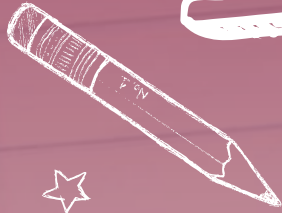


It's time to talk



4 young people's
stories of how
HIV has affected
their lives.



Foreword

Despite considerable interest in HIV within a family context there appears to be limited research on the experience of a non-infected teenager living with an infected parent and / or sibling and the infected parent's ability to make sense of this experience. The research that exists indicates that the needs of the non-infected child tend to be overlooked. Understanding and addressing these needs is critical to the health and wellbeing of the whole family.

In June 2011 four young people two young women and two young men, affected by HIV in their families, shared their experiences with me in a series of one-to-one interviews. Those stories are reproduced here. Each one is unique and amazing. The young people wanted others to hear and read these accounts, particularly parents and young people in the same situation. Time after time the theme of talking came up. The young people all said that they would have liked to have been told their mothers HIV status when they were younger and would have liked other opportunities after being told to talk again.

This work was inspired by a piece of research I had previously undertaken with infected mothers sharing how they thought their affected children experienced living in a family with HIV. During both sets of interviews it was highlighted that living with a chronic medical condition like HIV is something that affects the whole family.

Nina Bengtsson

Practice Manager

Positive Parenting and Children

PPC is here to help

Families affected by HIV can face challenges and problems which seem insurmountable. Parents' feelings of loss, guilt and anxiety about their children's futures, combine with their fears about the stigma and prejudice that may occur if others find out. Many of the families PPC works with are also affected by poor housing, poverty, racism and isolation. Some have fled war and persecution in their own country, and seen relatives and friends tortured and killed. It's no wonder that many of these families struggle to cope on day-to-day basis, often wary of approaching statutory bodies for help. What these families need is someone to support them within their own homes, who understands the affects of HIV and AIDS on their lives, and who can help them to focus on the needs of their children—so that the cycle of deprivation and isolation can be broken.

PPC is the UK's longest running charity for children and families with HIV. Each year we support over 150 families in London through Home Visits, Groups and other activities.

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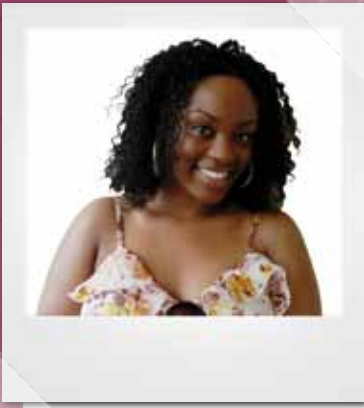
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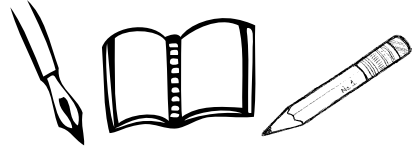
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Gloria's story



Gloria, age 22 has just returned home to her mother, two younger sisters and one younger brother, after finishing an honourable degree at University. Gloria's mother is HIV positive.

When I was 13 I found out about my mum's HIV, but I wasn't meant to know. I visited the hospital with mum. I don't know whether the doctor thought I knew or whether he thought I didn't hear, but he said she was HIV positive. I was praying that he had made a mistake; I remember I didn't say anything in the hospital, but once in the car I asked her if she had HIV and she said yes.

I felt so many emotions at once but I remember feeling hurt by the fact she hadn't told me. I asked her if I had it too and she said I didn't but I still felt sad and angry. The only safety net I had at the time was my knowledge of the virus, having been taught about it for years beforehand. My mum is a keen learner and wanted us to learn about it as she did even though we didn't know. So from an early age me and my brother were taught about HIV from my mum who is a nurse. At the time we had no idea why, but it all clicked once I found out.

