

# When a friend has AIDS...

... here's how  
you can help.

Although these thoughts are meant primarily for those affected by AIDS, they are relevant to all who are seriously ill, because illness is part of the human condition. These suggestions have been adapted to the specialized needs of people living with AIDS by **Chelsea Psychotherapy Associates**. Founded in 1983 and located in Manhattan, New York, USA, Chelsea Psychotherapy Associates is a group practice of New York-licensed social workers.

**The AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)** is a community-based, non-profit, health promotion organization, dedicated to serving the needs of men and women infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. ACT has been providing AIDS support, education and advocacy since 1983.

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*While serious illness is a fact of everyday life, AIDS has posed new challenges for everyone involved: not only individuals with AIDS, but also their friends. People who are in the prime of their lives have become ill, and their prospects for a long life have been severely affected. Their suffering and fear is shared by people close to them.*

*When someone you know becomes ill, especially with a serious illness like AIDS, you may feel helpless or inadequate. If he or she has been a good friend you may say, "Just call if you need anything." Then out of fear or insecurity you may dread the call, if it comes. Here are some thoughts and suggestions that may help you to help someone who is very ill.*

- Don't avoid him. Be there - it instills hope. Be the friend, the loved one you've always been, especially now when it is most important.
- Touch her. A simple squeeze on the hand or a hug can let her know that you still care. (Don't be afraid... you can not contract AIDS by simply touching.)
- Call before you plan to visit. He may not feel up to a visitor that day. Don't be afraid to call back and visit on another occasion. He needs you. He may be lonely and afraid.
- Weep with her when she weeps. Laugh when she laughs. Don't be afraid to share these intimate experiences. They can enrich you both.
- Call and say you're bringing his favourite dish. Be specific about what time you are coming. Bring the food in disposable containers, so he won't worry about washing dishes. Spend time sharing a meal.
- Take her for a walk or outing, but ask about and know her limitations.
- Offer to help answer any correspondence with which he may have difficulty dealing.
- Call and ask for a shopping list and make a "special delivery" to her home.
- Be prepared for him to get angry with you for "no obvious reason", although you've been there and done everything you could. Permit him this, and don't take it personally. Feel flattered that he is close enough to you to risk sharing his anger or frustration.

- Help her lover, care partner, or roommate. Though she is the one who is sick, they may also be hurting. Care partners may also need a small break from the illness from time to time. Offer to stay with the person who is sick in order to give her loved ones a break. Invite them out. Offer to accompany them places. They may need someone to talk with as well.
- If he is a parent, help care for his children. Offer to bring them to visit.
- Be creative. Bring books, periodicals, taped music, a poster for the wall, home-baked cookies or delicacies to share with visitors. All of these become especially important now. Bring along another old friend who perhaps hasn't yet been to visit.
- Don't be reluctant to ask about her illness. She may need to talk about her condition. Find out by asking: "Do you feel like talking about it?"
- Don't feel that you both always have to talk. It's okay to sit together silently reading, listening to music, watching television... holding hands. Much can be expressed without words.
- Can you take him somewhere? He may need transportation to a treatment... to the store or bank... to his physician... or perhaps to a movie.
- Help her feel good about her looks if possible. Tell her she looks good, but only if it is realistic to do so. If her appearance has changed, don't ignore it. Acknowledge the fact. But be gentle, and remember... never lie.
- Help him celebrate holidays -- and life -- by decorating his home or hospital room. Bring flowers or other special treasures. Include him in your holiday festivities.
- Tell her what you'd like to do for her, and if she agrees, do it. Keep any promises you make.
- Don't permit him to blame himself for his illness. Remind him that lifestyles don't cause diseases, germs do. Help him through this one. It may be especially hard for him.
- Don't lecture her or be angry if she seems to be handling her illness in a way that you think is inappropriate. She may not be where you expect or need her to be.

- Dish with him if he indicates that he's tired of talking symptoms, doctors and treatments. If he seems interested, fill him in on the disco, gym, organization or mutual friends. Take your cues from him.
- What's in the news? Discuss current events with her. Help keep her from feeling that the world is passing her by.
- Offer to do household chores, perhaps taking out the laundry, washing dishes, watering plants, feeding and walking pets. This may be appreciated more than you realize. However, don't do for him what he can do for himself. Don't take away chores he can still do. He's already lost enough. Ask before doing anything.
- Send a card that says simply "I care!"
- If you are religious, ask if you could pray for her, or with her. Don't be hesitant to share your faith with her if she says it's okay to. Spirituality can be very important at times such as these.
- Talk about the future with her... tomorrow, next week, next year. Hope is important to her.
- Include him in decision making. He's been robbed of so many things and has lost control over many aspects of his life. Don't deny him a chance to make decisions, no matter how simple or silly they may seem to you.
- If you and he are going to engage in sex, be informed about the precautions which make sex safer for both of you. Heed them! Be imaginative... touch, stroke, massage.
- Remember that for gay men, friends and lovers are also families. Demonstrate this by behaving like a loving family member.
- Do not confuse her acceptance of the illness with defeat. This acceptance may free her and give her a sense of her own power.
- Don't allow him or his care partners to become isolated. Let them know about the support groups and other concrete, practical services offered without charge by the AIDS Committee of Toronto or similar organizations in your area.
- Bring a positive attitude. It's catching.

# When you think about HIV or AIDS, think of us.

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- ▽ We link you to the **Resources and Services** in Metropolitan Toronto you need;
  - ▽ **Counsellors** work with you to explore your questions and concerns in person or over the phone;
  - ▽ ACT's **Library** gives you access to the largest collection of AIDS-related information in Canada;
  - ▽ **Support Services** offer you a range of **Buddy** and **Practical Assistance** programmes, **Financial** and **Legal Clinics**, **Support Groups**, and **Bereavement** programmes;
  - ▽ **HIV Health Promotion** information, seminars and workshops help you live with HIV or AIDS well and with dignity;
  - ▽ **Education and Advocacy** services work with you to promote individual and community health.
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**Your local AIDS Programme is:**

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399 Church Street, 4th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2J6  
Hotline: (416) 340-8844

☎ office: 340-2437  
☎ facsimile: 340-8224  
eMail: [ACT.TOR@Hookup.net](mailto:ACT.TOR@Hookup.net)  
☎ telephone for the Deaf: 340-8122

ACT

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