

Free To Be Me!



A comic book guide for young people on how to live happily and healthily with HIV in their lives.

Why you need to read this booklet:

In this booklet, young people share their stories about living with HIV and staying healthy in Namibia today.

You will find out everything you need to know about living happily and healthily with HIV. It is possible for young people to have exciting and fulfilling lives, even if they are HIV-positive.

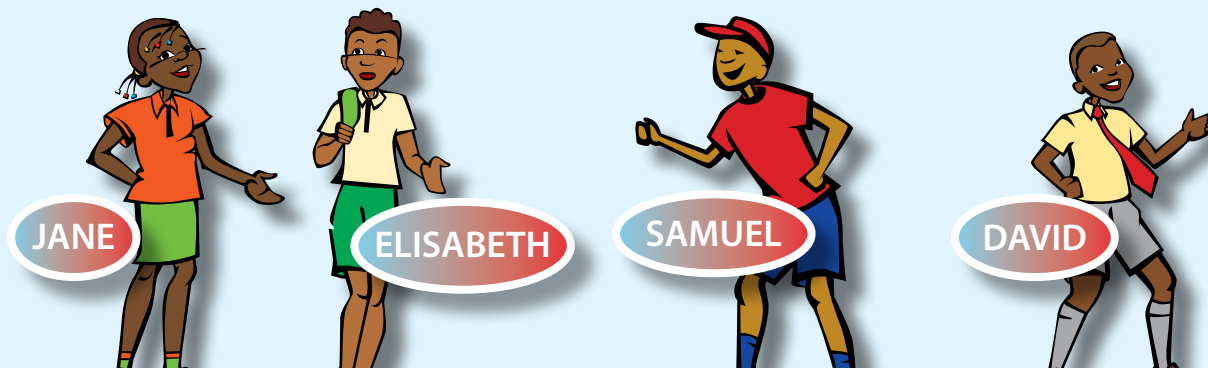
Health care providers and HIV HIV counseling and testing centres will also find this booklet useful, as it provides important information and advice for 10 – 19 year olds, about living positively.

Meet JANE , ELISABETH, SAMUEL and DAVID!

SAMUEL and ELISABETH have been dating for a year. SAMUEL works as an apprentice carpenter.

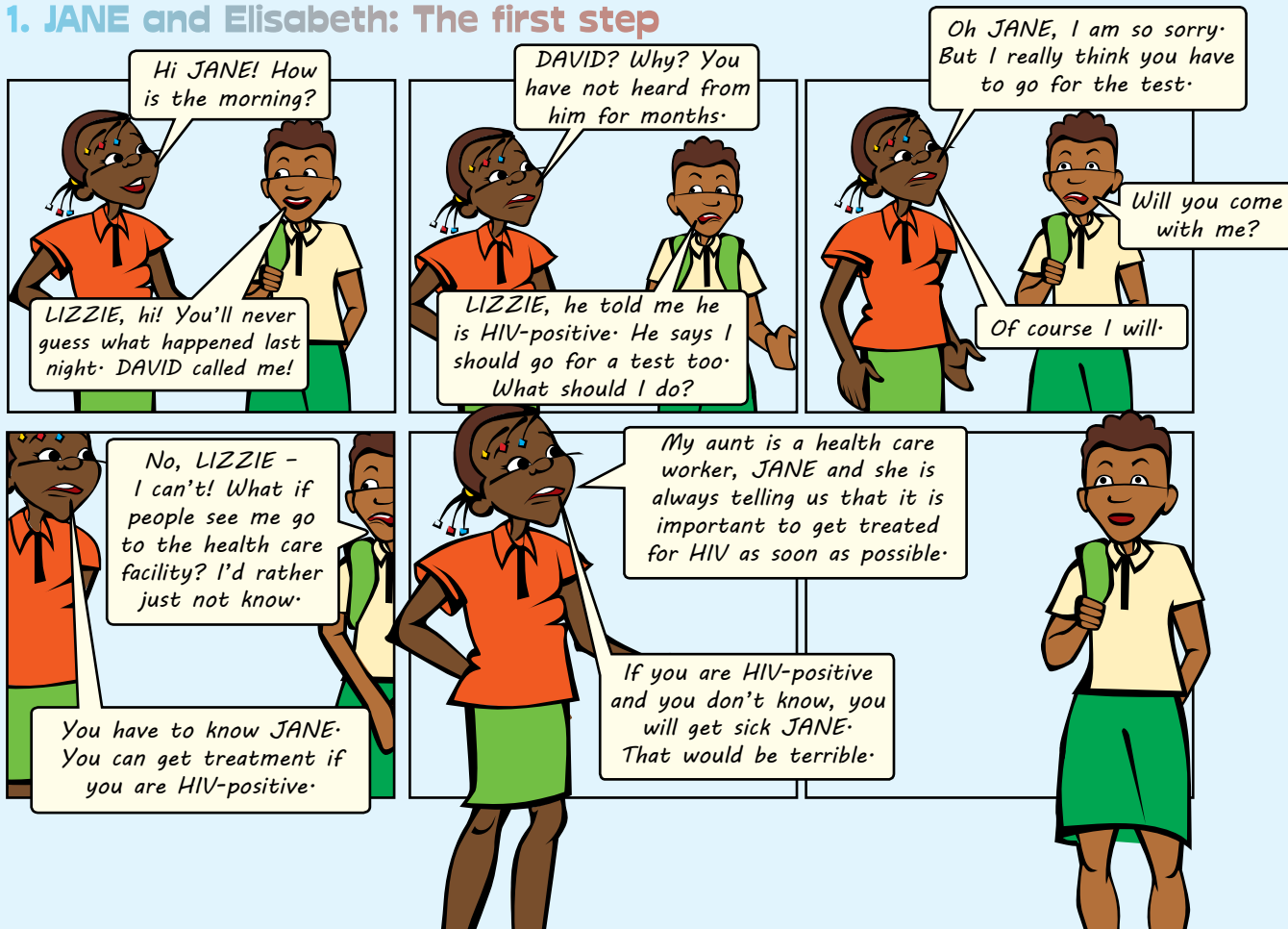
JANE and ELISABETH are best friends. They go to school together and tell each other everything.

