

MODULE 9

Preparing for new family or care relationships



Trainer's introduction

This module guides participants to think about preparing for new family or care relationships, so that they are easier for everyone involved. The focus is mainly on the new person joining a family or care arrangement. This might be a child, a partner or an adult. The module looks at both positive and negative aspects of the change. It will be useful for parents living with HIV and other participants too, such as future guardians, foster carers and community carers (who might support families or work in children's homes or hostels).

Approximate length of module 3 hours 10 minutes

Aims

The aims of this module are to:

- provide an understanding of the effect of making assumptions about others
- explore the challenges newcomers face when they join a family or home
- look at the impact of newcomers upon the existing family or home
- explore how new adult partners can prepare for forming a new family together
- look at ways to make emotional space for a newcomer in the family or home.

Key learning outcomes

By the end of this session participants will:

- have an improved understanding of the impact of making assumptions about others
- be aware of the challenges faced by newcomers – particularly bereaved children – and their needs, when they join a family or care arrangement
- have explored the impact of newcomers upon existing families or homes
- have an improved understanding of how new parents and carers can prepare for forming a new family or group together
- have explored ways to make emotional space for newcomers in the family or home
- understand the importance of planning for change.

Trainer's preparation

Module plan (with suggested times)

- Understanding the effect of making assumptions about others – **30 minutes**
- Exploring the challenges newcomers face when they join a family or home – **45 minutes**
- Looking at the impact of newcomers on the existing family or home – **30 minutes**
- Exploring how new adult partners can prepare for forming a new family together – **40 minutes**
- Making emotional space for newcomers in the family or home – **35 minutes**
- Reflection – **10 minutes**



Materials you will need

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 9

Trainer's notes

Please make sure you read the trainer's notes at the end of this module (page 87). They give you useful background on making relationships easier for new family groups.

Trainer's guidance

Before you start this module, make sure you know about local customs so you can guide discussions in appropriate ways for the local context. For example, in the local area is it common practice for widows or widowers to live with their new partner and their family?

Introduction

Start by explaining to participants that the purpose of this module is to explore how to make new family or care relationships easier for everyone involved. The focus is on the children or adults joining a new family, but the session also looks at the impact on members of an existing family or group, such as a children's home, who receive a new child into the existing arrangement. Tell the participants that the module encourages them to identify the possible positive impacts, as well as discussing possible difficulties.

Go through the topics to be covered in the module and how it is structured.

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 9

Please use the list in the module plan on page 79, but without the suggested times.

Understanding the effect of making assumptions about others

Activity 1 Looking at the impact of making assumptions about others

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to help participants recognise the impact of making assumptions about people and the importance of keeping an open mind to find out what people are really like.

1. With the whole group, brainstorm the assumptions the community makes about people living with HIV and AIDS. Record what participants say on a flipchart. Allow five minutes for this. Remember that in brainstorms there are no rights or wrongs. Accept all responses and do not discuss at this stage.
2. Next, ask the group, particularly participants living with HIV, to brainstorm what they know about HIV and AIDS. Record what they say on a new flipchart. Allow five minutes for this.
3. Show the group both sheets of flipchart paper. Ask the group:
 - What are the differences between the two lists?
 - Why are they different?
 Record the main points of the discussion on another flipchart. Allow 10 minutes for this.
4. Ask the group what they have learned from this activity. Make sure you bring out the following as you summarise the main points:
 - When we first meet people we often make assumptions. This means we are making judgments, even if we are not aware of this.
 - Sometimes we form opinions too quickly. It is better to keep an open mind until we have more facts and experience on which to base our opinion.

- Fear of the unknown often makes us think the worst.
- It is dangerous to base conclusions on what other people think rather than on reality.
- It takes time, trust and understanding to find out what a person is really like.

Allow 10 minutes for discussion and summary.

5. Close the activity by saying that it is useful for participants to remember these points as we go through the module, and when they are making plans for their children's future.

