

ANNE'S LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Lessons

1. No one is immune from HIV, whether you think you are a saint or not – so have an HIV test: if I survived, so can you!
2. Blocking my self-acceptance was my fear that I could not accept that I was living with HIV and my fear that my family would not accept me – this taught me to let close people support and love me in a time of need.
3. Laughter is the best medicine – laughing and smiling release happy hormones, reduce stress and are also good for exercising facial muscles.
4. Once I accepted myself and learnt not to take myself so seriously, I was able to rely on my faith and my sense of humour to heal and shape my life's purpose, including helping others.
5. Being more informed helped me to conquer and move beyond fear – I did this by surrounding myself with love and being inspired by other people living with HIV.
6. Being more informed also helped me to decide when to disclose – remember to be good to yourself and only disclose when you are ready.
7. I decided that HIV did not define me and that I would find my own way to control it, rather than let it control me.
8. I should have got more information on ARVs and their side effects sooner – but once I did, I learnt to accept my body changes and the benefits of ARVs.
9. I have reached a point where I have a vision of my life beyond HIV – a positive, healthy, fulfilling life where the universe is my oyster.

Questions

1. What is your way of loving and accepting yourself just the way you are?
2. How can you encourage open talking in your family to get support around HIV and any other issues?
3. How do you decide when to take big steps like disclosing and who would be the best person to disclose to?
4. How have you tried to bring a touch of laughter into your life to relieve stress?
5. What can you do, as someone living with or affected by HIV, to move beyond fear and to have a more positive outlook on life? Was there a moment or an experience that encouraged you to swim rather than sink?