I remember feeling bad for being angry. All kinds of scary thoughts ran through my head such as her dying. I thought maybe I'd been a bad daughter and that's why she hadn't told me. I can see now how irrational that was, but at the time I saw no other reason why she hadn't told me for all those years. After it sunk in the reaction surfaced with me distancing myself from my mum.

Trust was definitely affected, and once again I felt bad about how I felt towards her. As time went on my family spoke less and less about HIV, or personal things in general. Mum never talked about how she felt day to day or about her meds, or her fears. A lot was being bottled up, and we were all used to doing it which to be honest isn't good at all; but I also think it's a cultural thing. I think it can be more damaging when these things aren't spoken about. I would have felt better if she had shared things. I remember thinking

if I'm big enough to know, I'm big enough to know more.

It definitely would have made me feel more at ease if she had talked to me more because I was always so worried about her. To me the sharing is essential. I am not blaming my mum because I know she was only trying to protect me but the way I found out and the time were the problems, and not the information. Had mum come to me and told me herself, it would have been different and the trust wouldn't have been broken down.

I had already started getting myself into trouble, and was facing so many difficulties and hard decisions as a teenager before I found out and the news made me even more confused about my life. I felt even less stable and the years that followed my truanting, alcohol abuse and stealing spiralled out of control.

In no way was my mum's news the reason for me doing those terrible things, I was already on a slippery slope before I found out but it certainly didn't make it any better. However at the end of the day, I knew right from wrong and those decisions were mine and mine alone.

I feel really bad for what I put my mum through back then, but mum never gave up on me. She's one of the reasons, as well as God's grace why I didn't go as wayward as I could have, like some of my old friends. I never told any of those friends about mum's status because I knew how some young people can make horrible comments out of ignorance. I'm also glad that I didn't tell my boyfriend at the time. He would have used that against me when we argued because that's what he used to do with other matters. I just didn't want people to feel sorry for me, just as mum didn't want pity either.

I am convinced that my angry feelings towards my mum and the breakdown of trust stemmed from me accidentally finding out from the doctor. I think this is partly why my younger brother reacted differently. He was told directly by my mum and the nurse. He would often ask me why I was angry or hurt by the situation as if it was me, and we'd argue about that. I don't think he understood or appreciated why I was how I was. I also think this is why he reacted how he did when my little sister accidentally found out also. He would be angry with her and say she is not the one

who's got it so she shouldn't be angry with mum.

I empathised with her reaction. I didn't agree with or condone how she handled it but I understood where the anger came from. I think it really matters how someone is told about a parent's HIV status. My little sister and I both found out accidentally, whilst my brother was told in a planned manner.

I think this made a huge impact on how we responded. I closed myself off to the reality of the situation in order to deal with the worry for my mum. It became a habit and I didn't even notice how bad it was until I saw a friend at church being so open with me and others about her parents' status (without knowing my parents' status) that I realised how closed off from my own emotions I was. And once again saw the façade I was putting up to the world. I think this habit was the thing that affected me for the longest, as it was another reason to distance myself from getting close to others and them knowing deep things about me.

However, I'd often be reminded somehow, and this time there was an incident where my mum told me that she had been asked to speak on a TV show and do a magazine spread about her experience.

She asked if I would be ok with it and I strongly opposed it. I told my friend how wrong I thought it was and how upset I was with mum for even suggesting. But it was only when my friend disagreed with me and said "Why don't you want to be more encouraging of your mum for breaking free from the stigma and the fear linked to HIV?"

That revealed the fear of my own that grew from keeping things bottled in. Realising this was a great help in my coping process and my change. When I think about my own journey I know that my relationship with Jesus has been the focal turning point for me. I understand the real role of family and life now, and focus on the bigger picture and put my trust in God instead of myself. Learning more about God and His Word means I have realised that He is a relational God who made us in His image as relational beings who are to exercise loving relationships with Him and each other.

Therefore I've seen that hiding things isn't good, as Jesus Himself says; "then you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." This was highlighted when my friend at church told a group of us openly about her parents' HIV status. I remember I was shocked about how open and calm she was and I didn't notice any stress, panic or anger.