Exploring the challenges newcomers face when they join a family or home

Activity 2 Using role-play to understand the challenges faced by newcomers to a family or home

Suggested time: 45 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to increase participants' awareness of the challenges newcomers face when they join a family or home. Say that it will use role-play to show participants what it feels like to be on the outside of an existing family or group trying to get in, and what it is like to be a close-knit group trying to keep someone out.

Please note that this can be a powerful exercise. It can raise uncomfortable issues about hostility to outsiders. It may bring back memories of hostility experienced by the participants. Be ready to deal with this. Do not force people to participate.

1. Find a space where everyone can move around.
2. Divide participants into groups of six or seven people.
3. Ask for a volunteer from each group to play the role of outsiders who try to get into the existing family or home. The others in each group will be family members or residents of the home. Take the outsiders out of the room to explain their role in the exercise (step 4 below). They should wait outside until the others have been briefed (step 5).
4. **Instructions for outsiders:** Tell the outsiders that their role is to find a way to get into the family or home circle. Ask them to think of a story or imagine a reason why they are so desperate to join them. Maybe they are a homeless orphan, a distant relative who is sick or a child of the new partner in the household. Tell them to walk round the group circle and try to find a way in. Is there someone sympathetic who will listen to their sad story? Is there someone physically weak who they can push out of the way? Can they sneak in when the group is busy talking to each other?
5. **Instructions for family group members:** Tell them their role is to try to keep the outsider away and outside the family or home. They could each decide to be different people within the family – for example, mother, father, grandparent, teenager or child. The group might decide some members will present strong physical barriers and others will present tough emotional barriers. Ask members of each group to link arms and form a tight circle. Each circle represents a family or home. Explain that each family will be approached by an outsider who is desperate to be allowed in, and who the group is determined to keep out.

Allow 10 minutes to go through the instructions and organise everyone.

6. Bring the outsiders into the room or compound. Remind them they can use every possible way to break through, including begging for mercy, looking for a weak link in the circle or pushing their way through. If necessary, as trainer, help the outsiders think of different ways to break through the emotional and physical barriers. Remind group members and outsiders to be aware of how they feel while the struggle is going on.
7. Stop the exercise after five minutes or sooner if all the outsiders have broken through.

Ask each family and outsider to talk together about their feelings and how this applies to real-life situations of someone new joining a family or home. Allow five minutes for this.

8. Bring everyone back together to share ideas from the smaller groups. Guide the discussion with some of the following questions:

- Why did the family or home refuse to help the outsider? What do they fear?
- What does it feel like to keep out someone you know is suffering?
- What made it possible for the outsider to break into the circle?
- How did group members feel about the outsider when he or she was inside the circle?
- How did group members feel if they succeeded in keeping the outsider out?
- Were group members united in their action?
- Were the outsider's opinions listened to?
- What did it feel like to be a group member who wanted to let the outsider in?
- What was it like to be the outsider and to be kept out?
- What was it like to have to beg for help?
- What was it like not to be understood?
- Why did people despise or fear the outsider?
- What was it like to finally get into the family or home?
- Did the outsider feel he or she could settle within the family or home after this hard beginning?
- Was there someone in the group who understood the outsider?
- Why was that person different to others in the group?

Allow 15 minutes for feedback and discussion.

It is useful to keep your own list of other useful questions and ideas that come out of different groups, as you gain experience delivering this course.

9. At the end of the discussion it is essential to 'de-role'. Ask participants to look out of the room or compound to the furthest point they can see. Tell them to fix on one point and, in their mind, throw the unpleasant and hostile feelings from the role to that faraway point. Next ask participants to bring their eyes back into the room, look around at each other then speak to two or three people near them, each person saying:

- "I am not [the outsider/the unfriendly family member or resident of the home]."
- "I am [own name]"
- "The thing I like best about myself is"

Allow five minutes for this.

