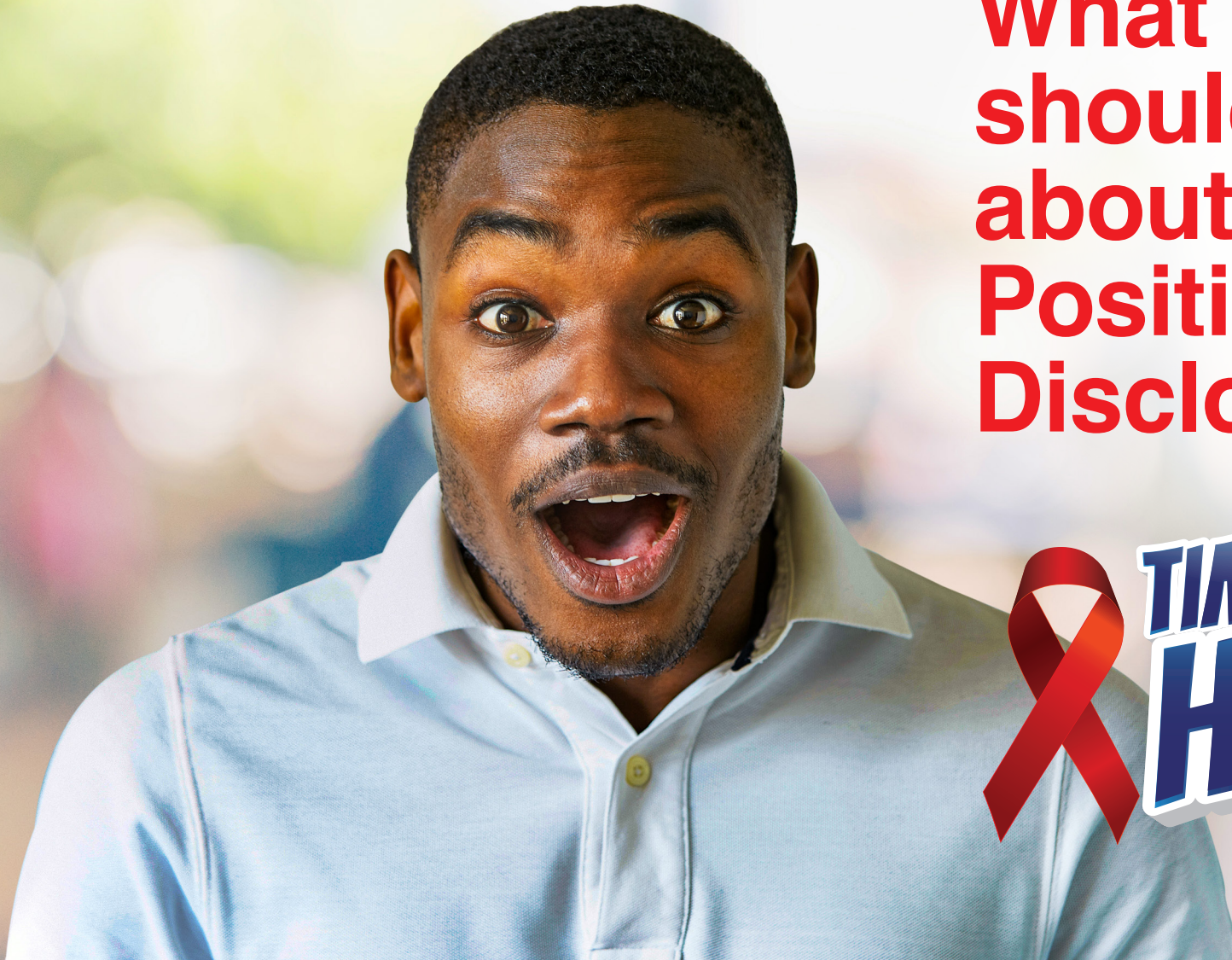


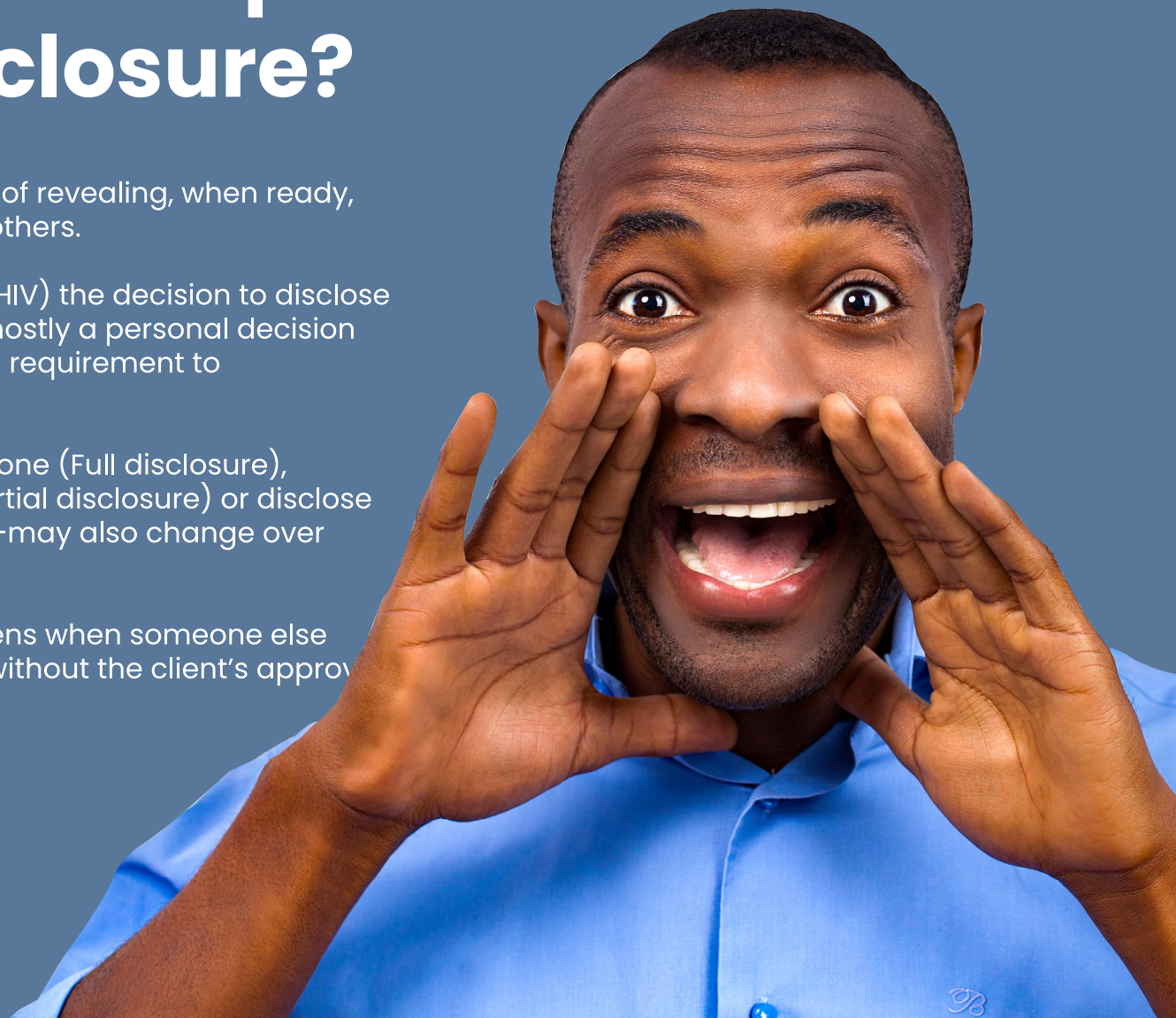


# What you should know about HIV Positive Status Disclosure



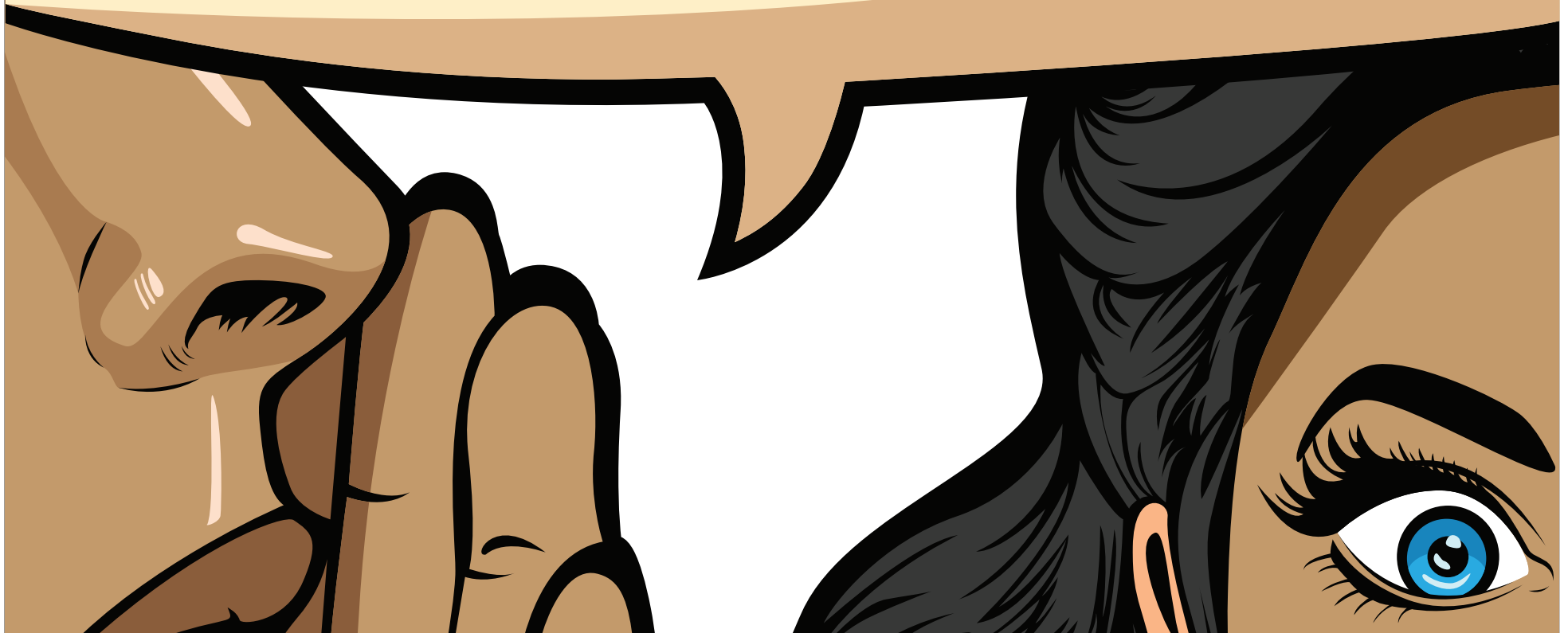
# A. What is HIV positive status disclosure?

- HIV disclosure is the process of revealing, when ready, one's HIV-positive status to others.
- For people living with HIV (PLHIV) the decision to disclose their HIV status to others is mostly a personal decision (except when there is a legal requirement to disclose to sexual partners).
- They might disclose to everyone (Full disclosure), disclose to some people (Partial disclosure) or disclose to no one (non-disclosure) —may also change over time.
- Involuntary disclosure happens when someone else reveals a client's HIV status without the client's approval or without their knowledge.



## B. Who are People Living with HIV most likely to disclose to?

- People living with HIV are most likely to disclose their status to family, friends, sexual partners, colleagues, healthcare providers and others gradually and selectively over time.



# C. What are the benefits of disclosure?

- Disclosure can help a person accept their status and reduce the stress of coping on their own. "A problem shared is a problem halved."
- Disclosure can help a person access the medical services care and support they need.
- Disclosure can help people protect themselves and others/loved ones. Openness about HIV status may help one negotiate for protected sex.
- One who discloses might be better equipped to influence others to avoid infection.
- As more people disclose, stigma, discrimination and denial that still surrounds HIV/AIDS reduces.
- Disclosure can stop rumors and suspicion especially if some one has signs and symptoms of AIDS.
- It reduces the stress of keeping a secret.
- It promotes responsibility; it can help you and your loved ones plan for the future.
- People living with HIV who disclose their status to others report experiencing increased social support, better self-esteem, lower feelings of depression and increased intimacy with sex partners.
- Disclosure is also associated with better health and healthcare outcomes including retention in HIV care, treatment and adherence.



