

IN OUR OWN WORDS®

Teens and AIDS

Discussion Guide

## Contents

<i>About In Our Own Words:</i>	
<i>Teens and AIDS</i> . . . . .	1
Profiles . . . . .	2
Using This Guide . . . . .	2
Impact on Participants Before Viewing the Program	
Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry . . . . .	4
HIV and Denial . . . . .	6
HIV and Your Future . . . . .	8
Making Smart Choices . . . . .	10
HIV, Sex and Drugs . . . . .	12
Family Health Productions . . . . .	14
Also From Family Health Productions . . .	15
Acknowledgements . . . . .	16

# About *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS*

In this program Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry tell how they contracted HIV as teenagers, through unprotected sexual intercourse.

Many young people and adults believe that only certain types of people get HIV. This program reminds viewers that HIV doesn't discriminate, that behavior not background puts people at risk for the disease.



*In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS*—viewed and discussed with questions from this guide—can help young people make wise choices about sexual activity. Parents who hear and discuss these true stories will better understand some of the challenges their children face growing up in a world with HIV and AIDS.

During production, two of the young people profiled—David and Pedro—died from complications with AIDS. Kerry, the program's host, died five weeks after it was completed. Veronica died several years later. Antigone is doing well, and continues to teach about HIV.

You can read more from Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry, and get more information about HIV at [abouthealth.com](http://abouthealth.com). The five young people profiled in this program had one goal. They wanted to save the lives of others at risk for HIV. You contribute to their efforts when you view and discuss this video with the young people in your life.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Blake".

Jeanne Blake  
President, Family Health Productions

## Showing *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS*

*In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS* is appropriate for groups of young people, for parents in the workplace, at community events about positive decision-making, and for families at home.

*Note: In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS includes copyrighted materials. Broadcast, cablecast, Internet, duplication or commercial use in trainings or presentations is prohibited.*

# Profiles

## Pedro

Pedro grew up in Florida. He didn't think a teenager could contract HIV. When he was first diagnosed, he was afraid to tell anyone. After being interviewed for *In Our Own Words*, Pedro participated in MTV's *The Real World*.

## Antigone

Antigone grew up in California. She used alcohol to deal with feelings of low self-esteem. Sometimes when she drank alcohol, she had unprotected sexual intercourse. She went with a friend for an HIV test. That's when Antigone found out she was infected with HIV.

## David

David grew up in Virginia. As a teenager, he realized he was gay. David felt isolated from his peers, and says he used alcohol and sex to try to deal with the pain. When he was 18, he found out he had HIV.

## Veronica

Veronica grew up in Pennsylvania. As a teenager, she contracted HIV from a boyfriend. When she learned that she was infected, she tried to escape her emotional pain by getting high on drugs. Eventually, Veronica quit using drugs, and supported others in recovery from addiction.

## Kerry

Kerry, the host of the video, grew up in Maine. When she was 15, she discovered she had contracted HIV from her second partner.

## Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help you lead discussions with young people, parents, and other caregivers. Parents can use this guide to discuss the program with their children. Questions are marked for:



young people



parents/caregivers

➤ Follow these arrows to proceed easily through the discussion.

## Impact on Participants

Young people may feel a variety of emotions as they watch the program. It may have a powerful affect on young people who:

- Haven't disclosed that they are living with HIV.
- Feel frightened, because they participated in one of the activities identified as risky.
- Know a relative or close friend with HIV.

## Before Viewing the Program

Prepare participants for viewing the program by asking these questions:

### ➤ Ask participants

#### ■ What is Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, a disease that destroys the body's ability to fight off certain infections.

#### ■ What does it mean to be HIV positive?

When someone is HIV positive, he or she has been exposed to HIV and is infected with the virus.

#### ■ What is sexual abstinence?

Sexual abstinence means to choose to not have vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse.

#### ■ What is safer sex?

Safer sex means keeping body fluids out of a partner's body during vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, and other intimate contact. Latex condoms—used correctly during sexual intercourse, every time, from start to finish—are highly effective in protecting against HIV and pregnancy. Experts also recommend using a barrier during oral sex to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Most health experts say HIV cannot be spread by kissing.

#### ■ How can people contract HIV?

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV may be passed from one person to another when blood, semen, or vaginal secretions infected with HIV come into contact with an uninfected person's broken skin or mucous membrane. A mucous membrane is wet, thin tissue found in certain openings of the human body. These openings can include the mouth, eyes, nose, vagina, rectum, and penis. In addition, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy or delivery, and through breast-feeding after giving birth.

# Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry



## ➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

When you're young it's hard to believe that anything bad will happen to you. Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry contracted HIV as teenagers.