10. After de-roling, encourage general discussion for five minutes. You could ask the following questions:

- What are the learning points from the exercise?
- Do you think families or existing groups, such as residents in a home, will join together in their efforts to keep outsiders out?
- Do you think more powerful family or home members will dominate weaker ones?
- Will the children be listened to?
- How would you treat an outsider?

11. Take five minutes to close the activity by bringing out the following points:

- It is not fair to expect incoming children to make all the effort to fit into a new family or home.
- The new child's feelings and emotions need to be considered.
- If a family or home does not welcome or understand a bereaved child, the child will have a hard time fitting in. She or he will probably disrupt the new household or home.
- The family or home taking in the child will need to adapt. The family or home members should be prepared to play a role in making the new child feel welcomed and valued.

- Experienced parents or carers might feel they know exactly what to do. But as guardians, foster parents or community carers they are starting again with a child who has his or her own character, opinions, needs and life experiences.
- It is important to emphasise the positive aspects of newcomers to the family or home. These might include the newcomer being a new friend for the children, bringing new skills and interests, and being able to take a share of the workload.
- It is important to think about all of these points when planning a care arrangement.

Looking at the impact of newcomers on the existing family or home

Activity 3 Looking at the impact of newcomers in the family

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to consider the impact of newcomers – adults and children – on a family, and to think about preparing both the existing children and the new child or children, for these changes.

1. Divide participants into four smaller groups. Explain that two groups will work separately on one set of questions for 10 minutes and the other two groups on another set of questions. Each group should choose someone to feed back in no more than two minutes.

Ask groups 1 and 2 to work on:

- how a child might react if a stepfather or stepmother moves in
- how we could make it easier for the children to accept him or her.

Ask groups 3 and 4 to work on:

- how a child might react in a new family, for example, a guardian's family, a foster carer's family or a children's home
- how we could make the new child feel welcome
- What existing parents or carers could do to assist this process.

2. Next, bring the groups together to share some of the ideas and main points from the small groups, allowing 10 minutes for feedback. Ask members of groups 1 and 2 to go first, then ask members of groups 3 and 4 to feed back. Invite the whole group to discuss and make sure you bring out the following points:

New partners and step-parents

- When a new partner or step-parent joins a family, the family rules and ways of doing things might need to change. It is helpful to involve children in discussion before the change. This helps prepare them before the new person arrives.
- It is helpful to explain why a new partner or step-parent is coming. Reasons might include the following: the mother or father needs adult companionship and love as well as love from their children; the new partner might bring more security for the family and extra income. It is important to explain that the new partner will not change the parent's existing love for their child.

New children

- It is natural for children to feel jealous, afraid and possessive before a new child joins the family. These feelings need to be discussed openly with parents before the new child arrives. Similarly, children in a home may feel some resentment to a new child and carers should do as much as possible to prepare them.
- In a new family all the children will compete for the parents' attention, but the new child will carry an extra burden of grief and feel the strangeness of adapting to change. In a home, where the attention that can be given to each child might be less than in a family, the existing children might become jealous of a new child who takes away some of the housemother's attention. Carers should try to reassure the existing children as much as possible while supporting the new child to settle in.

- You can encourage children to see the positive side of a new member of the family or home and try to welcome the newcomer (see Activity 1).

Allow 10 minutes for discussion.

3. Finally, remind participants that when dealing with these issues, it is good to put into practice the learning and skills the course has covered so far. The learning on communication is particularly important. Ask participants to reflect on:

- what they have learned about listening to children
- what adults can do to make sure that all children involved are treated fairly
- how the incoming children can be helped to talk constructively about grief, the loss of parents and fear of an unknown future.

Close the activity by saying that counselling from a support group can help children understand and cope with loss of a parent, and with being in a new family or home.

