



**As a staff member at a shelter, community agency, or child protection service, I am required to protect a woman's HIV-positive status, even when she is the primary caregiver of her child(ren).**



#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some concerns that might come up for workers supporting a woman living with HIV who is also a parent?
- What policies, professional guidelines, or laws exist that apply to this scenario?
- Are there ever circumstances where disclosing a parent's HIV status would be needed?
- What are some strategies you might use to support this woman while also protecting her private health information?
- What resources might be useful in this scenario?



# FACT


## TIPS:

People working in health and social services have a professional responsibility to protect people's confidential information, including their HIV status; however, sometimes concerns emerge about how to best protect the safety and well-being of children of parents living with HIV.


Here is some information that may be helpful as you navigate this situation:

- Since HIV cannot be passed by casual contact (e.g., sharing cutlery, toilet seats, coughing and sneezing, etc.), children are not at risk of acquiring HIV from engaging in day-to-day activities with their parents, including hugging, eating together, etc. This means that there is no professional responsibility to share the parent's HIV status.
- Sometimes there are concerns about whether it is ethical for parents to hide their HIV-positive status from their children. Parents living with HIV may have different comfort levels with disclosing their HIV status to their children, for many reasons. There may also be certain perceptions or pressures from the parent's community. It is important for people to be connected to supports and be thoughtful about how and when they share this information with their children. There are great resources to help that are listed in the [🔍 More Information](#) section.
- Sometimes there are concerns about whether a parent living with HIV is legally required to tell their children. Parents living with HIV are not legally required to tell their children about their HIV status; however, if they decide they want to, there are some great resources about how parents might do this. See the [🔍 More Information](#) section for additional resources that can be shared with parents living with HIV.



- Sometimes there may be a concern that the child is living with HIV and may not know it. Telling a child they are living with HIV can be very difficult and confusing. There are recommended practices regarding the processes and timelines for telling children that they are living with HIV that are developed by HIV specialists and pediatricians. There are useful resources workers can provide to parents, if appropriate, to support them in how to approach this information with their children. See the  **More Information** page for details.
- Sometimes there may be concerns about parent neglect, abuse, or other safety concerns. Duty to report, if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in need of protection, is outlined in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* in Ontario, and this is different than concerns related to disclosure of a parent's HIV status. It is often possible to navigate required reporting to child protection services without sharing someone's HIV-positive status.
- You can be a great resource by supporting women to think through their realities. You can talk about the pros, cons, fears, and benefits of disclosure, practice how to explain the situation to their children, and connect women and their children to relevant resources and support prior to and following disclosure. Talking about support within the community, and ensuring supportive cultural and community networks can also be helpful. Finally, it may also be helpful to talk through some of the stigma and discrimination that may arise in the disclosure process, and strategies to address these as they arise.



Check out the  **More Information** section of this toolkit for additional resources, including legal information, resources to provide support, and strategies for women to talk to their children about HIV, if and when they decide to do so.



For more information visit **WHAI.CA**