My First Disclosure

March 19, 2011 By Anonymous

Terrified, I shut the lights, buried my face in my hands and told him the secret I was dreading to tell him for the last four weeks: I am HIV positive. As someone newly diagnosed with HIV, this was the first time I've told a potential partner about my status.

I had been thinking about this moment ever since I met him. Its unfortunate but inevitable, that as signs of romance begin, my head starts turning with when, where, how, and if I should disclose.

In therapy sessions, I told my therapist (and myself) that I would wait to disclose until I felt like I really knew who he was and whether I could truly trust him. But as we spent another great date together, my thought process quickly changed, and I found myself throwing my perfectly planned disclosure "time-line" out the window.

On the night of the disclosure, he picked out a trendy, intimate place for us to have dinner. When I arrived, he was waiting for me with a table and a bottle of wine, and smiled at me as I walked through the door. We spent dinner chatting, laughing, and learning more about each other. After dinner, he escorted me around the corner to a live music venue. From there we went out dancing, to a place he knew would play music that I loved. He had planned the perfect night...or so he thought...

A few hours later, we ended up back at my apartment. He started kissing me. Soft, passionate kisses - the kind that you can get lost in. But I couldn't get lost, I wouldn't let myself. I silently and repeatedly reminded myself that I had to be very present and strategic. Our hearts raced (for different reasons), and as his kisses became increasingly passionate, I started to pull away. He smiled and asked me what was wrong. I told him that we needed to talk.

That's when I shut the lights and put my head in my hands. I couldn't look at him, looking at me as I revealed this news to him. After some hesitation, I spit out the 30-second version of my story. "I was in a relationship with a man who I had loved and trusted, but he cheated on me, and as a result, infected me with HIV." I cringed and peeked at him through my fingers, like a child awaiting punishment.

To my surprise, he didn't look angry or disgusted. He didn't scream or run away. He looked at me, and after a bit of nervous, verbal fluttering, started to ask me questions about how I was doing. He repeatedly said, "I'm sorry," and showed empathy and kindness. I told him I was willing to answer any of his questions and to talk about it as much or as little as he wanted. He thanked me for being honest with him and asked if he could spend the night with me. Shocked that he still wanted to, (after I had effectively extracted all of the passion from the night), I said, "of course."

We got into my bed, and I told him how much it meant to me that he wanted to spend the night. He seemed to be talked-out, and wanted to just think or sleep this experience away, so I thanked him for taking the news so wonderfully, and we said goodnight with a quick, passion-less kiss. I laid my head on his chest with a sigh, and we both drifted to sleep.

The next morning, I thanked him again for his kindness and told him I'd be happy to talk more about it when he was ready. He told me he had to leave, gave me a kiss on the cheek, and hugged me tightly as if to say "take care of yourself." Part of me knew that it would be the last time I saw him.

Despite how wonderfully he took the news, and how comforted I felt to have him spend the night by my side, it's been almost two weeks now and I still haven't heard from him.

I try to rationalize his behavior in my head. Maybe he needs more time to process… Maybe he'll come around…. But when I'm being honest with myself, I know the truth. He is not willing to have a relationship with me now that he knows the truth about all of my 'baggage.'

The weeks following my first disclosure were filled with a range of emotion…. Relief that I successfully jumped over another "first-hurdle" in my HIV journey; anger that I have these hurdles to jump at all; and sadness like anyone feels when they realize they are being rejected.

As I tried to focus my mind on my studies and extra curricular activities, the questions about this experience kept creeping in. Did I disclose too soon? Maybe I should have kept our relationship purely platonic for longer so that we could have gotten to know each other better? Or maybe I should have told him on our first date, so that it wouldn't hurt this badly now that I know his truth - that he's unwilling to be with me and my HIV.

Talking to one of my friends about the experience, she quoted from a favorite childhood movie of hers, and told me, "You'll know he's the one, when he's the one." This simple quote rang true, and

made me smile.

As much as I rationalize this experience as a good thing--the disclosure went well; he was kind; it made me stronger, wiser, and more experienced in dealing with the everyday struggles of living with HIV; its better that I know sooner rather than later that he’s not right for me--its still hard to shake the feelings of loneliness and the pangs of rejection. I’ll try to remember what my friend said and know that one day someone who truly wants to be with me, won’t let something like a virus get in the way.

This experience reinforced something I already knew, but that I now understand more profoundly; how the stigma of HIV can truly be the worst part of this disease. I’ve been taking my medication faithfully, my bloodwork is great, and I feel perfectly healthy. The pain I’ve felt in the last few weeks was not caused by HIV per se, but by others’ fears and ignorance of the effect HIV has on a relationship’s future. I informed my potential partner that because my viral load is undetectable, if we practice safe sex the chances of transmission are close to zero, and that chances are my life won’t be cut short by HIV, but he still has dodged any further conversation about HIV or our relationship. Stigma is one powerful beast...

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/my-first-disclosure