

One of the most common question posed to ASHA's Herpes Resource Center over the years is "How do I tell someone?" That "the talk" is intimidating is natural: you don't know how to start, worry about rejection, and just don't know what to expect. We can tell you that most potential partners don't leave over herpes but still, it's not easy.

We are fortunate that Jenelle Marie, founder of The STD Project, has allowed us to reprint her article on talking with partners about sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Her step-by-step approach is especially relevant to genital herpes and revolves around a key message: the most important person for you to connect with is yourself.

So, you have an STD.

You might even be learning to live with yourself by now (you certainly should be, but I know this takes oodles and oodles of time) and you might have finally resolved to regard the experience as a phenomenal learning opportunity – one you wish you wouldn't have had to learn first hand, sure, but a learning opportunity nonetheless.

Consequently, you've started to date! Cheers!

Or maybe someone came on to you while you were dutifully trying to swear off relationships for the rest of your life?!?!?

Either way, the time has come to have 'the talk'. NO ONE wants to have the talk with anyone EVER, but you must have it if you're ever to develop a loving, healthy relationship with someone

again – at least enough to get in the sack with them that is!

It may shock you, but sex is still fantastic with an STD. Do your best not to worry too much about that right now, I'll get you there.

Anyhow, now what? What in the world are you going to say to the potential love of your life to get them to not run for the hills?!?!?

Well, I'm sure there are many ways to go about telling someone you have an STD, however, not all of them will help you keep the other individual.

Albeit, what I'm about to share is certainly not a guaranteed method, by any means; it's just what I think works best. I've had quite a bit of luck in this approach; I've been married, I've had great long-term relationships, and I've never lost a partner simply because of my STD. So, in some ways, I'm proof there's a good way to do this kind of thing.

In the end, only you will know what works best for you, but in the meantime, you can try this approach on for size until you do.

No Text Messages, Emails, or Singing Telegrams

First of all, it is my belief that any mode of telling someone you have an STD other than face-to-face is bad form and would give that potential someone all the more reason to say, 'thanks, but no thanks.'

I know, it would be so much easier to have Barney show up at their door singing about loving people despite their differences, STDs are ok, just love one another, etc., etc....

But, this is one conversation where today's ingenious and creative technological approaches just won't cut it. Besides, even though the conversation is tougher/more embarrassing in person, it provides you an opportunity to gauge their initial reactions and it allows them to see

how sincere you are.

All in all, in-person is a win-win.

However, and this is a very big however, where you tell someone you have an STD is just as important as how. What I mean is, the place you choose to sit someone down to have this conversation should be fairly neutral and a calm atmosphere.

At the bar, while babysitting your best-friend's two year old, or at Starbucks are all HORRIBLE ideas.

In my experience, I've made a special trip over to the individual's home while they were alone and not in a hurry with the pretense of, 'Hey, can I drop by for a few minutes, I'd like to chat with you about something?'

Telling someone in the comfort of their own home or in private serves two purposes. It allows the person an opportunity to react how they would naturally without being influenced by on-lookers or having to 'put on airs'. And, this leaves the individual in a comfortable environment to ask as many questions as they like or to do their own private research without pressure, which, leads me to my next point.

Be Honest, Positive, & Resourceful

In sharing your status, it's incredibly important you're as honest as possible.

I've always shared how long I have had genital herpes, how I got it (or, at least what I know about how I got it), what I've learned from the experience, how hard it's been at times, and what it means for my health. Many times, I've told my story in tears – not with the intent of playing the sympathy card (although, I'm sure it could have been perceived that way) – because, quite honestly, it's an embarrassing and scary conversation to have and re-telling my story generally re-surfaces some old emotions. Regardless, I think that is all O.K. because it's honest.

From there, I share the facts and figures and let them ask whatever questions they'd like to know. I give them the information I know, what herpes does and doesn't mean for me, and the very realistic truth that an STD has been manageable for me and has not hindered anything in my life. I have passed my STD on to others, understandably – not all of my partners have contracted it (quite a few have not) – and the risk is still very real.

I also share with them some of the resources I've used to gather my information. Letting the person know there's a lot of information on the web and encouraging them to do some research on their own is always great. This lets the individual know you respect their opinion and that this kind of decision takes some thorough consideration.

Then, I leave.

Often, I've shared my story and then said something along the lines of, 'I know this is a lot to take in, and I'm not expecting a reaction or response immediately – no matter where you want to go from here, I respect that entirely, of course. Do some research, and then let's talk about how you feel when you're ready.'

Give Them Time

Everyone is different.

Some people have responded immediately with an incredibly surprising, 'You mean, that's all you had to tell me? So what? This doesn't change how I feel about you.' Others have needed more time to digest, to come back and ask me questions, and then to digest some more. Because of the taboo nature of STDs, it's hard to decipher how anyone will react.

As a result, it's nice to let them know they can have as much time as they need.

In the end, some people may choose not to continue the relationship.

This is an understandable reaction even though it will probably break your heart.

Consider yourself lucky to know why they do not want to go further. You could probably care less about the silver-lining to all of this when your heart is broken.... But remember, most people never know why a person stops calling them or chooses to see other people; they are stuck analyzing everything they did and wondering if it was their looks, their personality, their family, etc.

Should someone choose to end the relationship as a result of your STD, know it actually has nothing to do with you. They were scared –rightfully so – and the relationship had not developed enough for them to be willing to take the risk. Sucks, yes, but it's not the end of your dating career and it means you're still awesome despite your STD.

Believe me, it's true!

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