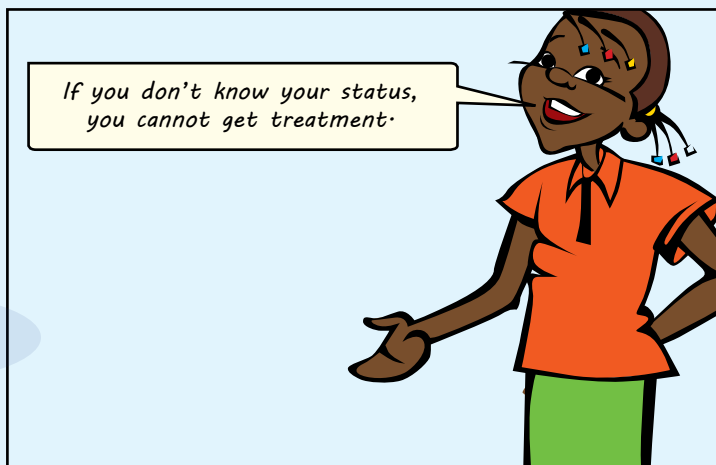
JANE used to go out with SAMUEL's friend, DAVID, but they broke up after JANE found out he had been cheating on her. DAVID went back to his home town after that and they haven't seen each other since.



Section A: Our Stories

1. JANE and Elisabeth: The first step





Facts I have learnt:**Find out your HIV status today**

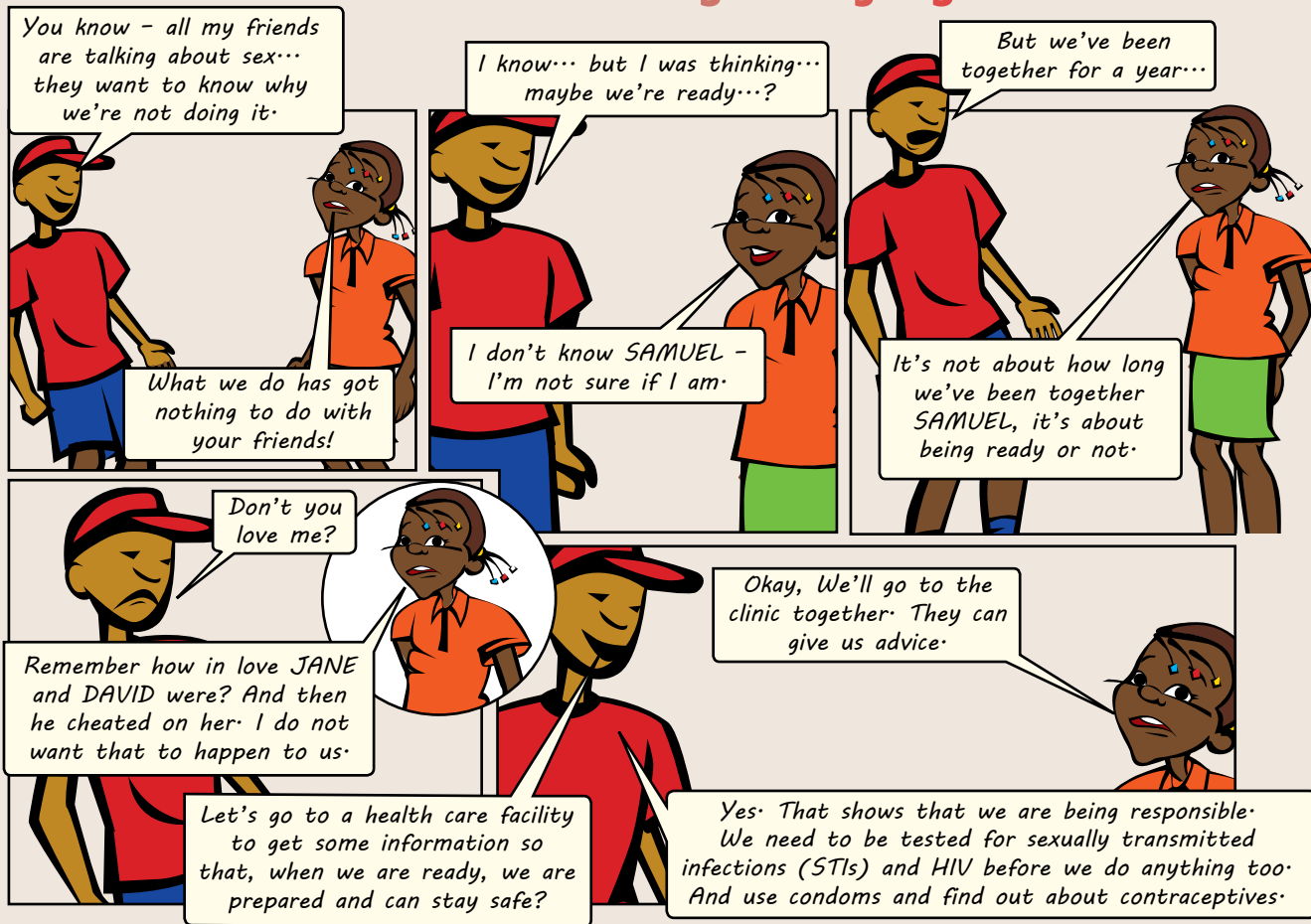
- Everyone should know their HIV status.
- By finding out your HIV status early, you can get earlier treatment and stay healthier.
- If you do not know your HIV status, find out by visiting an HIV Counseling and Testing centre (HCT) or health care facility today.