When being asked what advice I would give to parents living with HIV, in terms of the methods and timing of disclosure, I would firstly recommend separating your own fears from your children's, that lessens the possibility of passing on your own fears regarding HIV.

I've come to notice children and young people are often far more understanding concerning these issues because they haven't been as bombarded with false messages for as long and are open to learn. Secondly, talk to someone, maybe a professional of some sort if it is possible. Accept your feelings as real feelings and that it is ok to have them. It also helps enormously to educate children before hand about the virus. Make a date to tell them, and stick with it. Tell them yourself.



Don't let them find out from someone else, that is horrible.



Don't let the diagnosis steal, in any way, the relationship you have with your child. Involve them in your journey and invite them along. That brings parents and children closer together. And lastly, disclose to your child earlier. It is better if they find out before they are teenagers.

Not only do they get a more realistic view of life, it matures them in a good way and leaves them with a more stable view of reality from an early age. Knowing before you go to secondary school gives you time to get over it and stabilize yourself before your emotions, your surroundings, your body, and peer pressure extravagantly change.

If a parent is now dealing with an older child, that is fine too as long as you tell them yourselves, but if you still have a choice with a young child I think parents should suck it up and think about their children by telling them as soon as possible. For the child's sake but also for the parents sake as well; because then both will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.



Jermaine's story



Jermaine is 18 years old. He lives in his own self contained accommodation since last year January. Jermaine has two younger brothers and one younger sister. Jermaine's mother and sister are HIV positive.

Knowing it's there, I want to do something, but I realise there is only so much I can do. It hurts me in that way. She is the only sister I have. How am I supposed to handle it?

I worry about it internally but when I am with her I try to make her happy by telling her I love her so she knows I care about her.

I found out mum and my sister had HIV by my sister telling me she just found out she has HIV. She said my mum and step dad had told her not to tell me and that they would do it themselves. My sister waited a while, but was told "we will do it soon". However, my sister felt it was not right as she needed to be honest with the people she is close with. She also stressed that this was her private information and she has a right to share with me. She told me as we are very close and I am the first person she speaks to.

My first reaction was me being scared and I wondered will she die? I was a bit sad, but after reading up about HIV and doing some research, I felt reassured that she will be fine as long as she keeps well and not letting her immune system go weak. I then felt angry with mum for not telling me about herself and my sister. I felt disappointed in how it got to that point of it being withheld and a secret for so long. I thought to myself why couldn't it have been shared.

I also thought if mum has it I must have it too and I wondered how other people would react to us. I feared losing family members, I feared what would happen to my relationship with my siblings if mum dies, as me and my step dad had fallen out before I was thrown out of home. I had so many questions. How long had mum had it? I was confused and thought to myself how do I handle this?

When I found out this year, I remembered an incident that I had forgotten about. When I was in primary school, maybe ten or so and my play station had been taken away as a punishment for something. I was looking for it in my parent's bedroom and I found a letter that had the word HIV on. I asked mum about the letter she got angry and shouted at me. It was never mentioned again and up to this point neither my mum or step dad has brought it up.

Only with help from my sister and my social worker have I felt more reassured and stronger. It is also thanks to my social worker I have been able to mention it to mum. She then was able to respond to me. She was crying and said she was sorry she didn't tell me. I told her not to worry and to be careful and look after herself better. Mum has not said anything more and my step dad's comment seem a bit off when he told me not to talk about it, instead he said let's look at progress.

My mum and step dad's ways once again have reinforced that I need to make sure I look after myself and take my own responsibility and I took my own HIV test. I was encouraged and guided by my social worker and supported by my sister. We have spoken and shared, but my parents have never asked me anything.

Since my sister told me about her HIV status, I have spoken with her a lot and I speak to her every day.

I told her that she will be alright. We have always been there for each other. We talk and we are close. I gave her all the information I had gathered from professionals and also from my research about health and I reminded her of the importance of taking her medication. I also offered to come with her to her clinic appointments, which I have now done once.

