Lessons in Love

January 9, 2012 By Reed Vreeland

With Valentine's Day upon us, we ask: How does the dating game change after an HIV diagnosis? In her POZ Blog entry "My Reality Check: Dating With HIV," our Anonymous blogger appealed to our website's readers seeking advice for how to handle a newly budding romance. She shared that she struggled with disclosure and feared being rejected because of her newly diagnosed HIV status. The consensus? While stigma and ignorance are still pervasive, finding love with HIV is indeed possible.

If you're ready to connect with HIV-positive singles, check out personals.poz.com. In the meantime, here's some insight from readers on the subject of dating, love and HIV.

> I've been positive for a decade and a half, and there is no easy answer to this question: Do you disclose up front and perhaps lose any chance of this man getting to know you, or do you wait till you are both emotionally invested and risk possible heartbreak and losing him? Really, only you can decide how to best proceed on a date-by-date basis. Every potential partner is going to react differently. [But] plenty of people out there won't care about your status; often they know someone [else] who has [HIV].
> —**Dreamer, location withheld**

> I have been positive 21 years, and [in my experience] we have to become comfortable with our own diagnosis before we expect others to be. This is very vital in disclosing to anyone. It helps build stamina for the journey. Not everyone is nor will be accepting of our diagnosis and the personal views we may share going through it—so we have to be mentally prepared for the good, the bad and the ugly as it comes.
> —**Bonetta Graves, Sumter, SC**

> I have been HIV positive since 1985. In 2009, I married an HIV-negative man whom I dated for some time before I told him. I got to know him [and] made sure I could trust him. [When I disclosed] he did not reject me. The irony is he died of a heart attack last February when I had been preparing him [on] how to deal with my death. My advice is [to] take it slow, get to know someone. If you don't know them well enough to tell them your status, you probably shouldn't take them home.
> —**Jane, location withheld**

> I guess it's rejection that really scares us. People take rejection differently—even when I was [HIV] negative I had some of that fear of being rejected. Then after I found out that I am positive, this fear of rejection has kept growing and growing. But now I am getting to a point where enough is enough. If you don't ask, you won't know. So I am preparing myself to go back to the dating scene.

—**Mike, Toronto, Ontario**

Now I only date men from all the HIV sites who are also positive—it's just so [much] easier. I even met my current husband on one of the sites. It is a rare and special person who can accept our situation. But for me, the rejections were just so hurtful, and I was always fearful that someone would tell someone and so on and so on.
—**PJ, location withheld**

What I do normally [with a potential romance] is watch A Walk to Remember where Mandy Moore dies of leukemia. It's extremely romantic because the guy stays with her even after finding out she is terminal. This is a good opportunity for you to say, "Aww, wasn't that sweet? Do you think you could be with a woman that was ill, like a woman with cancer?" If he says "No," don't give up hope. Just proceed with caution.
—**Jason Cifredo, Orlando**

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