Try this together:

- By talking to JANE , DAVID showed that he is very responsible. Discuss with your friends how you can show that you are responsible and mature.
- Where in your community can you get an HIV test? If you do not know, ask an adult you trust, like a teacher, family member or neighbour.

My Scribble Space

2. SAMUEL and Elisabeth : Planning to stay together



Facts I have learnt: Being prepared for sex

- Listening to your boyfriend or girlfriend and not pushing them shows that you respect them.
- Being informed and ready before having sex helps you to stay safer.
- Being HIV-positive does not mean that someone is promiscuous.

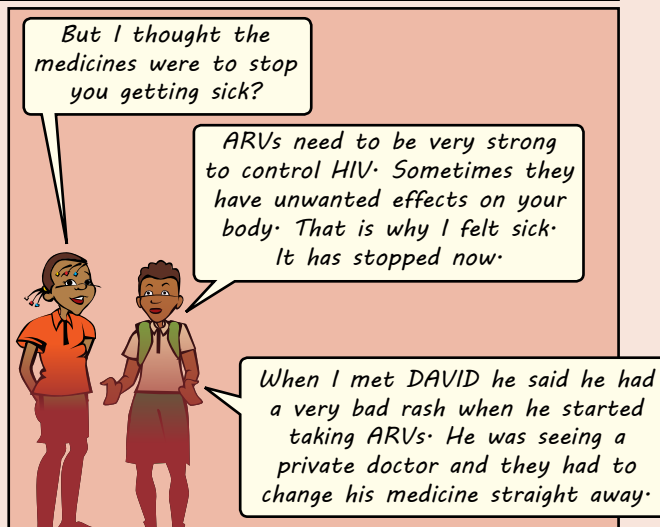
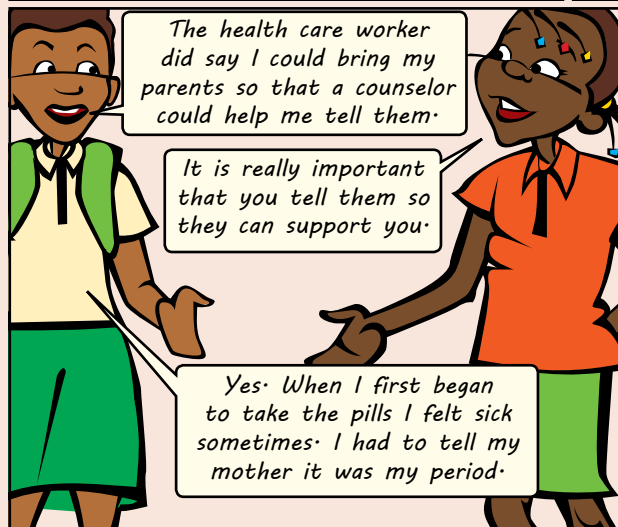
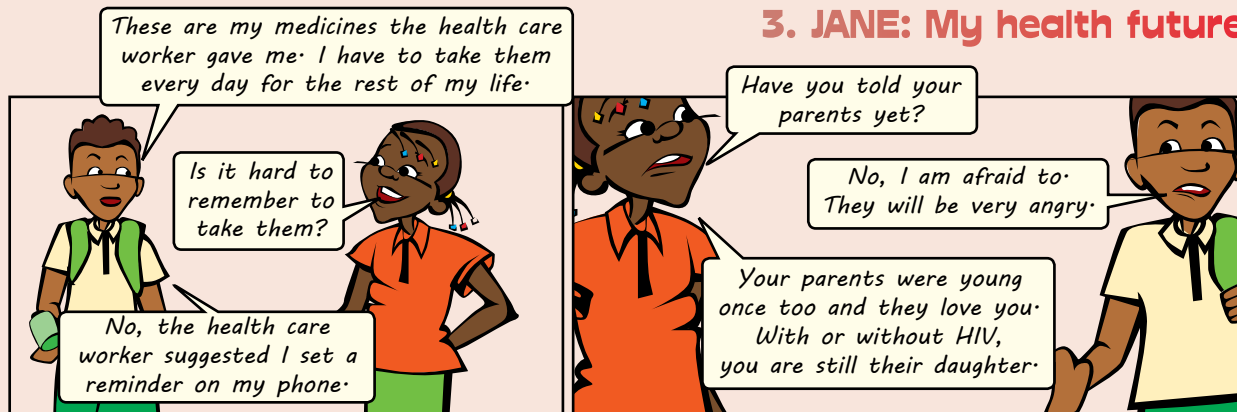
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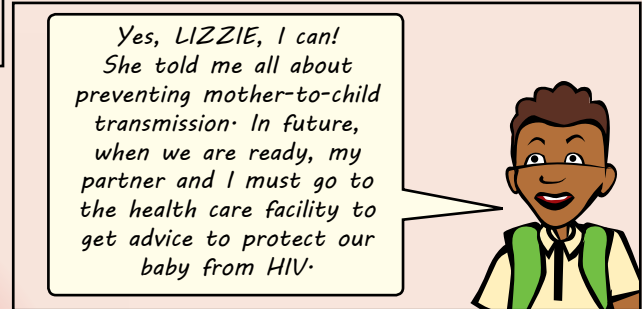
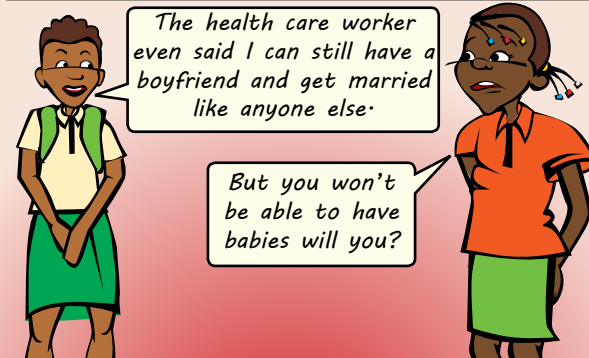
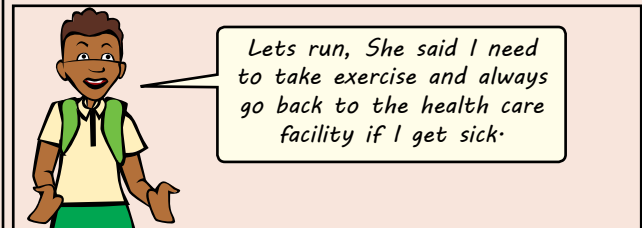
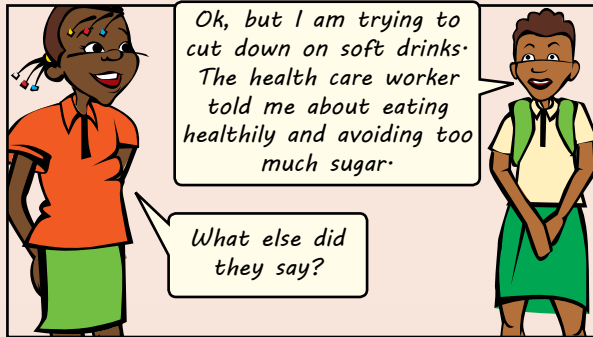
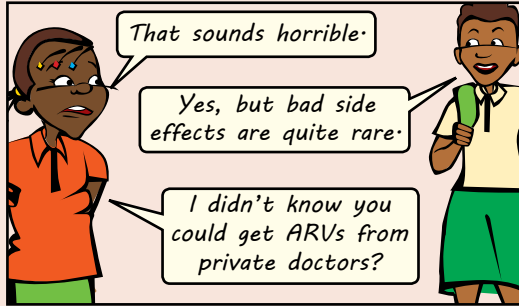
- With your friends, discuss some of the things that boyfriends or girlfriends might say to each other to encourage them to have sex. What responses can you think of to stay safer?
- Where can young people get safer sex information and services in your community?

