



A2 ACTIVITIES TO REVEAL HIDDEN ISSUES

My supporters: tackling HIV stigma



Why use this activity?

To demonstrate how easily we can stigmatise others, and to understand how the person being stigmatised may feel. This activity also helps people to recognise the importance of providing support for others, and what may happen if that support fails. Finally, it helps to identify ways of reducing HIV-related stigma and to support those living with and affected by HIV.



A brief description

Participants are divided into groups of seven to ten people. Each group stands in a close circle. Individuals take turns to stand in the middle and allow the rest of the group to support them as they lean outwards. After several people have tried, group members are told to withdraw their support for the next person in the middle.

Participants discuss how the person in the middle feels when well supported, and when support is withdrawn. This emphasises the importance of having support from friends, family and community, and of accepting and not stigmatising or stereotyping someone because they are living with HIV or for any other reason.



You will need

As well as reading and understanding the facilitation notes below yourself, you will need to brief other co-facilitators to use this activity, one facilitator to work with each group of seven to ten people. For example, if you have between 21 and 30 participants, this will make three groups, so you will need two co-facilitators to help you.



Time taken

45–60 minutes

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What to do

Step 1: Introduce the activity and arrange the groups

Welcome everyone and explain that they will be participating in an activity where each participant is expected to be supportive of others in the group.

Divide participants into groups of seven to ten. Because this activity involves physical contact, arrange participants into single-sex groups with men/boys in one group and women/girls in another group, if you think your participants will find mixed groups embarrassing.

Ask: *'When you think of the word "supporters", what do you think of? At a football or cricket match, what do the supporters do for the players?'*

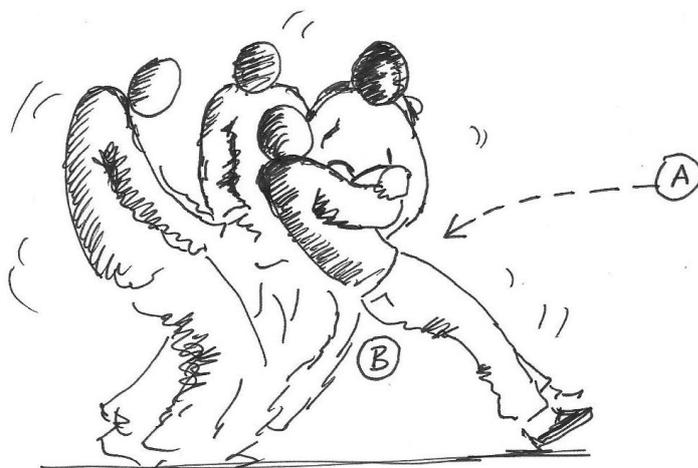
Some responses may be that they cheer, encourage, motivate and inspire the players.

Say: *'We are going to create a support system for each other. Are you ready to support each other in your groups?'*

Step 2: Facilitators teach their groups how to be good supporters

A facilitator should supervise each group and demonstrate this activity by starting off in the middle themselves. If you are the only facilitator, run one group at a time, with the other groups watching. Carefully follow these steps:

- Each facilitator stands in the middle of their group and gets the participants to make a tight circle round them, shoulder to shoulder.
- **Tell** the participants that you are going to ask them to literally 'support' you and keep you from falling to the ground as you lean in their direction.
- **Emphasise that this exercise needs everybody's focus and attention to make it safe.**
- Show participants how to stand with one foot in front of the other, knees slightly bent, leaning forward, arms up and slightly bent. This is the strongest position to catch someone.
- Stand in the middle of the circle, very straight with your feet together, arms folded across your chest, and your hands on your shoulders.
- **Ask** the check-in question: *'Are my supporters ready?'* When they all say, 'Yes,' check they are ready, then say, *'Leaning now.'*
- Select a section of the circle and lean gently towards them. Everyone in that part of the circle should help to catch you, and push you gently back up so you are standing straight and vertical again. (There should always be at least two people catching the person in the middle.)
- Do not move your feet and keep your body straight like a broomstick. Lean in one direction and then another, so that you give each person a chance to help catch you. Encourage the group members if they are doing well. Tell them this is a serious activity with real dangers if they drop someone.



- Continue until you are confident that the group has mastered the skill of supporting someone.

Step 3: Group members take a turn in the middle

Encourage group members to take a turn in the middle of the circle and be 'supported' by the rest of their group. Ask for the first volunteer to come into the middle and stand with their feet together, their arms folded across their chest, and hands on their shoulders. The facilitator now moves to being one of the supporters.

The group members get into their support positions, starting with their hands very close to the person in the middle. Remind everyone to keep their knees bent and body loose to act as a 'shock absorber' for the person leaning.

Before starting to lean, the person in the middle should ask the check-in question: 'Are my supporters ready?'

When all the group members in the circle have their arms up in the 'ready position' and reply, 'Yes,' the person in the middle can say: 'Leaning now,' and then start leaning.

Encourage the person in the middle to close their eyes as they lean. Encourage several people to take a turn in the middle, but only if they want to: do not pressure them to do this.

Step 4: Facilitate a discussion with the whole group

Use the following questions to facilitate a general discussion about the experience.

- 'What did it feel like to be in the middle and be supported?' Look for answers like 'safe', 'supported', 'comfortable'.
- 'Who are the people in your life that act as "supporters" for you?' Possible responses include: friends, husband/wife, other family members, neighbours, fellow church members and religious leaders.
- 'What did it feel like to be one of the supporters?'
- 'Who are the people in your life that you support? In what ways do you support them (including your husband/wife)?'

