

Dear Auntie Stella

I'm an 18-year-old woman and I sell vegetables at a market. I just went for an HIV test and found out that I'm positive. I stay with my auntie because my mother is late and my father left when I was young. I'm too ashamed to tell her, or my friends or anyone at the market, because they often joke about people with AIDS. I also fear that my aunt will be very angry and also sad.

I can't remember what the counsellor said at the VCT centre. What am I supposed to do now? Is there anything that can help me? Should I eat any special food? Are there special groups for HIV positive people? I was learning soap-making and other skills but can I continue now or should I just stop and get ready to die?

I don't feel sick at all, but I'm so worried that I can't eat or sleep properly. It feels as if my life is already over. I wanted to have an ordinary life - find someone to love, have children - but of course that can't happen now. And must I stop having sex? Sometimes I think it's best to kill myself now than wait to die from AIDS. Auntie, please help me - there is no-one else I can talk to.

Charity

TALKING POINTS

- What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?
- Do many people have HIV or AIDS in your area? Can they speak openly about it? Why? Why not?
- If you found out you were HIV positive, what would you be most afraid of?
- Should Charity just wait to die, or are there ways she can protect herself and stay healthy? How would you answer her questions about living with HIV?
- Make a list of all the things people say about people living with HIV and AIDS. Divide them into those that are supportive and those that are critical. Which list is longer? Why do you think this is?

