

Finding support through it all

My HIV test

I got tested in 2009, during the time I was staying at Rogers Memorial Hospital. I was there getting treated for depression, and we had regular group therapy sessions. During one of the sessions they talked to us about the idea of getting tested, and for some reason I started crying when they brought it up. I didn't ask to get tested right away, but eventually I did.

They drew blood for the test. They took probably four or five small tubes. When the doctor called, he told me that I needed to come in and get my test results. When I got there, the doctor had a little card in his hand with my results on them. He told me I had tested positive for HIV.

The doctor told me that I could go to ARCW (The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin) to get counseling if I wanted. It took me three or four months to go, and I started attending a men's group, but I didn't stay with it for very long. It just made me more upset.

Getting the results

When I found out the results of the test, I was shocked. I thought it would never happen to me. It's an unexplainable feeling. I knew that it was one of two people who gave it to me, and I was pretty sure which one it was. I was pissed at him. I called him when I found out and yelled at him. I told him I was going to kill him. I felt like he had killed *me*. Then I find out he wasn't the one who gave it to me.

Managing the day-to-day

At first I wasn't going to make any changes. I feel like I had too much anger to do anything at first. Finally, I started taking medicine, but I would start and stop. Some of the medication doesn't make you feel good. Your weight can go up and down depending on what they give you. Plus, it costs money.

When I go to the doctor for check-ups, it starts out like other doctor visits. They weigh you. A nurse takes your vitals. But now there might be a case manager there with the doctor. They are there to help you with housing, finding a job if you don't have one, that kind of thing. They are there to help – to provide different resources.

Telling my family and friends

I didn't tell anyone for a long time. But last summer, everyone started finding out. People talk, you know? For one friend, it was too much to handle. He couldn't talk about it. Sometimes I try to hide it from friends.

When my aunties found out they started crying. My mom said she felt sorry for me, and she was the one who told my father. I don't talk to my family about this particular situation. I feel like they could care less sometimes.

Finding support

I thought that if I came out as positive, no one would love me and no one would support me, but that's not true. I have found support, for one, from my boyfriend. When I first found out that he liked me, I told him that I was positive. I gave him time to think about it.

He has helped me a lot. He comes with me to all my doctor appointments. He makes sure I eat right and take my medications. If I am breaking out or having a reaction, he asks me if I'm alright.

Advice for other youth

The first thing I would say is that they shouldn't be having sex. Everyone feels pressure to do it, and some folks act out by having sex or doing drugs. But it's just not worth it. If you are thinking about having sex with someone, go get tested together. If they don't share their status with you, you don't know. And even if they do share, some people lie about it. There is this perception that if you're positive you won't find love. People are scared, so they lie.

There is also the idea that if you're positive, you'll give it to everyone. But that's not true. If you're taking your medications like you're supposed to, and if you're using other protections, you can really lower your chances of spreading it.

You're probably going to be nervous going to get tested, but there's nothing to be scared of. What you don't know *can* kill you, and it's better to just find out. What you *do* know can make you stronger.

If you find out that you are positive, you have to forgive the person who gave it to you. You have to put your pride aside. I know that's really hard to do, but you have to if you want to go on and live a happy life.

I just want to live a happy life.

Discussion Questions

1. Alfonso said that he thought it (getting HIV) could never happen to him. How common do you think this belief is? Why do you think this is?
2. Some gay men believe that being HIV positive isn't a serious diagnosis and that the disease can be controlled by taking a pill with no ill side-effects or complications. According to Alfonso, is this an accurate perception? Why might this perception exist?
3. Alfonso said he thinks that youth should not be having sex. Why do you think he said that? What do you think of this advice? What are some good reasons to delay having sex?
4. What are the pros and cons of relying on someone to tell you their HIV status?
5. What do you think he was afraid of before telling his friends and family about his status? What are some stigmas or commonly held misperceptions about people with HIV or AIDS?
6. What kind of support did Alfonso get from his boyfriend? How did his boyfriend's support help or change the situation? If you had a friend or family member living with HIV/AIDS, what are some ways you could show them support?