

My Future is My Choice

The Government of Namibia, with support from UNICEF, is running a “life skills” training activity called My Future is My Choice.

The aim of My Future is My Choice is to provide young people, between the ages of 15 to 18 years, with information and skills which will help them to:

- **avoid HIV infection**
- **avoid teenage pregnancy**
- **avoid alcohol and substance abuse**

My Future is My Choice, is run under the Life Skills Project of the Government of Namibia and UNICEF’s Youth Health and Development Programme. The Ministries involved in the project are the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The activity is **free of charge** and is implemented at schools.

The National Youth Council, the partner ministries and the Catholic Bishops Council are implementing the My Future My Choice activity with the support of various other partners working with young people in Namibia.

When My Future is My Choice is run at your teenager’s school, it is run as an extra curricular activity. This means that the activity is implemented after school hours and will not interfere with the regular schoolwork. Your son or daughter must volunteer to sign up and make a commitment to attend the 10 two hour-long training sessions. The training sessions are run after school with approximately three sessions per week. Trained youth facilitators run the sessions, and they are supported by contact teachers in each school.

Information for Parents

on My Future is My Choice Life Skills Training for Young People

Young people who sign up for My Future is My Choice need the support of their parents. The information and skills the young people learn during the training need to be supported and reinforced at home by frank and open communication on sexual health between parents and young people.

As a parent have you heard about AIDS?

Do you know all about HIV?

Did you know that...

- **one out of every five Namibian between the age of 15 and 49 is already infected with HIV.**
- **the main way people contract HIV is through unprotected sexual intercourse (sexual intercourse without a condom).**
- **over 50% of young people in Namibia between the ages of 15 and 18 are already having sexual intercourse.**

It is important that young people have the correct information about HIV and AIDS, as this disease is spreading very rapidly in Namibia. They also need correct information about sexual health. Young people need the skills to put this information in to practice, and My Future is My Choice is aimed at developing these life skills, especially negotiation skills and critical thinking skills. Young people need these skills to be able to avoid risky behaviour.

Parents can present clear and accurate information about sex, reproduction and sexual behaviour.

Do you know that using a condom can prevent HIV infection and other STD's.

Do you think it is important to know how to use a condom?

Do you think it could be a matter of life and death if your teenage son or daughter knows how to use a condom?

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM THEIR PARENTS

In Namibia, like in many other countries, most parents do not talk openly with their children about sex. When the subject is mentioned, most parents give girls warnings like -- "stay away from boys or you will get pregnant" -- without any explanation or discussion. When sex education has been addressed it is often through the extended family members, like aunts and uncles and is related to the preparation for marriage.

Namibia has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world, with almost 20% of the population 15 - 49 years of age already infected. With this rapid spread of the HIV epidemic, many parents have become extremely concerned about their children's future, and many of them are talking to their teenagers and children about the dangers of AIDS.

If you are not talking about it, now could be the time for you to start talking with your children about HIV prevention. This will also mean talking openly and frankly about responsible sexual behaviour. Your children need and they also want your support!

You can let your children know that they can come and talk with you at any time.

WHY SHOULD WE TALK WITH OUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX?

Here are some good reasons for talking with your children about sex:

- According to recent academic research studies in Namibia, 37% of 12 to 14 year olds and 50% of 15 to 18 years olds are already sexually active.
- The risks associated with early sexual activity include unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV infection.
- Studies from around the world show that parents talking with their children before they are sexually active can protect them from engaging in early sexual activity.
- **There is no scientific evidence that talking about sex will encourage young people to experiment with sex. In fact the research shows it helps them to delay sexual activity, and practice responsible sexual behaviour if they are already sexually active.**
- If you don't talk with your children about sex they learn about sex from other sources, and what they learn is often not accurate information.
- Many issues which face young people in Namibia today are the result of cultural practices which prohibit young people from asserting rights guaranteed under the Namibian Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This situation is especially true for young women, many of whom are marginalised and victimised.

SOME IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS MAYBE USEFUL TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

The first step is to agree that it is the wrong approach to say that such things are beyond your children's knowledge. They watch TV, they see magazines in shops, they read books and magazines, and they hear adults and other children talking about sex.

If you start talking about sexual behaviour and the consequences of sexual activity, your children will have accurate information and the skills to make responsible decisions.

HOW CAN WE TALK WITH OUR CHILDREN?

- Try to be open to the topic.
- Show interest when your children raise the issue of HIV, AIDS or sex.
- Listen and hear what they say about the subject.
- Have a discussion on HIV and AIDS and find out what your children know. Then ask about what they covered in each My Future is My Choice session, if they have signed up.
- When faced with questions you have difficulty with, tell your children that you will get back to them with more information.

- Remember how it felt to be young and the issues that occupied you as a teenager.
- Try to give positive messages to your children.



My Future My Choice Graduates in Omaha.

WHO CAN HELP US?

Sometimes it is not easy for parents to start talking with their children, but there are people around us who can and want to help. For instance, this could be a relative -- aunt, uncle, cousin or a grandparent, as well as friends and elders in your community.

There are also professionals in your community such as teachers, health care workers, social workers, health educators, religious leaders as well as other organisations working with people to prevent HIV/AIDS, that are able to help and can give you additional information.

My Future is My Choice is an activity where your children's school helps you start the discussion on sexual health with your child and his or her peers. To ensure your child has a healthy future, free from HIV, it is important that you continue the discussion.

There are many opportunities to talk with your children, and there are people and sources in the community to help you.



As parents we can set good examples for our children to follow.

The Future Is Your Choice...



**For information or queries about sex, relationships and
HIV/AIDS you can contact:**

AIDS Care Trust of Namibia•Tel: 061-259590

Life Line•Tel: 061-232221

UNAIDS•Private Bag 13329, Windhoek•E-mail: anna@un.na•
Tel: 061-229220•Fax: 061- 229084

UNICEF – YHDP, Question Line•P.O. Box 1706, Windhoek•
E-mail: ask.us@fo.unicef.un.na•Tel: 229220 •Fax: 061-224413

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