My Scribble Space

A vertical yellow notepad with horizontal lines, intended for writing. The notepad is titled "My Scribble Space" at the top. It has a white border and a slight shadow, giving it a 3D appearance. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the notepad.

3. JANE: My health future





Facts I have learnt: HIV treatment saves lives

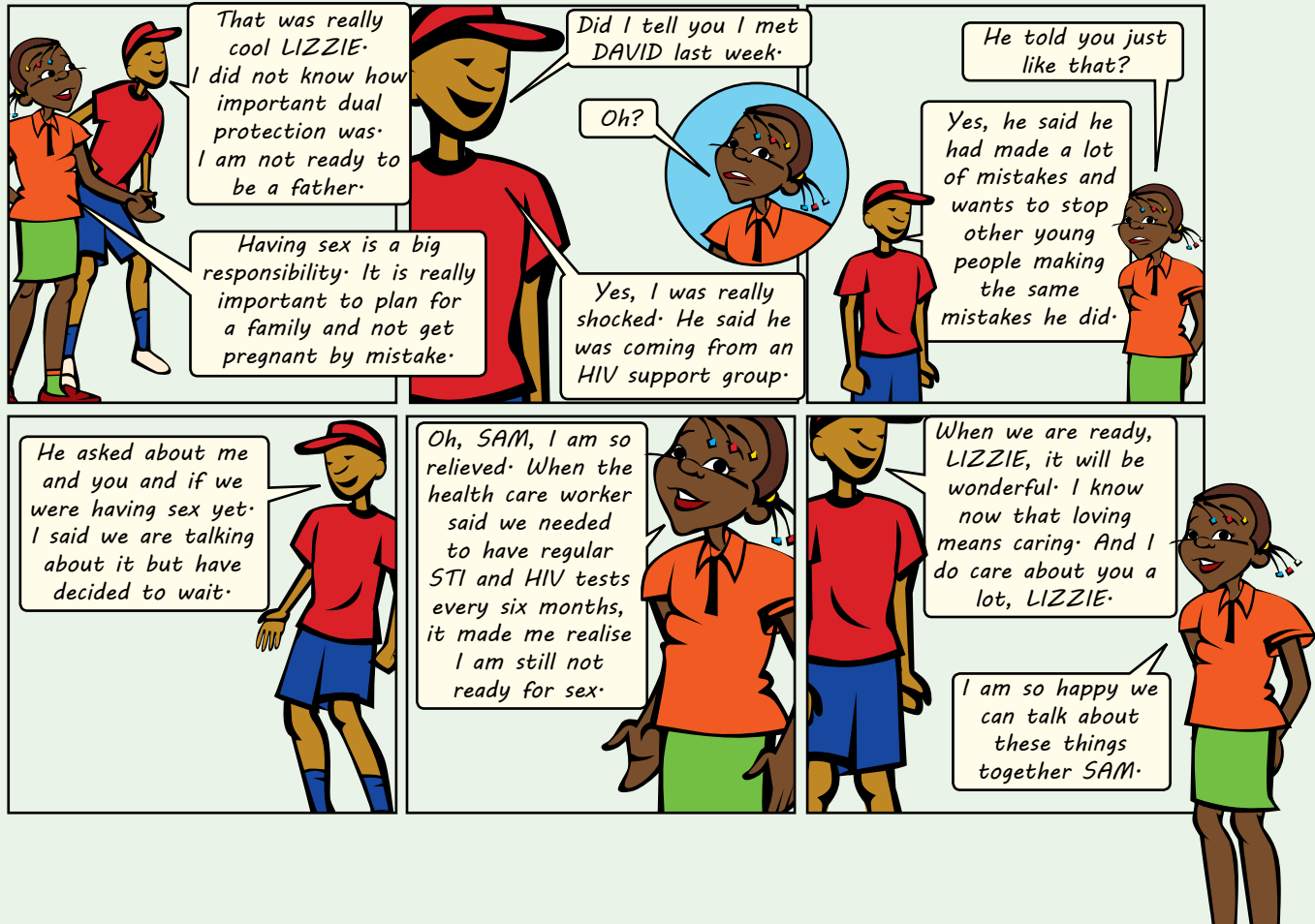
- If you start taking ARVs, you must take them every day exactly as your health care worker tells you, for the rest of your life.
- Cellphones are a good way to remind yourself to take your medicines.
- Side effects from ARVs usually go away after a few weeks, but some side effects may mean you need to change your ARVs.
- Everyone who is pregnant or planning to have a baby must go for HIV testing, and get advice on prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) if they are HIV-positive – to stop them passing HIV to the baby.
- With treatment, people living with HIV can live a long, healthy and happy life – they can do all the things that HIV-negative people can do.

