



Talking with your GSA about HIV & AIDS

HIV/AIDS continues to be a major health concern for young people – all young people – so the most important thing we can do is talk about it, talk about it, talk about it. The good news is that contracting HIV is totally preventable. Be Smart. Be Safe. Get Tested.

The number of HIV-positive youth is rising, and the only way that will change is if young people are educated, access testing, and take steps to protect themselves. Here are just a few ideas on how you can start conversations with your GSA about HIV/AIDS:

- Since this can be a difficult thing to bring up or talk about, watch a video or read an article about HIV/AIDS at a meeting and have a discussion about it.
- Invite an HIV-positive person and/or a professional working in the HIV/AIDS prevention field to come talk to your group.
- Make sure that your GSA knows that HIV/AIDS is not just a “gay thing” and that HIV does not discriminate (HIV rates are higher amongst men who have sex with men in the U.S. so it’s an important issue for GSAs to address, but infection rates worldwide show 50% of those newly infected are women, and one of the fastest growing infection rates in the U.S. is amongst women).

Have discussions about why it’s important to get tested, and encourage your friends and fellow GSA members to get tested if they think they might be at risk:

- Know where testing sites are and when they do testing in your area and have this information available to students. (You can find this information at www.hivtest.org)
- Don’t make accusations about people by implying they need to be tested; instead encourage *everybody* to be tested if they have had *any* risk.

Organize an event in your school that is around a date that is recognized for HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness:

- December 1st is World AIDS Day. Have a panel of professionals and/or HIV-positive folks do a presentation in your school. Distribute red ribbons to teachers and students with information including local and worldwide statistics of HIV/AIDS.
- June 27th is National HIV Testing Day. Disseminate HIV testing information through Facebook and other social media, since most students aren’t in school in June.

Be a resource for students in your GSA and school regarding services for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment:

- This doesn't mean you have to be an expert, just that you know where to get information or answers to questions other students might have about HIV/AIDS. Two good websites to search for basic (and advanced) information are **aidsinfo.nih.gov** and **www.thebody.com**.
- Know organizations in your community that help those living with HIV/AIDS as well as HIV prevention services.
- If there is a Rainbow Alliance for Youth (RAY) group near you, consider attending their meetings and becoming a Youth Health Promoter. You can find a list of the RAY groups here on the Diverse & Resilient website at **www.diverseandresilient.org**.

Know and encourage risk reduction when it comes to HIV prevention, as well as prevention of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy:

- Have safer sex materials available to other students (barriers such as external and insertable condoms, dental dams, lubrication). **If you can't distribute or have these in your school, make sure you know community resources where youth can get free supplies.**
- Encourage your school to have inclusive sex education instead of abstinence-only education. **While abstinence is the only 100% way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), youth need to know prevention methods if they are having sex.**

Have a fundraiser or volunteer time as a group for your local AIDS Service Organization:

- Organize your GSA to have a team in the Milwaukee AIDS Walk or volunteer for the annual AIDS Network Cycles Together (ACT) Ride as crew members/day volunteers or get a team of riders together. (Check out websites for Wisconsin AIDS Service Organizations at **www.arcw.org** for more information.)
- Have a baked goods or red ribbon sale, or simply ask students to bring in donations and make a group donation to your local AIDS Service Organization.
- Contact your local AIDS Service Organization and see what your GSA can do to help. Many times they have simple tasks that need to be done like putting together mailings, creating safer sex kits or they may have special needs that a small group of people would be perfect for.