will help the couple to have a happy marriage with less chance of infidelity.

Hints for a good sex life

A good sex life over a whole life cannot be expected to “happen” automatically

- Men and women need to talk about what they like in bed. Everyone is different and likes different things, so you cannot assume that you now know what your partner likes in bed. The only way to find out is to ask, and then work out together how to make sex more enjoyable.

- It is not a sign of lacking experience to ask your partner what he or she likes. It is a sign of love and feeling for each other.
- If sex stays exciting for BOTH partners, it is likely to last longer. To satisfy each other makes partners appreciate one another more.
- It usually takes longer for women to feel aroused than men so the man might need to spend more time on foreplay in order for the woman to reach orgasm or feel very excited.

What can stop you from enjoying sex?

- If one partner is afraid that the other partner has been unfaithful, they will be scared of getting HIV and other STIs and that will make it more difficult for them to enjoy sex. Staying faithful to your partner is very important for trust and to be free of fear.
- Most people often worry about their body structure but how your body looks like doesn't make sex better or worse. Good sex is about doing what you and your partner like most.
- It is much nicer to have sex if you are clean. Women should remember that it is okay to wash the outside of the vagina, but washing inside can make the tissue weaker and make her more vulnerable to infections.
- Sometimes it can be hard to find time and space to have sex. Children may be around, and it may be hard to find a private room. Make plans for creating time and space for your sex life. Ask your relatives or neighbours to look after your children during a morning or afternoon at the week-end, since you need to take care of someone important.

Some wrong ideas about sex

- Some people believe that women cannot enjoy sex when they are old. This is not true. Women can still enjoy sex after menopause. Some women may experience dryness of the vagina but this can be relieved by using waterbased lubricants.
- Some people believe that women cannot enjoy sex when they are pregnant. This is not true. Women can still enjoy sex during pregnancy and breastfeeding, but it is important to understand that their body may change because of hormones. This might change their desire for sex. It is important to be an understanding and caring partner.
- Some people believe that sex between married partners must happen in the dark and in the bed. This is not true. Be open to trying something new in your sex life, but don't force your new ideas on your partner. You can try it with light on or in a different place. You could also try to change the position and style.
- Some people believe that only "loose" women enjoy sex and that a married woman should be very 'decent' in bed. This is not true. Married men and women can enjoy sex and explore ways of making sex pleasurable for both of them.

HIV and YOU

Anyone who is in a sexual relationship should know about HIV and AIDS. This is because HIV can be passed from one person to another during sex. Most people who are infected with HIV do not know they are infected. You cannot tell if a person is infected by just looking at them. It can take years for the signs of HIV to show.

It is important to talk to your sexual partner about the risk of infection. People believe many wrong things about sexual relationships. When we have a relationship with someone, we need to remember that they may have had relationships with others before us.

People often don't know that it is possible that one partner in the relationship can be HIV positive, while the other partner is still HIV negative - even if they have had unprotected sex before. They think you don't need to protect yourself with someone you've already had sex with. But, in Zimbabwe, 1 out of 7 couples are sero-discordant, which means that one partner is HIV positive and the other partner HIV negative.

We need to negotiate with our partners around safe sex. Talking about safe sex doesn't mean you don't trust your partner, it means you love them and want to make sure that together you stay safe and healthy even when infected with HIV.

HIV and You

Remember: It is important for you as a couple to know each other's HIV status before engaging in unprotected sex. It is not too late for you to find out even if you have already had unprotected sex together.

Away from my spouse: What can I do?

It is believed that one of the reasons why HIV is so high in Southern Africa, is that so many people work or live far away from their spouses and start having other partners. The best choice is therefore for you to take your family with you wherever you work. It might be difficult, but it is really important for your family life. If you can't help leaving your spouse and family behind, it's important to talk to your partner about your options for preventing HIV.

I am worried about how you will cope with loneliness? You will be gone for months before we can have sex again.



Who ever said someone will die from not having sex. So does it mean you too will soon be looking for a boyfriend the minute I leave?



That is not the point John, but these days of HIV and AIDS we need to be extra careful. Faithfulness to each other is our promise, but if you are tempted, be sure to use a condom.



I am glad you say anyone of us can get tempted because you women think that it's only a man who can sleep around, but you must know that men can be faithful.



Yes, I agree. However, we need to both commit ourselves to preventing HIV. For the sake of our future and that of our children.



Thank you for making this promise. It will give me peace of mind. I too will be a smart girl.

I agree, and promise to be a smart boy.

We hope you have found this booklet useful. A number of ideas discussed here may be new to you, but we encourage you to decide together what you will do to keep the love you have found.

Make a commitment to keeping your love

Now that you have completed this booklet make a commitment to improve your relationship. Take a pen and complete this page with words that describe what you want to be.

We choose to

We choose to

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We would like thank the many organisations and individuals who contributed in different ways to put together the information presented in this leaflet namely those who provided:

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We hope that you will find this leaflet beneficial to you.

Do you need more information?

If you would like to know more, visit your nearest health facility or call the National AIDS Council Office (NAC) nearest to you.

NAC Head Office:	04-971171	Mashonaland East:	079-22008
Harare:	04-708070	Mashonaland Central:	011878935
Bulawayo:	09-884077	Matebeleland North:	09-882943
Manicaland:	020-64324	Matebeleland South:	084-22631
Midlands:	054-220084	Masvingo:	039-262097
Mashonaland West:	067-22741		