Try this together:

- Finding out that you are HIV-infected is hard. What can you do to help support people living with HIV and make their lives easier? Discuss with your friends or ask your teacher to have a class discussion about this.
- Where else can you get ARVs from?
- Living healthily is important for everyone. What does healthy living mean? Discuss with your friends – or ask your teacher to talk to your class about this.

My Scribble Space

4. SAMUEL and Elisabeth: Good things come to those who wait



Facts I have learnt: Delaying sexual debut and using dual protection

- Unprotected sex can lead to unplanned pregnancy, HIV and STI infection.
- Contraceptives prevent unplanned pregnancy – visit a health care facility to find one that works for you.
- Condoms, used correctly every time, are the only contraceptives that prevent unplanned pregnancy as well as STI and HIV infection. Ask a health care worker to show you how to use condoms correctly, if you are not sure.

Try this together:

- What do you think about SAMUEL and ELIZABETH's relationship? Discuss this with your friends or partner.
- Is it hard to delay sex? Discuss with your friends.
- Knowing about safer sex helps young people to make safer, more responsible decisions. Try talking to your parents or guardians about this – you can read this book together to start the discussion.

My Scribble Space

5. DAVID: Get support to overcome stigma and discrimination

I feel so alone and confused...

JANE, I've been trying to find you since we last spoke.

What do you want DAVID? I don't want to see you

I saw her taking medicines... that is what happens when you sleep around!

JANE, I understand that you are angry with me. Did you go for a test?

Yes DAVID. And yes, I'm also HIV-positive. Now everyone is whispering about me and it is all wrong!

I am so sorry JANE. What they are doing is called stigma - it happens because people do not understand the facts, or take time to understand your situation. It is very hurtful I know.

Yes. Last week there was a party and I was not invited.

Discrimination is really hard. Joining a support group for people living with HIV helped me. Maybe there is one near here that you can join?

Meeting and talking to other people in your situation will make you feel less alone.

I have found good friends in my support group. They have helped me come to terms with being HIV-positive.

Oh, they mentioned this at the clinic. Maybe I should join, everyone is gossiping anyway.

Thanks DAVID. It has been good to talk. When I find a support group, would you come with me?

Yes, of course, JANE.

Facts I have learnt: Stigma and discrimination

- Treating someone unkindly or differently is very hurtful and makes it harder for them to get the services they need to stay healthy and protect others.
- Be supportive and kind to people living with HIV – it makes it easier for people living with HIV to accept their status.

Try this together:

- How did it make JANE feel when people were whispering and pointing at her? Discuss this with your friends.
- Are you going to be like the group of people who were whispering and being hurtful, or like DAVID who is trying to help JANE ? What can you do to make people living with HIV feel less alone? Make a list with your friends.

Everyone should know their HIV status



I can be responsible and respect myself by:

- ✓ Being true to myself.
- ✓ Saying no to things I feel uncomfortable with.
- ✓ Delaying sex.

I can be responsible and respect others by:

- ✓ Not pressuring my partner into sex.
- ✓ Talking about what I value.
- ✓ Communicating worries and concerns.



