



## A2 ACTIVITIES TO REVEAL HIDDEN ISSUES

# HIV counselling and testing



## Why use this activity?

This activity explains what VCT (voluntary counselling and HIV testing) is. It helps people to think about the issues involved in going for voluntary counselling and HIV testing themselves.



## A brief description

This activity helps people to imagine what it is like to go through the VCT process, and clarifies what is involved.



## You will need

- plain paper
- scissors
- photocopies of the information on 'Voluntary counselling and HIV testing' at the end of this activity (for literate participants who would find this helpful)

In some places, the process is called **HTC – HIV testing and counselling** and also **CT – counselling and testing**



## Time taken

30 - 40 minutes for the activity itself, in addition to the time needed for preparation.



## What to do

### Preparing for the activity

- Cut up enough small pieces of paper so that the people taking part in the activity have one each. Make half of them in the shape of a square and the other half in the shape of a triangle. Fold all of the pieces and put them in a box, bag, or bowl.
- Find out what VCT facilities are available locally, and what procedures they use for counselling and testing for HIV. If possible, obtain leaflets about the services they offer to give to your participants. You could also try to arrange for a counsellor from a local VCT centre to come and talk about VCT and the services they offer. They may even be able to provide a counselling and testing service immediately after the session.
- Get tested yourself, if you have not already! When explaining VCT, participants often ask the facilitator: 'Have you been for VCT yourself?' If you can honestly say: 'Yes, I have,' and talk about it based on your own personal experience, it will add credibility and impact to the session.

Awareness - raising

Children &amp; youth

Climate &amp; environment

Conflict &amp; peace-building

Corruption &amp; governance

Disaster risk management

Discrimination &amp; inclusion

Food &amp; livelihoods

Gender &amp; sexual violence

Health &amp; HIV

Influencing decision-makers

Migration &amp; trafficking

Water, sanitation &amp; hygiene

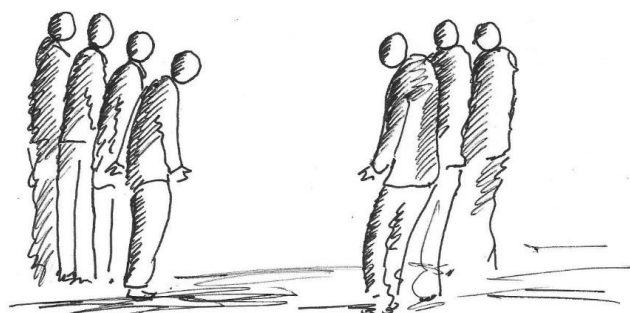
### Step 1: Discuss HIV testing issues and concerns

Clarify that an HIV test is the only way of knowing for sure whether or not you have the virus in your body.

#### Discussion questions:

- What happens during VCT?
- What do you need to think about before having the test?
- How would it feel if your test result was HIV-negative?
- How would it feel if your test result was HIV-positive?
- Who would you tell and how might they react?
- Who among you would decide not to go for a test?

- Ask everybody to stand together in the middle of the room.
- Ask those who say they would **not** go for a test to take a step back. Those who **would** go for a test should move forward, so the two groups are separate.



### Step 2: Imagine going for VCT

Get participants to imagine going through the VCT process, describing it using your own words:

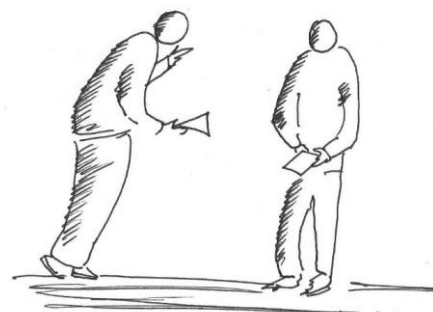
You could say: *'I would like you to relax and imagine you are now going for VCT. You go for pre-test counselling, and then give a blood sample. The blood sample is tested and you are coming for the results. Your counsellor invites you into the counselling room and asks you to sit down. The counsellor asks if you still want to know your result.'*

- Ask if there is anybody who does not want to know their result. Ask them to put up their hand.
- If anyone puts their hand up, ask them to move to join the group at the back who chose not to go for VCT.

### Step 3: Give 'test results'

Get each participant who says they want their test result to pick one of the folded pieces of paper.

Explain: *'Imagine the piece of paper you have picked represents your test result. Open it up. It is in the shape of either a square or a triangle. One means that your test result is HIV-positive, the other that your test result is HIV-negative. How would you feel if I told you that a square means an HIV-negative result, and*



*a triangle means an HIV-positive result?’*

Ask: *‘Those whose test result is negative, how do you feel? Those whose test result is positive, how do you feel? What would you do next? Who would you tell?’*

Then ask how people would feel if the results were reversed, ie a square meant an HIV-positive result and a triangle meant HIV-negative.

Include in the discussion those who ‘decided not to go for a test’, or who did not get their result. Ask: *‘How do you feel now about not knowing your HIV status?’*

#### **Step 4: Discuss where testing is offered**

Find out from participants whether they know where VCT is available in their area. Discuss what options might be available for participants to access VCT. Give participants the name, location, opening times and cost of VCT centres. Try also to provide details of centres in other towns outside the area, for people who want to be sure of confidentiality.

#### **Step 5: VCT counsellor presents information, answers questions and – if available – offers testing (optional)**

If you have a counsellor or representative from a local centre offering VCT, ask them to describe the services offered and answer questions from participants. If mobile HIV testing and counselling services have been arranged, they can also explain how participants can use these services.

