

# telling your partner you are living with an STI

Some sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as herpes and HIV, aren't curable, which means if you get one of these STIs, you will always have it. If you are living with one of these STIs, you may be considering whether or not to tell your sexual partner(s) about it. This is sometimes called disclosure.

## Should I tell my partner(s) I have an STI?

It can be difficult to tell a partner you are living with an STI. Factors that can make disclosure difficult include:

- **Stigma:** some people have negative stereotypes about people with STIs, even though STIs are very common and anyone of any age, race, gender, class and sexual orientation can get them.
- You may worry your partner will make fun of you, put you down, call you names, tell other people or refuse to have sex with you.
- You may be having sex with someone you don't know well and don't know how, or aren't ready, to bring it up with them.
- If you are experiencing violence in your relationship or are financially dependent on your partner, you may not feel that you can disclose without fear of violence or financial consequences.

Although it can be difficult, there can also be many benefits to telling your partner that you are living with an STI. These include:

- Having an open and honest conversation with your partner(s) can build greater trust and intimacy. You may even find your partner has been wanting to talk about it too.
- You and your partner(s) can explore new ways to have a healthy, exciting and fulfilling sex life/romantic relationship.
- It allows your partner(s) to make informed decisions about sexual activity and their health.
- Being up front saves you from having to disclose later on should the relationship become long term.
- It is your choice whether or not to tell someone you have an STI\*. Whatever you decide, there are many ways for you to have a healthy and fulfilling romantic and/or sex life.

for youth ages 13-29

**planned parenthood toronto health services**

offers drop-in and scheduled appointments.  
call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

for youth ages 13-19

**teen health source**

offers anonymous/confidential sexual health info for teens and by teens.  
text: 647-933-5300, call 416-961-3200, email: [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)



**planned  
parenthood  
toronto**

**choice is yours.**

## When and where to have the talk

- Consider talking before you become sexually active together. Your partner(s) may appreciate having the chance to make an informed decision beforehand.
- You may be worried that having the conversation will ruin the mood or feel like a “downer”. Pick a non-sexual moment when you can be alone to talk.
- Choose a moment when you are both in a positive mood, there is enough time to talk and neither you or your partner is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Nothing defeats good communication like feeling too tired, having a bad day, feeling rushed or not having a clear head.
- If you can, try to have the conversation in person - talking over the phone or online can lead to misunderstandings.
- If you are concerned about threatening behaviour or violence but still wish to disclose, consider a park or coffee shop which are public but still offer some privacy. To get support around the violence in your relationship, call the Assaulted Women’s Help Line at 1-866-863-0511.

## Get talking

The way you begin your conversation will depend on the person and what you know about them. Here are some tips:

- Normalize the talk. Make your disclosure part of a general conversation you might have with any partner about safer sex, STI testing history and, if applicable, birth control.
- If you’ve talked about uncomfortable topics with this partner before, what worked? What didn’t work? Use what you know about the person you are talking to.
- If you’ve disclosed your STI before, what worked? What didn’t work? Use what you’ve learned from past experiences.
- Think about what you’re going to say in advance. It may help to write it down and/or practice in front of the mirror or with a supportive friend.
- When you tell them, be calm, direct, and stick to the facts.
- Try not to do all the talking. Allow your partner time to speak and encourage them to ask questions. Have outside information ready, such as pamphlets and websites, from reliable sources.

## Potential Icebreakers

Finding the right words to start the conversation can be hard. Consider framing the discussion in a positive way like:

- “I’m really happy with our relationship...”
- “I really care about you so I want you to know...”
- “I value you as a partner and I want to tell you...”

*\*If you are HIV positive, there are laws around disclosure and sexual activity. To find out how this law affects you, visit [www.halco.org](http://www.halco.org).*

for youth ages 13-29  
**planned parenthood toronto health services**  
offers drop-in and scheduled appointments.  
call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

for youth ages 13-19  
**teen health source**  
offers anonymous/confidential sexual health info for teens and by teens.  
text: 647-933-5300, call 416-961-3200, email: [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)

 **planned  
parenthood  
toronto**  
**choice is yours.**

If you don't know the person well and you are not ready for a bigger discussion, consider something like:

- "Tonight's going to be fun but you should know I have... should we use your condom/dam/glove, or mine?"

### What if they don't react well?

- Remember how you felt when you first found out you had an STI. It may have taken you some time to get used to the idea and your partner(s) may need time to adjust as well.
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings, correct any misunderstandings and offer the person time to think about it.
- Sometimes people have a negative reaction based on past experiences, misinformation or fear. Having outside information ready can help reduce fear and provide accurate facts.
- Let them know that you are committed to finding a way to make the relationship work if they are interested. Give your partner(s) time and don't pressure them to make a decision about the relationship in that moment.
- Remind your partner(s) that having an STI doesn't mean sex has to be less pleasurable or fun and that there are ways to lower the chances of passing on the STI. Suggest some of the tips listed in our fact sheet "Safer Sex Tools".
- You deserve respect. If your partner threatens you, puts you down, or calls you names, consider whether you want to continue having a relationship with them.

### Dealing with rejection

- Feel good about your decision to treat someone's health with respect even though it may not have been easy.
- Know that many people are comfortable having a relationship with someone who has an STI even if this person wasn't.
- Remember that your worth as a person didn't change when you received your diagnosis, and it shouldn't change now.
- Keep in mind that it is your STI that is being rejected, not you.
- Remember - the next person you tell may really appreciate your openness and courage.
- Spend time with friends and family who love and accept you.
- Consider seeking out other people who are also living with an STI. There are STI-specific support groups in Toronto:
  - o Phoenix Association - Toronto's herpes support group: [www.torontoherpes.com](http://www.torontoherpes.com)
  - o ACT - AIDS Committee of Toronto: [www.actoronto.org](http://www.actoronto.org)

for youth ages 13-29  
**planned parenthood toronto health services**  
offers drop-in and scheduled appointments.  
call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

for youth ages 13-19  
**teen health source**  
offers anonymous/confidential sexual health info for teens and by teens.  
text: 647-933-5300, call 416-961-3200, email: [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)

 **planned  
parenthood  
toronto**  
**choice is yours.**

• If you want to get support anonymously, there are online forums for people living with STIs. Please be aware that the medical information posted on these sites may not be accurate:

- o American Social Health Association's STI message board: <http://www.ashastd.org/phpBB/index.php>.

- o Blog about STI stigma: [fuckyeaherasingstigma.tumblr.com/](http://fuckyeaherasingstigma.tumblr.com/)

**for youth ages 13-29**  
**planned parenthood toronto health services**  
offers drop-in and scheduled appointments.  
call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

**for youth ages 13-19**  
**teen health source**  
offers anonymous/confidential sexual health info for teens and by teens.  
text: 647-933-5300, call 416-961-3200, email: [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)

 **planned  
parenthood  
toronto**  
**choice is yours.**