Exploring how new adult partners can prepare for forming a new family together

Activity 4 Looking at important factors new partners should discuss as they prepare to form a new family

Suggested time: 40 minutes

Explain that this activity aims to help participants consider what issues parents might need to discuss and agree before they start living together as new partners and families. This may be particularly important to participants living with HIV. It will also increase understanding of the situations that some children experience. Ask group members to imagine themselves in these situations so that they can contribute to the activity.

1. Tell the group to divide themselves into groups of three or four. Ask each group to take 15 minutes to consider what would be important to discuss if a new partner was preparing to move in with another adult and his or her family. Inform each group that they should choose a representative to feed back two key points from their discussion.
2. Bring everyone back to the whole group and ask for feedback from each group. Give each group's representative three minutes to share their two points, then invite the whole group to discuss. Allow 15 minutes for this.
3. Summarise the main points of the discussion and make sure that the following are among the important points for new partners to discuss:
 - What they have both experienced, so there are fewer misunderstandings and secrets.
 - The implications of one or more family members living with HIV. It is important to be honest about this subject.
 - How they approach parenting, their expectations for their children, the standards they set; and methods of discipline they use. Parents will quickly become anxious or angry if they do not agree with the way their new partner relates to their children.
 - What to do if the children are rude or disobedient. Who will take charge? Can they punish each other's children? What do they need to think about in these situations?
 - Money. Who will pay for what? What if there is not enough money?
 - Relatives and other important people who spend time with the family. Do they know who will help and who might cause trouble? For example, in a situation where the mother has died, will her relatives continue to come and go as if she was still alive? Or will the deceased father's brothers continue to behave as if they are in charge of the household?
 - When and what they will tell their children about the new relationship?
 - What should children call the new partner, for example, Uncle or Dad, Auntie or Mum?

- What do you do with reminders of the person who has died, for example, wedding photographs or clothes? Remember, it is important for the children to keep alive memories of the parent they have lost.
- What could everyone do to try to make the situation less difficult?

Allow 10 minutes for the summary.

Making emotional space for newcomers in the family or home

Activity 5 Looking at ways to give bereaved children or adults space to grieve

Suggested time: 35 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to consider ways to make emotional space for new parents and children, so that they can grieve in their own way.

1. Divide the group into small groups. Share the questions below among the groups, giving them two each. Give them 10 minutes to discuss their two questions. Divide the questions appropriately: for example, if the group includes community carers or participants who work in children's homes or hostels, give them questions relating to carers. Some questions may be given to more than one group.

- How can new partners make time and space to deal with their own needs and the potentially competing needs of the children? Will there be times when each parent needs to give attention to their own children?
- In a busy household, how will the two parents find time to be together? Who else could help?
- What can parents do to help their children to start bonding with a new parent? Can each parent find ways to help and praise the children of the other parent?
- How can parents or carers help children talk about their dead parent?
- How can parents or carers help children keep good memories alive?
- How can parents or carers make family or home arrangements feel safe for new children?
- How can parents or carers help the 'old' children not feel pushed out or overwhelmed by newcomers?

Ask the small groups to choose one person to be ready to feed back their main points.

2. Next, bring everyone back together. Ask each group to feed back in two minutes. Record their points on a flipchart. Allow time for discussion and questions when all the groups have presented. Give 15 minutes for this part of the activity.

3. Summarise the main points and add the following if they have not been covered:

- It is better for adults and children to be open about loss.
- Help children to feel safe and able to talk about the parent or parents they have lost.
- Don't ignore or try to get rid of memories of a parent, wife or husband – for example, by throwing away photographs.
- Talking to children about important events might not be part of family tradition, but this might be a good time to break old patterns. The children will benefit. Find ways to explain the changes to come. Involve children in discussing how they can deal with change. You could use a memory book to help the child share memories of the parent who has died (see next module).
- Remember to use the support of friends and family so you can make time to talk to each other as new partners or to talk to your children.

Allow 10 minutes for this.

Reflection

Activity 6 Reflecting on the module

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Explain that the aim of this last activity is to help participants reflect on what they have done in this module and share key learning points with each other.