It's not that I hate mum, but after she had a fit, fell and had to be taken to hospital she blamed me, this was last

year, soon after asked me to leave home as I had made her fall. She told all our relatives and they started to have a go. My sister and I know she is not right as she has had several falls and fits since I left home and how can it be my fault when I am not even there.



I know my mum isn't very confident and I think she has her own struggles. She has always taken my step dad's side and often laughs at me. I learned to detach myself from her. I feel I have no parent. I didn't think she would throw me out of the house. I think I have no trust in her protecting me and I worry what will happen if she dies as my step dad is not my dad and he still finds it difficult to talk to me.

I am good at hiding my feelings. I think it has affected me in the outside world, I think I am defensive and I distance myself from other people as I lack trust. I often think and wonder how difficult it is to trust when my mum didn't tell me things like her and my sister's HIV status. I am also not able to share this with my friends. It doesn't bother me that much as I think every family have matters they keep to themselves, but I know it affects relationships. I have told my girlfriend and she is very supportive of my sister and mum. I told mum I needed to tell her as I needed to share with someone. I keep in touch with my family more since I found out. I try to make them happy. There's no point holding on to anger. Instead I hold on to my positive attitude, I keep up the hope and I pray.

I have grown up thinking positive and due to my experience of being a kind of scapegoat in the family I have learnt to be strong and independent and take responsibility for myself. I study and work and I took up psychology at college as it helps me to understand others and helps me to function better as an individual.

I think I get my main strength and coping from producing music. I have my own music studio now. I put my feelings into the music and I direct my energy into that. It takes away some pain and it is explorative and it's a way of expressing. I want to be a music producer. I also want to do future research into HIV as this would be an achievement on many levels, for my family and others but I would also feel better about myself for helping.

If I could advise any parent in my parents' situation, I would say please tell your children earlier, don't wait until they are mid teenagers or older.

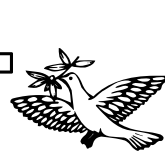
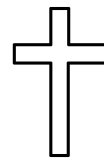
 **It definitely would have helped me to get an opportunity to contribute more,** 

making sure my sister and mum were staying healthy, exercising and eating well.

I would have taken my mum to the gym and perhaps I would have changed my career path to science. I would have attended work shops and been able to overall offer support to them both. I also would encourage my children to be part of and ask questions about their parents. I wouldn't push my children away. I would communicate more, listen to them, not blame and have better relationships with them. I would reassure them by me explaining and talking to them nicely. I would say talk more as parents and involve your children in your health matters.



Dulcelina's story



Dulcelina is 19 years old. Dulcelina lives at home with a younger sister and a younger brother. Dulcelina also has two older sisters who do not live at home. Dulcelina's mother is HIV positive.

👂 Tears started coming up, it felt funny in my throat, I didn't want to cry, I was fighting the lump in my throat, I asked to go to the toilet so my sisters would not copy my almost crying. I didn't look, I was really scared. I was ice cold. **👂**

Isabelle had her head down, I don't remember what else but I remember there was a long silence. I think Sophie had tears in her eyes. My brother was playing on a side table. I don't know whether he understood or whether he knows now. He has never said anything that would show so.

I found out mum's HIV status 2 years ago. We were in a clinic and it was kind of a family meeting. I didn't feel myself there. I felt tense. There were at least four other adults apart from my mum. I can't remember any names. In fact, I can't say I knew them and I can't say I had met them on more than a few occasions.

One of the ladies said, your mum has got something to tell you. Mum was quiet but that is what she is like. My mum has always been shy and quiet. I remember I looked at all these strange people and then thought to myself, why doesn't she tell me at home if she got something to say?