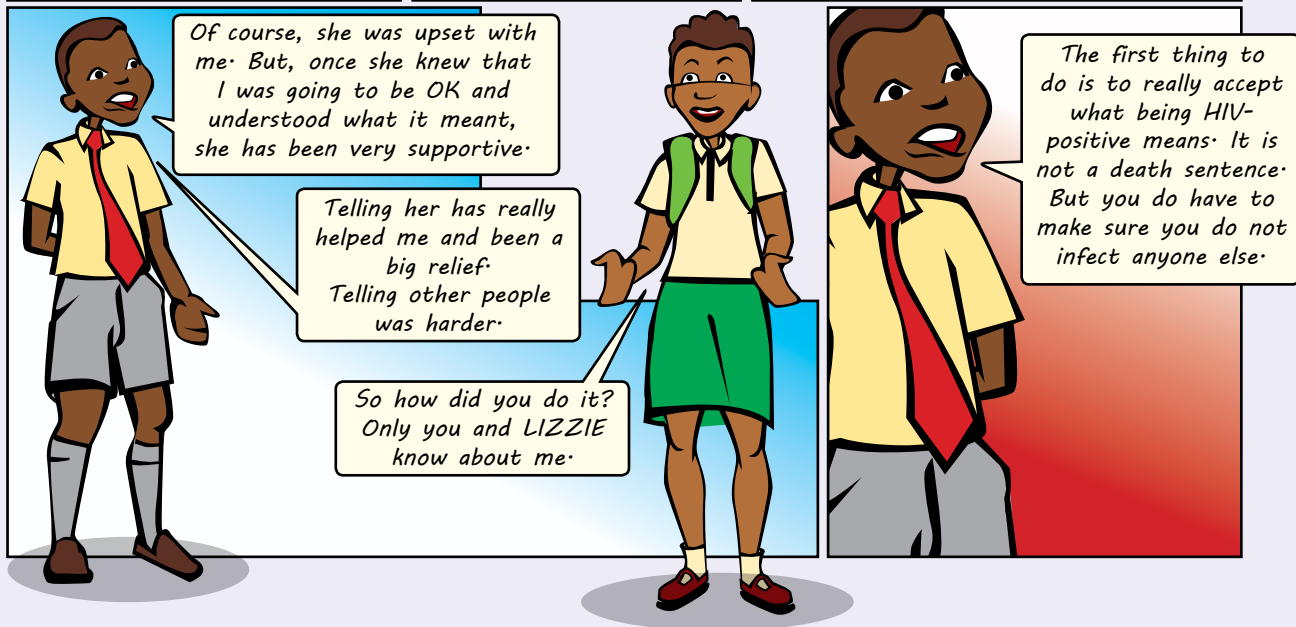
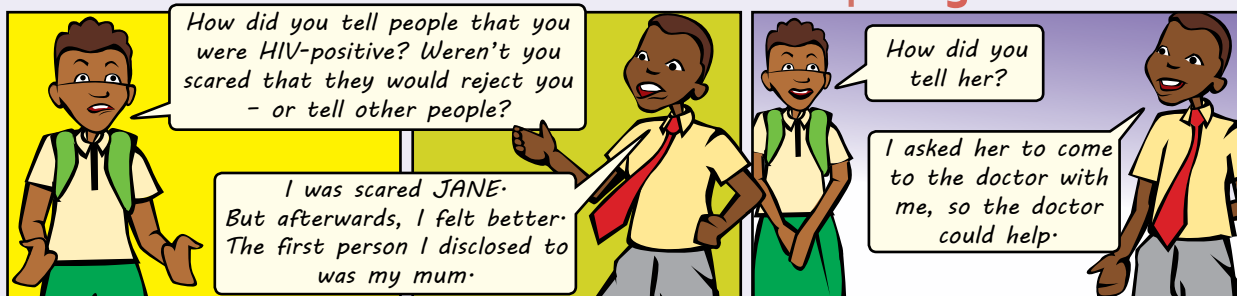
Do you have a role model or a hero who could help you decide how to respect others more?

Draw a picture or write about this person and show why you have chosen them



Know your HIV status for a healthier future

6. JANE and DAVID: Preparing for disclosure

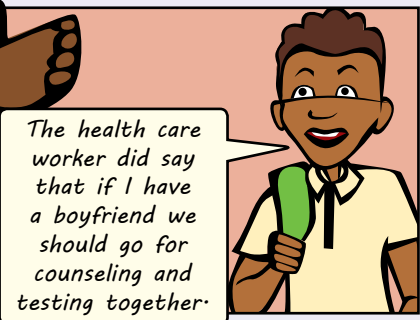




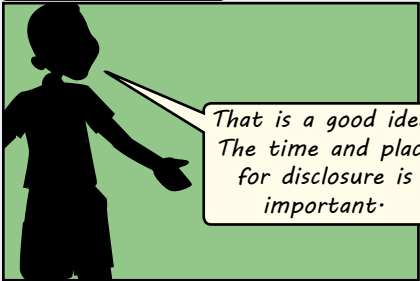
Once you are ready to disclose, think about who you want to tell and why you want to tell them. You need to be sure they will support you. And you need to be prepared in case they don't.



If someone rejects you because of your HIV status, they were not a true friend.



The health care worker did say that if I have a boyfriend we should go for counseling and testing together.



That is a good idea. The time and place for disclosure is important.



Disclosing takes courage - if you disclose to someone they should respect your courage, support and care for you.

