



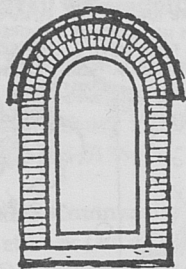
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Pamela Gale

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Patricia J. Noll

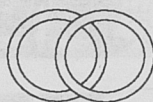
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*Gay and lesbian couples
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HIV Positive -- What Next?

You've taken the test and, and whether you were expecting it or not, it's come back HIV-positive. What does it all mean? What happens next? How are you going to cope with it all?

First, take the time you need to work through your feelings. It is quite healthy to feel anger, frustration, disbelief, fear, sadness, and a whole range of other emotions. These feelings won't resolve themselves overnight, and will probably keep coming back in one form or another over time. While they may seem overwhelming at first, you can develop methods to cope with them.

There is no prescribed way to face this situation and everyone deals with the news in their own manner. Don't allow other people's expectations to shape your responses to learning you have HIV. Be patient with yourself and don't be surprised if sometimes you just need to cry, yell, hit a punching bag, or lock yourself away in a room. Do try, however, not to engage in self-destructive behavior while you're absorbing the results. If you find yourself drinking or doing more drugs to numb the feelings, lashing out at friends instead of leaning on them, or entertaining thoughts of suicide, it is a serious sign of trouble.

Don't expect to handle it entirely by yourself: there is no shame in asking others for help. Talk to other people, friends, professional counselors, family members, religious or spiritual advisors, anonymous hotlines, anyone you know who will respect your need for confidentiality and who will be supportive. By all means, make contact with the AIDS service organization in your area, and think seriously about joining a support group for people with HIV. Meeting other people who have tested positive is frequently a great way to break down any feelings of isolation and you can learn a great deal from people who have already "been there". Even if a support group isn't for you right now, it still makes sense to talk with one of the AIDS groups, just so you can know what they have to offer. At the very least, you can count on a sympathetic ear and a confidential and caring environment. And if you establish contact with them now, you'll know each other already if you find yourself suddenly in crisis over something.

It is impossible to offer an easy guide to learning to live with HIV. It isn't something that you suddenly come to terms with and then forget about; it is an ongoing process of adjustment and change. What is important to know is that someday, perhaps sooner than you imagine, it will seem far more manageable than it does at first. Learn everything you can about HIV, AIDS, the disease process, treatments, and community resources. You'll be amazed at how much information is out there. You won't be able to take it all in immediately, so begin with a more general overview (GMHC's booklet "Medical Answers about AIDS" is a good place to start) and then move on to more specific topics which interest you.

Far more than even two years ago, there are many reasons to be hopeful. Treatments are developing rapidly, and people with HIV and AIDS are living longer. Forget all the stuff you may have once believed about this being an immediate death sentence. While there is no question that HIV represents a serious, life-threatening condition, you may be able to take advantage of many of the advances which are happening everyday in the field. Find a health care provider experienced in working with people with HIV and AIDS. There are doctors within reach of most parts of the state with a significant amount of expertise in the field, including specialized clinics in Burlington and Hanover (N.H.). If you already have a health care provider you feel