#### **Step 6: Bible study – The grace to face our fear**

**Read Philippians 1:12–14 and Matthew 26:36–42.**

Discussion questions:

- How does Jesus describe his soul? Why do you think this is? Can you imagine how fearful you might feel going for a visit to the VCT centre? Perhaps you have been. Can you describe what it was like or might be like – the night before or on the day?
- Paul was imprisoned. Jesus was detained and about to be crucified. Each had his own reason for sorrow and fear. What is happening in our lives that causes us sorrow or fear? What about the lives of people in our community?
- How do we view God’s deliverance and grace? When we look at the life of Jesus, or of Paul when he was in prison, we see that grace does not always bring the change or deliverance we might expect. If it is true that our situations do not always change, then what does grace change?
- When going for an HIV test, how will you or did you know that God’s grace and peace are with you?

**Key points:** Jesus and Paul experienced sorrow and fear. God does not always bring the change or deliverance that I might want or expect, but his grace is always with me to help me change my attitudes and how I address or face an issue or crisis.

**Read Job 32:1–8.**

Discussion questions:

- Why is Elihu angry with Job? Why is Elihu angry with Job's friends?
- Who does Elihu think has better understanding? Does this reflect how things work in our community? Do we wait for age/wisdom to speak first?
- In what sense do our communities react like Job or Job's friends in relation to people living with HIV or getting tested for HIV?
- Imagine you were one of Job's friends. What would you be saying?
- Is it time to speak with the wisdom that comes from God? How can we gain this wisdom?

**Key points:**

Job justifies himself that he has not sinned. This may be like someone saying they do not need an HIV test because they have done nothing wrong.

The friends who condemn Job can be like community members who rush to condemn. Yet, some people living with HIV have never had sex, or have been faithful all their life to their husband or wife.

You could finish the session by saying together:

*'May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and for ever more. Amen.'*

**Finding out more**

- Tearfund and Samaritan's Purse UK (2011) *Think livelihoods! A facilitator's manual for applying a livelihoods lens when working with people, households and communities affected by HIV*  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/sustainable\\_livelihoods/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/sustainable_livelihoods/)
- Tearfund (2009) *Guardians of our children's health (GOOCH)*  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/preventing\\_parent-to-child\\_transmission/gooch/?d=1%3Fd%3D1](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/preventing_parent-to-child_transmission/gooch/?d=1%3Fd%3D1)
- Tearfund (2011) *HIV and your community: a facilitator's supplementary guide to Umoja*  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/church\\_mobilisation\\_on\\_hiv\\_issues/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/church_mobilisation_on_hiv_issues/)

**Notes**

- *This activity is taken from Tearfund (2009) Guardians of our children's health (GOOCH) resource:*  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/preventing\\_parent-to-child\\_transmission/gooch/?d=1%3Fd%3D1](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/hiv/preventing_parent-to-child_transmission/gooch/?d=1%3Fd%3D1)

**Related tools:**

- A1 – Revealing HIV: information for facilitators [A1: Health & HIV-1]
- A2 – How HIV spreads [A2: Health & HIV-2]
- A2 – My supporters: tackling HIV stigma [A2: Health & HIV-3]
- A2 – How HIV affects livelihoods [A2: Health & HIV-4]
- B – Attitudes towards disease and difference (Bible study) [B: Discrimination & inclusion-1]
- B – Loving the outcast (Bible study) [B: Discrimination & inclusion-2]
- B – Caring for widows and orphans (Bible study) [B: Discrimination & inclusion-3]
- B – HIV and AIDS and the glory of God (Bible study) [B: Health & HIV-1]

### Voluntary counselling and HIV testing (VCT)

Some hospitals and clinics can test your blood to see if it contains HIV, and many countries have specialist centres offering VCT. In many places this is now called HIV Testing and Counselling (HTC).

When HIV enters the body, the body makes antibodies to fight against the HIV. It is difficult to find HIV itself, but the test can pick up these antibodies. If the test is positive, it means that the person has HIV in their body. It does not mean they have AIDS. After a person first becomes infected with HIV, the HIV antibodies can take up to three months to develop and show up on the test. This is called the window period. If your test result is HIV antibody-negative, it might be because you are in the window period, and you should get tested again after three months to make sure.

Having an HIV test often brings out strong feelings and emotions, and it is very important to get proper counselling when you have the test.

### How does voluntary counselling and HIV testing work?

Before going for an HIV antibody test, either alone or with your partner, you spend time with a counsellor, who will help you think about your issues and concerns, and will ask questions like:

- What will you do if the test shows you are living with HIV?
- What will you do if the test shows no sign of HIV in your blood?
- Are you sure that you want to go ahead with the test?

The counsellor will meet you again when you get the test result, and help you think through the implications of your HIV test result and plan what to do next. These discussions are confidential. The doctor and professional counsellor should not tell anyone else about your test result or anything that you have said. Sharing the result is up to you. Some churches ask couples to get an HIV test before marriage. This is a good idea, as it is important for couples to discuss how they will cope if one or both of them are living with HIV, and also how they will protect each other if both test negative. However, people should not be forced to have tests. If a couple do decide to have the test, it is also their choice about whether to share the results.

### Who should go for voluntary counselling and HIV testing?

Everyone. No one knows for certain that they don't have HIV unless they have had a blood test. It is good to know your status – if you are negative, you know you can protect your status and, if you are positive, you can be supported in the right ways and also protect others from infection.

### Why go for voluntary counselling and HIV testing (VCT)?

- If you know you are living with HIV, there are many things you can do to stay healthy, live long and still achieve your goals and dreams in life.
- You can enjoy sex while ensuring that you protect yourself from re-infection and protect others from getting infected.
- If you are expecting a child, there are many things you can do to minimise the chance of HIV being transmitted to the child.

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