## ➤ **Ask young people**

- The young people in this program all made decisions about sexual activity that affected their lives. What do you think it felt like to learn they had HIV?
- Most people don't plan to have unprotected sex. Why do you think some people have sex without a condom?
- Antigone said her mom's eyes filled with sadness when she learned that Antigone had HIV. How do you think Antigone felt in that moment?

## ➤ **Remind young people**

Each of us has to live with the consequences of our actions. Try to make decisions that will keep you safe and healthy over the long term.



### ➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

It's normal for children to deny that bad things may happen to them. Part of a parent's job is to help their child understand that there are consequences to his or her actions.

### ➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Do you have the information and skills you need to clearly and accurately discuss HIV with your child?
- What efforts do you make to have ongoing, open discussions with your child about sexual health?
- How can you build your child's self-esteem so that he or she is more likely to make choices that are good for him or her?
- How can you take advantage of teachable moments—real life opportunities—to talk with your child about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections?

### ➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Most children want their parents to be their main source of information about important topics such as HIV. In a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, most parents of eight- to 12-year olds say families don't talk enough about HIV/AIDS. When conversations take place, more than half of the parents say they waited too long to begin talking about these issues.



# HIV and Denial

## ➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

Denial is the feeling that something is not going to happen when, in fact, it could.

Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry all denied they could become infected with HIV. Let's talk about how denial affected their decisions and lives.

## ➤ **Ask young people**

- Kerry said she sometimes wakes up in the night and thinks the doctor made a mistake. Why do you think it's so difficult for Kerry to believe she has HIV?
- What behaviors put people at risk for HIV?
- Without saying names, do you know someone who may be at risk for HIV?
- Why do some people believe that only certain types of people are at risk for HIV?
- How do you think Antigone felt when the students said they wouldn't want to sit next to someone with HIV?
- If you learned that a friend had HIV, how would you treat him or her?

## ➤ **Remind young people**

Your racial, cultural, or economic background doesn't determine your risk for HIV. Where you live, whether you're male or female doesn't matter to HIV. If you come into contact with blood, semen, or vaginal secretions infected with HIV, you can contract the disease.





➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Denial is a defense mechanism. When something is frightening, it may be easier to not think about it. That's why many parents deny that their children may be participating in activities that put people at risk for HIV.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Adolescence is a time of experimentation. How certain are you that your child is not engaging in behaviors that put him or her at risk for HIV?
- If you learned that your child was sexually active, how would you respond?
- Why do some people believe that only certain types of people can contract HIV?

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Half of the new HIV infections reported each year occur in people 25 years of age and under.

*Source: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, HIV/AIDS Statistics Fact Sheet, January 2004*

# HIV and Your Future



## ➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

Pedro, Antigone, David, Veronica, and Kerry said their goals were affected by HIV. Let's talk about how they viewed their futures differently after learning they had HIV.

## ➤ **Ask young people**

- How do you think Pedro's brother felt as he spoke at Pedro's funeral?
- How would your goals change if you learned that you had HIV?
- Pedro said because of HIV, he didn't plan far ahead. How would you feel if your health kept you from doing something you loved to do?
- Describe how you think Veronica feels when she considers that her son may grow up without her.
- David's dream of traveling to Europe to study dance ended when he learned he had HIV. How do you think he felt when he had to cancel his trip?
- What do you think would be the worst part of having HIV?

## ➤ **Remind young people**

When faced with decisions, consider the consequences of your actions. Ask yourself, "Is doing this worth risking my life?" Honestly answering this question can help you make smart choices, and follow through on them.



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Medicines can help some people with HIV live longer, but there's no cure. Let's talk about how you can help your child avoid putting him or herself at risk for HIV.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Some teenagers ignore warnings about HIV, because they believe there'll soon be a cure. If your child said that, how would you respond?
- How would you respond if your child said he or she wasn't at risk for HIV because they didn't know anyone who's living with HIV?
- How can you continue to raise the issue of HIV and healthy decision making with your child?
- What would you say if another parent admitted to being too embarrassed to talk with his or her child about HIV and other sexual health topics?

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Research from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that when mothers talk with their children about sexuality—including birth control, condoms, and reproduction—those young people are more likely to delay sexual intercourse, and use protection when they do have sex.

# Making Smart Choices



## ➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

As you grow up, you're faced with many choices. Sometimes, you may feel overwhelmed. Let's talk about how your choices can help you stay safe and healthy.