This changed me. I used to be open. I was a tomboy and I didn't care about girls' things or what girls may think. This closed me up. I was not aware of the news of mum carrying the HIV virus. I was worried. My first thought was whether she was going to die? I closed up; I distanced myself from my mum because I thought what will happen to us if she dies. But I tried to be stronger for my younger sister and brother because who would care for them. My mum was very sick. She was in hospital a lot or in bed when she was at home. It was hard to see her like that.

There were no talks about mum's illness since the day in the meeting. To be fair, I don't like to talk about diseases, any in fact, as it makes me want to cry. I told my friend at the time. He was supportive, but I got angry with him as he seemed to think that it was all fine. It was not fine, I told him that you don't know what it is like, I have to live with this always and you can't just get over it.

My sister told a friend of hers too. I don't know how he reacted. It was a lonely place... Auntie Sarah said we have to pray for mum to be healed and we were asked by my auntie to go to church. At that time, I did what my auntie said as I wanted to help and I also wanted mum to be healed. But I also tested God as I was naughty, I was fighting and stealing from home, I was rude. I never liked girls. I was different from now. It was by going to church I changed.

I was thinking more about my life since finding out mum's HIV and I started to think more about my actions and doings. I found the youth group in church. My mum didn't want me to go she said she got healed a year ago and there was no need for me and my sisters to go to church anymore. I also know that Auntie Sarah influenced her decision. Well, I didn't listen, I went anyway and I always found a way to get there.

I had all these fears and worries that I felt needed to be calmed by seeing my friends at church.

👂 I was scared because I am like my mum and I thought I may get it too. **👂**

I didn't want to be like her, I wanted better. She has many boyfriends, she doesn't protect herself. I don't know how she got it, but a boyfriend she had died. Have I been tested, I don't know. I had lots of blood taken; I don't know what it was for.



There were times when I wanted to shout and scream. I don't know what they would hear should they have heard

my thoughts. Well, a breathless me, crying a lot, so loud next to me. Are you dumb, stupid, can't you hear my pain. I bang my head, wall cracking, like an earth quake, fist crunching, eyes swollen, face pale, scars, bitten nails, clothes wrapped up, a lot of pain, no one to hear.

Church was good, as when I found out I thought what's the point, mum is going to die soon and who is going to take care of me. I had already been separated from my mum when I was around five. That was the time when one of my older sister and I were sent to live in a convent. My other sister came to the UK for a better education and my younger siblings stayed with mum but they moved to Spain. Mum and dad had some problems so mum sent us away. We all got together eventually about five years ago; we all lived with Auntie Sarah.

I was worried about mum when I went to school. Is she ok, my grades started to fall. I was either picking up my brother from school or visiting the hospital to see mum. I didn't tell anyone in school I think instead I went a bit off the road and got tough I think maybe to protect myself and I also became a bit of a bully, not something I am proud of, but I did. I didn't get many GCSE's I think mainly because of all the distractions.

I really have a need to talk. I have not felt that I have had that opportunity before. I wish I had that when I was in my darkest of darkest fear. I know for a fact that no one in my family speaks about how we feel about mum's HIV. Neither, has anyone outside of the family asked us anything.



 **Talking is good and so needed.** 

I think the loneliness was one of the worst things, in school I didn't want to be with anyone. I isolated myself, but also the loneliness at home. Although I have many sisters, there was no one to talk to. It really feels like a dark room with no one there.

Another thing is I am and was always looking over my shoulder, checking if my sister, Sophie was ok, worrying about my future, always being on guard to see if someone was coming to take things away from us as I was not sure if mum was going to live. The future looked dark and uncertain. There was a lot of fear. I wouldn't trust boys as I was scared I'd end up the same as mum. Actually I am still terrified of having sex. I am also terrified of getting it. I couldn't sit on the same toilet or drink from the same cup. Actually I still don't.

I think my trust has changed. I remember the marker of this when I told my friend of mum's HIV. He listened and we spoke on the day but not much more. It is if I wanted to say "I still need you but you are gone". I felt he stole my trust. I didn't have a best friend and I couldn't talk to my mum about my fears. Actually there was no one. I wasn't taking care of me as I was taking care of my mum and brother. No one else wanted to help my mum so I had to check she was ok. It was always "Dulcelina can you come here.." There was stress, no time to do my hair, no time to see my friends, no time to sleep. It felt like someone else had taken that time from me.

