

Overview of Couples HIV Counseling and Testing (CHCT)

Elias Gudo

Annie Mwaanga

28 January 2009

Senior Administrative Counselor

Zambia Emory HIV Research Project

Overview

- This presentation will cover the CDC Couples HIV Counseling and Testing training material.
- We will discuss the key points of the curriculum.
- Background and discordance
- Essential couple counseling skills
- Initial Session of the CHCT Intervention
- Providing Results

Background and Discordance (Purpose of CHCT)

- Provides an optimal intervention for problems that can potentially wreck couples
- Provides necessary information on acceptable and suitable strategies for persons that are married or cohabiting
- Couples share confidentiality and receive HIV test results together
- Enables couples to plan for their future and that of their family

Guidelines of CHCT

- Couple must be willing to be counselled and tested together
- Couple must be willing to receive and share results together
- Couple should be able to have open dialogue amongst each other
- Couple should have respect for each other
- Couple commits to shared confidentiality
- Disclosure decisions are made mutually
- Couples agree to discuss HIV risks issues and concerns together

Essential couple counseling skills

- Counselor self-awareness
- Capacity to tolerate intensity
- Understanding relationships in the context of cultural values and norms and dynamics of power and oppression

Essential Couple Counseling Skills, cont

- Demonstrate neutrality and non-biased concern for both members of the couple.
- Convey respect for the couple's relationship.
- Facilitate balanced participation of both partners.

Essential Couple Counseling Skills, cont

- Model appropriate listening and communication skills.
- Facilitate dialogue between the couple.
- Raise the difficult issues that the couple may need to address.
- Ease tension and diffuse blame

Mediation Skills for Easing Tension and Diffusing Blame

- Normalize feelings, reactions, and experiences.
- Effectively use silence while conveying a supportive and calm demeanor.
- Remind the couple that HIV infection is common.

Mediation Skills for Easing Tension and Diffusing Blame

- Focus on the present and future. The past cannot be changed.
- Avoid and deflect questions aimed at identifying the source of infection.
- Express confidence in the couple's ability to deal with HIV-related issues

Initial Session of the CHCT

Conditions for Receiving CHCT Services

- Partners agree to discuss HIV risk issues and concerns together.
- Couple is willing to receive results together.
- Couple commits to shared confidentiality.
- Disclosure decisions are made mutually.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations of the Couple

- Participate equally in the discussion
- Listen carefully and respond to each other
- Treat each other with respect and dignity
- Be as open and honest as possible
- Provide understanding and support to each other

Realities of Couple HIV Counseling and Testing

- CHCT is not marriage counseling.
- Couple issues are more important than individual issues in CHCT.
- Couple may reveal feelings not discussed previously within the couple.

Realities of Couple HIV Counseling and Testing

- Couples may want to use CHCT to address longstanding issues in their relationship.
- Couples may have issues in their relationship unrelated to HIV.
- Couple—not counselor—is ultimately responsible for what happens in the relationship

Terms and Definitions of CHCT

- 1) Intervention— A strategy for achieving a specific goal
- 2) Component— A sequence of specific and related tasks that should be addressed when going through the protocol.

Terms and Definitions of CHCT (continued)

- 3) Task— Series of ordered activities to be fulfilled in order to accomplish each component
- 4) Objective— Provides the rationale for focusing on and achieving each of the tasks to be completed
- 5) Script— Consists of questions and remarks that are designed to draw information and accomplish the task

Risk Assessment: Separate vs Together

- **Partners share results together.**
- **Partners learn prevention methods together.**
- **Disclosure issues between partners are resolved together.**
- **Couple should be able to have open dialogue amongst each other**

Risk Assessment Separate vs. Together

- **Suggests that there are secrets between partners.**
- **Undermines the reason for the couple to seek CHCT services together.**
- **The couple recognizes the risk in their relationship.**

Focus on the present and future

- Reinforce that the couples HIV counseling and testing session focuses on the couple's present and future. The past is in the past and cannot be changed
- The past cannot be changed
- Acknowledge that there are issues that could have happened in the past but focus on the future

Questions?