Having Options

In an opinion piece titled “Is It OK to Have Options as a Person Living With HIV?” Jordan J. Edwards, the deputy director of the Normal Anomaly Initiative, encourages the newly diagnosed. Below is an edited excerpt.

August 17, 2026 By Jordan J. Edwards

“Is it OK to have options as a person living with HIV?” It’s a question I have asked myself countless times since 2013, when I tested HIV positive. And sadly, like so many, I let my inner shame tell me the answer was no for far too long.

When you are first diagnosed, it feels like you are handed a script written from others’ experiences or expectations that you must follow with little room for deviation. You feel like everything is set in stone. Maybe it is the initial shock or the stigma that feels imposed with the diagnosis, but so many people go silent or feel silenced by their healthcare professionals, by their community, by the opinions of others and by their own internal shame. You feel like a prisoner to your diagnosis and that any freedoms you once had are now taken away.

For myself, sexual education in school wasn’t much more than the gym coach saying don’t get yourself or anyone pregnant, don’t get sexually transmitted infections and that HIV is the worst thing you can get. Beyond the after-school special that used fear-based tactics, there was no actual explanation of how these things occur, or, if they do, what options you have. So that left many, like me, afraid to ask further questions from trusted resources. Instead, I sought answers through what felt accessible: porn or friends.

When freshly diagnosed, before you can even process what has happened, you are given a treatment plan by a medical expert. And like many navigating healthcare power dynamics, you don’t feel confident enough to ask what the other options might be, what can be tailored to your lifestyle or schedule or what works best for your unique needs.

And while at first, with this new diagnosis, you feel your only option is to do what you are told without question, I am here to assure you that the more comfortable you get with who you are, what you want and what you need, you will once again find your voice and be able to ask yourself the same question once again.

“Is it OK to have options as a person living with HIV?” The answer is absolutely, yes! You have a plethora of options for treatment, partners and even when you disclose. Being HIV positive does not mean your treatment, your choice of partners and the time you disclose must be a one-size-fits-all. The status does not strip you of your humanity, individuality or right of choice.

I have found that having a healthy sex life starts with conversation with your partner or partners but also, most importantly, with yourself. What do you want? What life do you desire? How frequently do you want to take medication and in what form? Does one pill a day work best for you?

You deserve the option to have a treatment plan that fits into your lifestyle and doesn’t add onto the mental load. You deserve the option to choose a partner who doesn’t base their engagement with you solely on you being undetectable. You deserve the option of having a partner who takes the same responsibility as you do to update their status.

Stigma only protects the myth that living with HIV makes you less than someone who is not living with HIV. Shame tells you that you can’t ask for more because you are no longer deserving, but I’m telling you right now that is a lie. You deserve a beautiful life filled with choices. And the only way to actualize that is to ask for more options, to make choices based on what benefits you and to speak up and demand more, more from healthcare providers, more from your partners, more from your community and more from yourself.

Living with HIV has taught me that positive status causes fear in many but has the potential to create empowerment with the right mindset.

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