If I was to give a gift and present to other young people in my position, I would give them strength, courage and happiness: strength to get back up to not feel the hurt, courage to walk forward and not look back, happiness to feel on top of the world and not let pain effect your own dreams.

 **If I was a parent, and I thought of what could be done differently, I would say talk, talk, talk. Mums, dads and parents must realise that they make it worse for the kids when they don't.** 

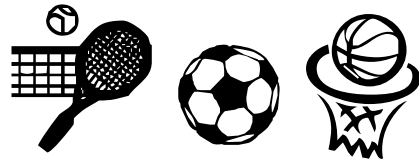
I understand the shame, the fear and that they are scared but deal with it!

Have a relationship with your child, even if you don't have money, do things with them, go to the park after they find out about your HIV. Don't just leave her with the information like it was dealt with. Take your time to get to know your child and what she thinks and feels. Build a relationship with them. Don't isolate your own self and your own pain away from them.

They can see it anyway. Give your child an opportunity to know your feelings and you theirs. I would urge parents to tell their children much earlier. As a child you react more casually. Like my brother's age, 10. He is carefree and not bothered about a lot and in that age you just get on with things and move on. You don't dwell like you do when you are a teenager. I know that if I was told when I was younger, I wouldn't think and worry so much and I would be able to grow with it more and for it not to be such a shock.



Fran's story



Fran is 22 years old. Fran lives at home with his mother and younger sister. Fran's mother and sister are HIV positive.

I can't ask how my sister feels as I think she will feel uncomfortable if I did. Of course I haven't tried to speak about her condition since I found out, I can't talk to my sister openly about how she feels, it wouldn't be possible. I think that is related to how you don't ask or talk about certain things with your parent.

👂 For example I wouldn't dream of talking to my mum about her illness or her relationship with her boyfriend. 👂

It has never crossed my mind to do so, you know what our culture is like, the parents are different from the children and children don't speak back or ask questions. I think if I would she would look at me very strangely. I haven't tried because I know it's not something you do. I guess I could say it isn't allowed.

I can't remember someone asking me how I feel having a sister and mother that have "that" condition. Hmm, let me think... I worry less for my mum because she is more mature and as there is good medication in this country and I know she has taken it for a while, I know she will be fine.

I also don't see how my mum worries about it and I have seen how she speaks openly about it. She does not care what other people say, I know she has told people when we have been to gatherings and it doesn't look like she fears rejection or anything. Honestly, I see her as being strong and happy. I would be worried about my mum if we still lived in Uganda.

Actually I would worry a lot as you know there is no medication there. I think they would have died. It helps talking to you about this as I know you have been there and also worked there. Yes, it is not nice thinking about how it is over there. It reminds me of how we saw our cousin passing away, he was six. He had signs of the condition, but we didn't know and it wasn't something that was spoken about.

When I was living in Uganda I didn't know my sister had the condition. I can recall she was bullied in school, because she had some signs that my cousin had. But I was never told by my grandmother, whom we lived with. She kept the truth away from us. All she said was your sister is weak so don't treat her in that way. That would be if we were having a little tease or something. I think it would have been better to know, because I would have been more caring if she fell sick.

I worry more about my sister than my mum. I think I do this because I don't think I would be able to cope myself should I have been the one with the condition. I worry about things, a lot of things. The two weeks waiting for my test result was the hardest of my life.

I often feel it is unfair that my sister got it, I think it affects her. I think it affects her daily life. Well, I feel bad that she has to take medication and have worries about for example relationships. It is harder for her and mum when it comes to relationships as they may fear and experience rejection. This I know because my previous girlfriend left me when I told her about my mum and sister. So, this is where my mixed feelings come in. On one hand feeling relieved that I don't have the condition and the consequences that come with it, but on the other hand sometimes feeling guilty that I am more free.

