

What can I do as a parent?

Q Dear Doctor,
My daughter who was born with HIV and has been on ARVs almost all her life is now 23 years old. Because of the good care and adherence to her medicine, no one can guess she is living with the virus. What is bothering me is that she has moved in with a young man whom she told me is HIV negative. She says he knows she is HIV positive and does not mind, but he does not want his parents to know about it. She says he supports her to continue taking her medicine. When I told her what she was doing was wrong, she told me off; insisting they are adults. What does one do as a parent in such a case?

Florence

A Dear Florence,
With the efficacy of ARVs, improved care for people living with HIV and better coverage of both health and treatment literacy; many people now understand that one having HIV does not mean he or she is going to die or infect his or her sexual partner with the virus like it

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was in the pre-ART era.

ARVs have thus gone a long way in eroding the stigma associated with HIV. Therefore, instead of discouraging people with discordant HIV results from relating with each other, they should be supported to seek couple counseling, so that they make informed decisions. This seems to be the case with your daughter and her partner, if indeed she has disclosed her HIV status to him as she told you.

Your role as a parent and a person living with HIV yourself is to offer parental and peer support, so that the young people can live positively with HIV in their nascent family; and work

together to prevent new HIV infections and AIDS related deaths for your daughter and others who are already infected.

Concerning disclosure to others including parents, religious leaders or any other person, it should be one's choice. This is because disclosure should be for a purpose; either to prevent possible onward transmission of the virus to others or when one discloses in order to get support. Some people do

public disclosure to "give HIV a face" as a way of fighting stigma; but again, it should be voluntary and no one should be under pressure to disclose his or her HIV status for the sake of disclosure without a purpose.