## ➤ **Ask young people**

- Kerry says if you can't talk with your partner about sex, you're probably not ready to have sex. If you agree with this statement, why do you agree?
- If you felt embarrassed talking openly about certain topics, what steps could you take to try to get more comfortable?
- Veronica says safer sex is the next safest thing to abstinence. What does this statement mean?
- Kerry says if she had valued herself more, she would have waited to have sex. How can someone's self-esteem affect his or her decisions about sexual activity?
- Pedro says not all young people have sex. Name ways you can feel close to another person without having sexual intercourse.
- What would you say to a friend who told you he or she was having sex even though they didn't want to?
- What did Kerry say about the effectiveness of latex condoms?

## ➤ **Remind young people**

Researchers from the federal government report that latex condoms are highly effective in protecting against HIV and pregnancy when used correctly, from start to finish, every time one has sex.



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

It's normal to feel a lot of pressure growing up. Let's talk about the young people in this program, and how their responses to pressure hurt them over the long term.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Kerry says if she had valued herself more, she would have waited to have sex. How do you remind your child that he or she is valued and loved?
- How do you stay aware of your child's emotions?
- How can you help your child choose to delay having sexual intercourse?
- Do you think talking with your child about condoms gives him or her permission to have sex?
- How could you begin a conversation with your child about condoms?
- If you've talked about condoms with your child, what have you said?
- If you've discussed how to use condoms and where to get them, explain how you did this.

➤ **Remind parents**

Researchers from the federal government report that latex condoms are highly effective in protecting against HIV and pregnancy when used correctly, from start to finish, every time one has sex. Researchers have concluded that children whose parents talk with them about condoms are more likely to delay sexual intercourse and use condoms when they do have sex.

# HIV, Sex, and Drugs



## ➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

Kerry says sex and drugs don't mix. Let's talk about why this is true.

## ➤ **Ask young people**

- Antigone admitted she made poor decisions about sex when she was drinking. How does alcohol, or other drugs, affect your decision-making?
- Following through on decisions can be challenging. For example, someone may vow not to drink. Why might it be difficult to follow through on that decision?
- If you've made a decision to postpone having sexual intercourse until you are older or married, where can you find support to help you keep that promise to yourself?
- Pedro says when we think of HIV and drugs, we often think of intravenous (IV) drugs. What's the connection between IV drugs and HIV?

## ➤ **Remind young people**

Kerry says your actions today can affect you tomorrow and for years to come. She says that by making and following through on smart choices, you can control whether you contract HIV.



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Kids experience a lot of peer pressure growing up. Let's talk about the importance of helping children make positive choices, even when their friends may not.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Name ways young people may react to feeling peer pressure.
- Teenagers who drink alcohol are more likely to have sexual intercourse than those who avoid alcohol. Why is this so?
- How would you explain to your child that alcohol affects the way people make decisions?
- One of the best ways to teach a child is to be a good role model. Give an example of how you're a good role model for your child.
- Kerry says children's actions today can affect their lives for a long time. How can you help your child believe this?
- Young people whose parents talk with them about drugs are more likely to avoid using those substances. How can you find ways to discuss drugs, including alcohol, with your child?

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Young people are more likely to seek their parents' support and guidance when they can talk openly with them. Listening without judging creates opportunities to share your values with your children.

## Family Health Productions

Family Health Productions produces multimedia to help young people and their peers and families talk about the challenges young people face growing up.


Jeanne Blake is the producer of *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS*. She is president of Family Health Productions and of Blake Works. Blake is a medical journalist and an affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School. She speaks to parents in corporations, health care organizations, and schools, and consults nationally on family communication. She is the author and producer of the *Words Can Work*™ series of books and DVDs for parents and young people.



## Also from Family Health Productions


### ***Alcohol: True Stories* hosted by Matt Damon**

Four young people tell how alcohol affected their lives and encourage their peers to avoid underage drinking. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

*Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers* 


### ***The Power of Girls: Inside and Out*<sup>®</sup>**

Five girls talk about challenges they faced growing up. Topics include bullying, eating disorders, early sexual activity, and loss, and how support from friends, family, and the community made the difference. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

*Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers* 

### ***Boys on Bullying***

Five boys tell how bullying affected their lives, and how support from friends, family, and the community made the difference. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

*Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers* 

### ***Raising Healthy Kids*<sup>®</sup>: Families Talk About Sexual Health**

Gives parents information and skills for talking with kids about sexual health. Includes discussion guides.

Program #1 *For parents of young children* Addresses setting limits, labeling body parts, how babies are made, self-touch, appropriate/inappropriate touch and more. 20 minutes.

*Recommended for parents and other caregivers* 

Program #2 *For parents of preadolescents and adolescents* Addresses sharing values, keeping communication open, postponing sexual intercourse, avoiding absolutes, building strong relationships, and more. 20 minutes.

*Recommended for parents and other caregivers* 

### **To place an order or to ask about other resources contact:**

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# Acknowledgements

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