Step 5: When support is withdrawn

Invite one group to join you to do the activity again, and make a circle where everyone else can observe. Ask for a volunteer to stand in the middle and ask the 'check-in' question. Then stop the activity, explaining that you are going to make some changes.

- Ask two or three of the supporters to put their hands down and hold them behind their backs.
- Ask two or three other supporters to take a big step backwards.
- Ask two or three other supporters to leave the circle and return to their seats.



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- Ask the person standing in the middle:
‘Are you happy to continue with the activity now and start leaning, with only a couple of people left who are still ready to support you?’ (They will undoubtedly refuse.)
‘Why are you refusing?’
‘How do you feel?’
- Ask all participants:
‘Is this what can happen when people find out that a family member, friend, church or work colleague is living with HIV...?’
Some people no longer offer support. (Point to the people with hands behind their backs.)
Some people distance themselves from the person living with HIV. (Point to those who took a step back.)
Some people may reject that person, and break off contact with them. (Point to those who have left the circle and sat down.)
 Explain that these are all examples of external stigma – treating someone else differently or unfairly because of a ‘label’ (such as ‘HIV-positive’) that has been attached to them.

Step 6: Discussion: how can we better support those living with HIV?

Ask/discuss:

- *What are some of the reasons that people reject, judge, avoid and victimise those living with HIV?*
- *If you found out that you were living with HIV, would you feel comfortable telling others in your church and seeking support from them? If not, why not?*
- *Would your family members, friends and fellow worshippers feel comfortable telling you that they are living with HIV? If not, why not?*
- *What needs to be changed? What can we do, both individually and as a church, to be more welcoming and supportive of people living with HIV?*

Step 7: Put good support into practice

Say: *‘We do not want the person in the middle to be left feeling unsupported. So can the group who withdrew support come together and this time provide really good support for the person in the middle?’*

Step 8: Explain self-stigma and that we do not have to accept the stigmatising attitudes of others

Ask participants: *‘Do the stigmatising actions of the supporters change the person in the middle?’*

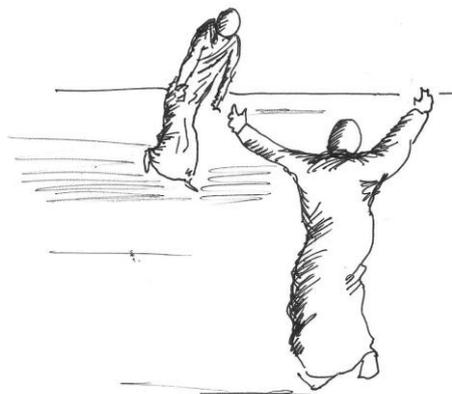
Explain: *‘It probably will affect how the person in the middle feels, but it does not have to. The actions of the supporters will only affect the person in the middle if he or she accepts the stigmatising attitudes of the supporters. This is called self-stigma or internal stigma.*

There will be no self-stigma if their response is something like: “I’m still a good person, wonderfully created and loved by God, whether or not I have some HIV in my body. If that is your attitude to me, that is your problem, not mine.”

Step 9: Stigma and the Lost Son

Ask the participants to read Luke 15:11–32.

Explain: ‘Jesus’ parable of the Lost Son gives examples of stigma, self-stigma and acceptance without stigma.’



Ask: ‘Who in this story demonstrates self-stigma?’

Explain: ‘The younger son returns, saying, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am not worthy to be called your son.’ If he keeps saying to himself things like “I am worthless”, this creates self-stigma. He needs to accept the forgiveness of his father and that he is wonderfully created and loved by the Father, despite the sins he has committed.’

Think to yourself: Do you have self-stigma because of things you have done or said or that have happened in the past? Or do you accept that you are wonderfully created in the image of God, who loves and cares deeply for us, and will forgive when we repent?’

Ask: ‘Who in this story stigmatises another person?’

Explain: ‘It is the older son, who refuses to go in to greet his younger brother.’

Ask: ‘Who is accepting without stigma?’

Explain: ‘The father, despite knowing that his younger son had squandered his wealth in wild living, including with prostitutes, had compassion and welcomes him back. He does not wait for his son to reach the door: he runs to him, throws his arms round him and kisses him.’

Ask: ‘Who are we like, individually and as a church, towards people we know or suspect may be living with HIV, in the way we judge their sexual behaviour? Are we like the elder son or are we like the father? How can we be more like the father?’

Step 10: The Good Samaritan

Either read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, or summarise the story if your participants know it well. Remind the group that in Jesus’ time, the Samaritans were despised and outcast by the Jews. They were thought of as ‘sinners’ because of their origins. In this story we see someone who is rejected by society being the very person to help another human in need.

Ask: ‘Are there examples of this in our own community?’

Encourage participants to reflect.

Ask: ‘Would you be prepared to do what the Samaritan did, or would you prefer to pass by on the other side of the road? Think of one thing you could do in the next week as a “Good Samaritan”.’

Step 11: Close in prayer

Close the meeting with prayer, praying for wisdom and courage to take the approach shown by the Good Samaritan and also by the father in Jesus’ parable of the Lost Son.

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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/
- 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
- 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/

Related tools:

- A1 – Revealing HIV: information for facilitators [A1: Health & HIV-1]
- A2 – HIV testing and counselling [A2: Health & HIV-1]
- A2 – How HIV spreads [A2: Health & HIV-2]
- 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]

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