Facts I have learnt: Preparing for disclosure

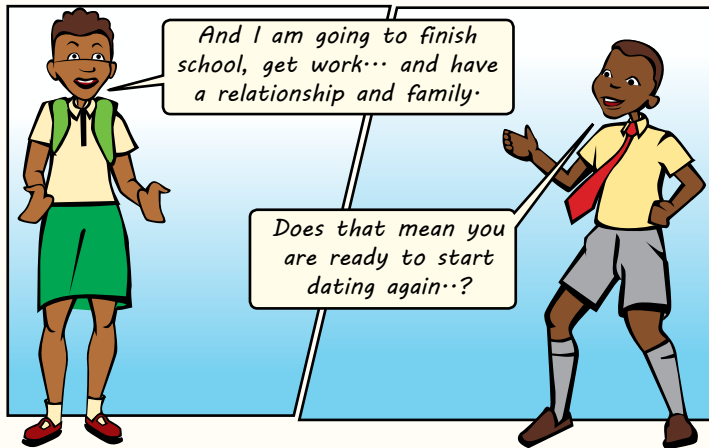
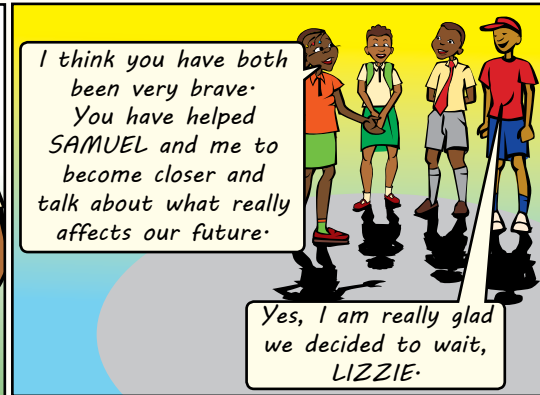
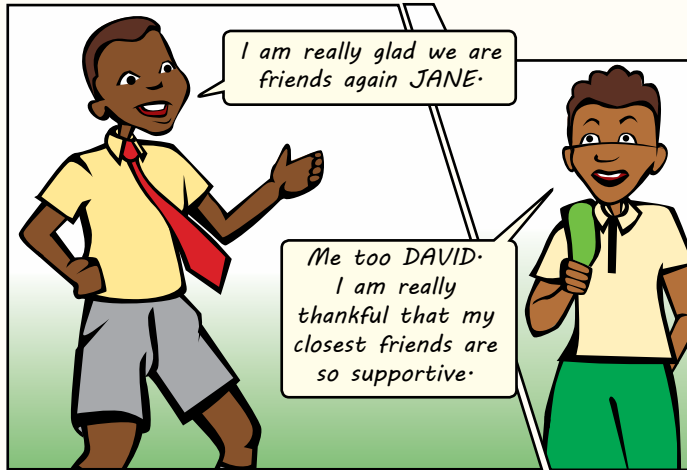
- Telling someone you trust that you are living with HIV can help you to get help and feel more supported.
- If you decide to tell someone about your HIV status, make sure that it is someone you trust who will not tell anyone else.
- Choose the time and the place, and have all the information you need at hand.

Try this together:

- How can you make it easier for people living in your community to live openly with HIV? Ask your teacher to have a class discussion about this.
- Being informed about HIV helps you to understand it better – and to be a better friend to people living with HIV. Find out more about HIV today – ask for information at a health care facility near you.

My Scribble Space

7. Our future - We can do it



Facts I have learnt: My future – I can do it

- Accepting your status helps you to start looking forward to a healthier future.
- Being HIV-positive does not stop you from doing anything you want to do – but it is your responsibility to protect your health and the health of others.
- Support and communication are really important for a healthy future.

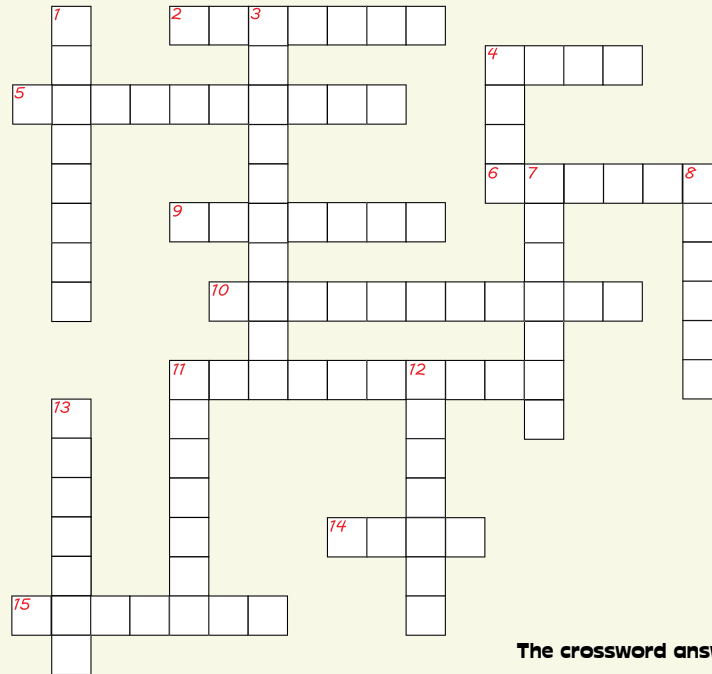
Try this together:

- What have you learnt about HIV testing and counseling, treatment and prevention? Make a list with your friends.
- What else do you want to know about HIV and sex? Visit a health care facility or ask an adult for more information.

My Scribble Space

Section B: Making Learning Fun – Games, My Champion Checklist & More

1. My Free to be Me Crossword



The crossword answers are on page 28

Across

2. Having a good diet, getting plenty of rest and getting any other infections treated is part of living.
4. The name given to medicines which are used to treat HIV
5. When you tell someone you trust you are living with HIV it is called
6. Everyone should know their HIV
9. The only contraceptive which prevents against unplanned pregnancy and HIV or STI infection.
10. Sex without a condom is called sex.
11. of mother-to-child transmission services helps to protect against HIV infection of the baby during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.
14. The name of infections that can be passed on through unprotected sex
15. Real mentheir partners.

Down

1. When you only have sex with one person it is called being
3. Not having sex at all is called
4. Without treatments, HIV can lead to
7. You can find out your HIV status by going to an HIV counseling and centre.
8. When people treat others unkindly because they think they are different, it is called
11. Your HIV test results are which means only you and your doctor will know them.
12. about feelings and how to protect yourselves is an important part of a healthy relationship.
13. groups for people living with HIV help them to meet other people who are in the same situation.

2. I can be an HIV Counseling and Testing Champion! - My Checklist

By being HIV Counseling and Testing Champions, we can help to reduce HIV in our communities. This includes being supportive of people living with HIV so that they can get the services they need more easily.