I think my sister thinks we are different. We have different rights and choices when it comes to what we are able to do, at least when it comes to relationship and future choices of husband and wife.

👂 I think she thinks 'why me' and I think it makes her sad at times. I don't know if

she is depressed or sad but I have seen her crying. 

She cried a lot when she found out, it was very hard to see, because I didn't know what to do or say. This was years ago, but I still feel bad when she is upset as I don't know what I can do for her. I think the best thing I can do is to care for my sister and my mum.

I have and will always take care of them and make sure they are ok. I take care of them in the sense of working and providing for them, I have three jobs outside of going to Uni. I will always make sure they have good food and money so they can look after their health.

Sometimes it can be tiring to work so much and try to study at the same time. But I don't have a choice; I need to look after them. That's what you do when you have family members that are sick. I also think being the eldest makes a difference. I think it won't matter if you are a girl or a boy if you are the eldest, you will naturally care for your family no matter what.

How it has affected me most living with an illness in my family, well I think if they were not sick I would have gone and lived at campus at Uni out of London. I wouldn't live at home; or I would live with my girlfriend. I did move in with my girlfriend for a week, but I had to come back. I felt too bad and I felt responsible for looking after my family.

I think it would be different if I was the younger child, I wouldn't care as much. Or I think it would be different if there was another man in the house. I guess we would share responsibility to look after them. I would feel I can go and be free. My step dad passed away. I have become reserved as I can't share; also it is not my secret. I can't tell my friends.

Sometimes I feel they are not my friends because I can't tell them everything that you do with friends. I bottle up instead. But I also think my situation has made me more responsible and mature, I have grown up faster. It has made me work harder in school and at work. Being a provider is important and my experience has made me look differently at my role as a future husband as I have to provide and care for two families.

I have been more responsible when it comes to infection. I won't have unprotected sex if my girlfriend hasn't been tested. She hasn't had a test yet but said she will. Also, I won't have children if I am not ready. The experience has made me stronger. I think I am an example to others. For example, I see how that works positively with my younger family friends and cousins. I hear adults saying 'why don't you be like him, do good at Uni and work hard?' I also know that I don't want my children to have the same experience as me so I will be very careful not to get it.

I think my strength and coping has been helped by me seeing the way they deal with it. I see they are strong and happy. I am stronger now than I was four years ago. This is because I have read so much about it.

The knowledge and awareness has helped me to be stronger. I am always busy, so I don't get time to think about it. If I was to think what could be different, I think talking about it. We don't talk about it and I don't think it is so good. I think things would be different if I knew more how they felt and for them to know how I feel.

That would make me stronger. If they knew I sometimes get sad when my sister is not fine or upset. I don't think anyone knows that I do get sad. I think if they knew they would know how caring I am. They would know I am there for them. But I think men are emotionally stronger. We have to be strong. I can't be sad because what would happen to them. They must think this is the person that will be taking care of us and what now. I also think it be good if they knew I get frustrated at times. When my sister is sick I don't know what is going to happen and it makes me frustrated.

What would I tell other parents or what would I do differently could I go back in time: Hmm, I would, as a parent talk about what I feel and I would ask them the same. I would be more open and friendly to my children. I would listen to them more. I would share more between us. I never knew what was going on between my mum and step dad. I wouldn't do like my grandmother and shut me up when I asked questions related to my sister's health and symptoms. I would tell my children instead.

 I wouldn't have secrets like this from my children. 

It is better to know even when things are bad like a sickness.

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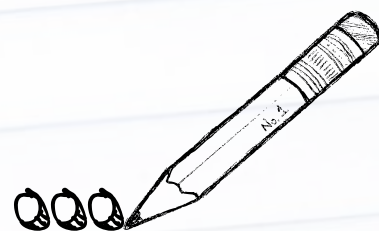


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Dear Mum ...



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