# D. What are some of the possible negative consequences of disclosure?

The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS means that disclosure can sometimes lead to negative consequences, especially in the short term and PLHIV need to be prepared for them.

These include;

- Problems in relationships, whether with sexual partners, family, friends, community members, work colleagues.
- The experience or feelings of abandonment, rejection and constant judgement.
- Loss of family and friends
- Stigma and discrimination.
- Threat or experience of violence and abuse.
- It might result into pressure to assist in AIDS work or become role models.



## E. What are the possible consequences of non-disclosure?

Sometimes it seems there is too much to lose if one discloses but non-disclosure can have major consequences. It is useful to discuss the following possible consequences of non-disclosure;

- Lack of support. Family and friends may not give the support the client needs. Client might have to deal with everything on their own.
- The client might be placing others at risk of infection, particularly sexual partners and unborn children. There is a risk of reinfection for the client as well.
- The client might not be able to access appropriate medical care, counselling or support from groups.
- People might become suspicious of the clients actions if they don't understand their HIV status.

disclosure may contribute to poor adherence as patients will want to hide the fact that they are taking ARVs



# F. What factors might impact a person's decision to disclose?

- Both internal and outside stigma. Fear of stigma from others might lead to non-disclosure.
- Life stress and stress related to disclosure may also affect a person's decision to disclose.
  - People who perceive disclosure to be stressful cope by not disclosing.
  - People who find keeping their HIV-positive status a secret too stressful often chose to disclose.
- Previous disclosure experiences factor into a person's decision to continue disclosing.
  - Negative experiences with disclosure deterr people living with HIV from disclosing to other people.
  - Positive disclosure experiences motivate some people living with HIV to be more open about their status.
- Disclosure may contribute to poor adherence as patients will want to hide the fact that they are taking ARVs



# G. How does one cope with stress related to disclosure?

Whether they opt for disclosure or non-disclosure or experience involuntary disclosure, it is important for clients to try and adopt positive ways of coping with stress and anger. Some of the options include;

- Singing
- Prayer
- Long walks
- Spending time with family and friends
- Joining a support group
- Talking to a counsellor





# H. Steps towards disclosure

Disclosure is a process and not a one-off event. It is important that people do not rush into disclosure but think through carefully and plan ahead. The ideas and advice below should be shared with clients;

- Help the client think through the decision to disclose and ensure that's what they want to do and help them plan how they are going to go about it.
- Identify sources of support, such as support groups for PLHIV, church members, and counselling organizations.
- Use role plays and "empty chair" techniques to coach and help the client prepare for disclosure.
- Always provide support and reassurance to the client and help them accept themselves positively.
- Discuss about sexual partners who need protection from infection.
- Prepare the client for a shocked or even hostile reaction.
  - o Reassure the client that with time people close to them should learn to accept their HIV status.
  - o Assist the client think about likely responses from people they disclose to; they will need to assess how much the person they plan to disclose to knows and understands about HIV/AIDS. This will help the client package the disclosure in a less traumatic manner for both.
  - o The client should be strong enough to allow others to express their feelings and concerns after disclosure.
- Help the client realize that once the decision to disclose is made, it may be easier to start with those they are close to and trust; relatives, family, friends.
- Answer the clients questions and fill information gaps.

# I. Counselling process of disclosure

1. Allow the client to develop trust in you and feel at ease.
2. Get to know the client especially what HIV and AIDS means to them.
3. Assess the client's ability to cope and establish their sources of support.
4. Discuss implications of disclosure fully, to help the client consider and prepare for the reactions of the people they might disclose to.
5. Help the person develop a plan on disclosure. The plan should include;
  - a. All necessary preparations they need to make before disclosure.
  - b. Level of disclosure; full or partial.
  - c. Who they will inform first.
  - d. How and where they will disclose.
  - e. This way, the client remains in control of what to say and how to say it.
6. Discuss the implications of disclosing to inappropriate persons or groups.
7. Arrange follow on appointments/meetings to review this process.
8. You must protect the clients against undue pressure to disclose.





Call 0800-211-046 & 0800-100-066,  
text 8080 Toll-free or  
visit a health centre near you  
for more information.