Below is an HIV Counseling and Testing Champion's Checklist. Make sure that you are a Champion by doing all these things:

HIV Counseling and Testing Champion's Checklist	
✓	I know about HIV and I understand my risk
✓	I know my HIV status
✓	I abstain from sex or practice safer sex
✓	I protect others from HIV infection
✓	I only have one sexual partner and use condoms everytime we have sex
✓	I support people living with HIV
✓	I know that ARVs must be taken every day for life, exactly how the health care worker says to take them
✓	I do not discriminate or stigmatise
✓	I am a protector – I do not push people into sex and I never use force
✓	I stay faithful to my one partner

Share the information in this booklet with your friends, family and others so that they too can become HIV Counseling and Testing Champions.

3. Ten things about HIV which are not true

There are a lot of things about HIV which people think are true but are not. This can put them and the people they care about at risk. Make sure you know what is and is not true so that you can protect your own health and the health of the people you care about.

Not True	True
All people living with HIV will die	These days there is very good treatment for HIV – called ARVs. People living with HIV can live just as long and healthily as people who are HIV-negative.
HIV infection can be passed through sharing plates, cups and other things we use to eat, or from bath tubs and showers	HIV infection can only be passed through unprotected sex (sex without a condom), unsafe blood contact (eg. sharing razors or needles) or from a mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding – if she does not receive prevention services.
People living with HIV are promiscuous – they have had sex with many people	People can become HIV-infected in many ways: some people are born with HIV, others may become HIV-infected through rape – or after having unprotected sex with one person if that person is HIV-infected. HIV-infection is not a sign of being promiscuous.
You can tell if someone is HIV-infected	People living with HIV can stay healthy for a long time without looking sick. The only way to know for sure if someone is HIV-positive is through a blood test.
Babies born to people living with HIV will also be HIV-positive	These days there are very good ways of preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV so that HIV-positive women can have HIV-negative babies. Anyone who is pregnant, or planning to have a baby, must find out their status so that they can protect their baby from HIV infection.

<p>Young people do not need to know about condoms or safer sex as it will encourage them to have sex</p>	<p>Having correct information, and being able to get the prevention services they need, helps young people to make safer, responsible choices about sex, including delaying sex.</p>
<p>Family planning and HCT services are for women only</p>	<p>Both partners in a relationship have a responsibility to protect their own and each other's health. Going for joint family planning and couples counseling helps you understand safer sex options that work for both partners.</p>
<p>If both people in a relationship are HIV-infected, they do not need to use condoms</p>	<p>Even if both partners are HIV-infected, they must use condoms correctly every time. Otherwise they may re-infect each other which means they will get sicker and their ARVs may stop working.</p>
<p>I cannot get HIV-infected the first time I have sex</p>	<p>You can get HIV ANY time you have unprotected sex – including if it is your first time or you only do it once. You must know your own and your partner's HIV status before ever having unprotected sex. You can also get pregnant the first time you have sex if you do not use contraception. Always use a condom correctly.</p>
<p>Being friends with someone who is HIV-positive puts me at risk</p>	<p>Being friends with, and supporting, someone living with HIV helps them to get the prevention and treatment services they need to stay healthy which is better for the whole community. Being friends does not put you at risk – only having unprotected sex or exchanging blood puts you at risk.</p>

4. Some important words

Check here if you come across or hear any words to do with HIV that you do not understand:

Abstain: Not having sex at all. Abstaining will protect you from HIV, pregnancy and STIs, but it can be very difficult to do all the time.

AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus. This is the illness, or group of illnesses, that someone living with HIV will eventually be affected by if they do not get treatment.

ARVs: Antiretroviral medicines are prescribed to people living with HIV to help them live long, healthy lives and keep their immunity strong.

Discrimination: Treating someone differently from others because of something that you know or think you know about them.

Dual Protection: Using condoms, together with another method of contraception.

Health Facility: A place where you can get health care, HCT and information on contraception and PMTCT.

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus is the virus which, without treatment, can lead to AIDS.

HCT: HIV Counseling and Testing. HCT centres provide free counseling and testing services for people wanting to find out their HIV status.

PEP: Post Exposure Prophylaxis can be taken following a situation where someone may have been HIV-infected, eg. after someone has been raped, or a condom has burst. It should be taken within three days.

PMTCT: Prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission of HIV services are measures which can be taken to prevent a mother passing HIV to her infant during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

Promiscuous: Having many sexual partners.

Sex: Whether you are male or female, but it is also used to mean having sexual intercourse - usually when the penis penetrates the vagina or anus.

STI: Sexually Transmitted Infections - a group of infections and viruses which can be spread through unprotected sexual contact.

Sexual debut: When a person has sex for the first time.

Stigma: Thinking badly about a person because of some characteristic they have (eg. being HIV-positive), especially when it is something they cannot change.

Transmission: The way something is spread, eg. disease, like an STI or HIV.

5. My action list

Am I at risk?

What can I do to stay safe?

Who else can benefit from reading this comic book?

There are some suggestions listed already – add your own actions and things that you plan to do to the list – and then do them!

My Free to be Me Crossword

Down:

1 – Faithful. 3 – Abstinence. 4 – AIDS. 7 – Testing. 8 – Stigma.
11 – Private. 12 – Talking. 13 – Support.

Across:

2 – Healthy. 4 – ARVs. 5 – Disclosure. 6 – Status. 9 – Condoms.
10 – Unprotected. 11 – Prevention. 14 – STIs. 15 – Protect.

My Action List

- Visit an HCT Centre for more information and to find out my status
- Talk to my partner about how we can reduce our risk
- Share this information at school, in my community and with my family

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