# Mentors

October 1, 2005 By Aaron Krach

**The Rookie**
**Amira Hikim**
**26, Washington, DC**
**Diagnosed 2000**

**Q: “Should I tell my young kids I’m positive?”**
A few of my closest friends and most of my family know I’m positive—but not my kids. I have three—they’re between 4 and 10—and I don’t think they’re old enough to understand. I want them to know what I’m saying when I tell them. I’m afraid of children teasing them, and I want my kids to have the right information to fight back. Even if I got sick, I’m not sure I’d disclose.

I was diagnosed while pregnant with my third baby. My pregnancy was miserable. I was an emotional mess at first. It took me a year and a half after being diagnosed to realize I have many more years to live and HIV is just one part of who I am.
If it wasn’t for my kids, I don’t know if I would have made it through the fear and anxiety. They were the reason that I got up each day. They need to be taken care of—not me. I’ve been positive for five years and don’t take any medication. Things are going well: My T cells are 480, and my viral load’s around 5,000.

I publicly came out about my HIV during a recent college speaking tour with Hope’s Voice, a youth-oriented HIV-education organization. The trip helped me come to grips with my life. I learned to speak openly and stay strong.

As a family, we have so much to look forward to. I want to see my kids graduate from high school, and then I want to see them go off to college. With so much ahead of us, I don’t want them to worry about me. Why should I burden them with the news I’m positive?

**The Veteran**
**Dania B.**
**41, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida**
**Diagnosed 1995**

**A: “Kids understand more than adults think they can.”**
With five kids, ranging from 5 to 19, I don’t avoid talking about HIV if they’re in the room, but I don’t advertise it, either. I think living openly makes things easier—especially when it comes to

family.

I was diagnosed while pregnant with my third child and was using every drug but heroin at the time. I was scared to death. When I came home, I shared the news with my two oldest daughters. My 8-year-old was very upset. Her reaction was like mine: “What is going to happen to Mommy?” I thought I was going to die. But I stayed healthy despite using drugs and alcohol.

Life outside the house was different. My status remained a secret for a long time. We lived in a small town, so I wouldn’t go to the clinic, fearing people would know. After staying clean for six months, I began disclosing during Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Each time I told others, it became easier.

My two youngest children are 5 and 9. They see me take my medicine twice a day and know I take it because I’m positive. Once, while preparing for a hurricane, my kids reminded me to pack my medicine. It was very sweet. This doesn’t mean kids fully understand the disease. But they understand more than adults think they can.

In my experience, kids start asking questions when they’re around 12. I wait until then to get into many details. But as soon as they ask for more information, I’m ready to share. And I sleep comfortably knowing that when that conversation begins, we aren’t starting at the beginning.

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