1. Ask the group to work in pairs for five minutes and talk about how they found the module. Ask them to be ready to feed back the key points they have learned and what they are taking away with them.
2. Ask three or four participants to share their reflections about the module and what they have learned.
3. Draw the module to a close by reminding participants that parents cannot do everything. But if they invest time, planning, sensitivity and careful words in the early stages of new relationships, they may help to avoid long-lasting problems for the whole family.

Thank the group for their hard work. Say that you hope their learning from this module has helped them feel better prepared to plan for the future. Add that you look forward to working with them on the next module.

MODULE 9 – Trainer's notes

Please read this information carefully. You will find that some of the information has already been highlighted as key points to bring out in the summaries at the end of activities. Try to contribute additional points you feel are important from these notes to help facilitate discussion.

Many parents who attend this course are widows or widowers. Others might have been left to cope alone by former partners. Some will have already made new relationships.

When parents find new partners it raises some important issues. For example, how can a mother begin to talk to her children about her needs for companionship, love and support, particularly if the children's father has recently died? How will the children react if they feel that a new parent is interfering in their lives? New relationships are involved when families take in a new partner and/or the children of relatives or friends who have died.

There are many hopes and fears to deal with and all these situations create challenges. How will 'new' and 'old' children get on with each other? How might these relationships change over time? How will the money be stretched to meet the new family's needs? How will parents deal with the needs of bereaved children if they are tired, ill and worried about the future? New family members come with their own life experience, and resentment, jealousy and anger can easily get out of control. There will probably be more pressure on everyone.

Many of the points about the changes that bereaved children face are also relevant to community carers in children's homes or hostels, as well as parents.

Preparing for changes

Participants need to think about the different ways someone coming in might disrupt – and benefit – the family.

Emotional space

In many cases, adults will already have suffered the death of their former partner and children will have lost a parent. In general, it is better to be open about such loss and to create space for children to feel safe to deal with their loss in a more positive way. It is not helpful to ignore or try to get rid of the memories of a loved one.

Although talking with children about important events may not be part of family tradition, this might be an opportunity to break with old patterns. It is important to find ways of explaining changes to come and to involve children in discussing how to deal with these changes.

Physical space

If one partner is moving into the other partner's home, how will they feel? How will it feel for all the different children involved?

Participants should consider any of the following questions that are appropriate in their context:

- Are there wedding photos in the house?
- Do the father's clothes still hang in the cupboard?
- Do the mother's relatives come and go as if she were still there?
- Do the father's brothers behave as if they are in charge of the household?
- Would people still use their old married name after the new marriage?

Participants should also consider the practical steps they could take to make newcomers feel welcome. The following questions may help:

- Could the children choose some of the family photos for their memory books?
- Could important pictures or possessions be moved to places where they are easy to see, if the children approve?
- Is there someone who would be glad to have, for example, the late husband's clothes? Would the children like to choose something to keep, which will help them remember their father or mother?
- If there is space, can things be moved around so that the new partner will not move into the old bedroom or the same bed?
- Can all the children help to decide where they will sleep and where their belongings will be kept?
- Is there space for 'new' children to put out some of their photos and special possessions?
- Everyone has to be prepared to make changes. Children will adapt better if they are given a chance to question and offer their own ideas about practical arrangements.

New children in the family

(These notes can be adapted and integrated into the module activities to be relevant to parents and carers alike.)

Children need emotional and physical space. They need to understand how the family works and the new carer needs to explain family rules to them. They need to feel safe, wanted and welcome.

It is not fair to expect incoming children to make all the changes to fit in with their new family. Their feelings, ideas and emotions need to be considered. Their possessions and skills need to find a place in their new home. The family taking the children in will also need to change.

Experienced parents might feel they 'know it all', but as birth parents to their own children they had time to grow into a parenting role. As guardians or foster parents they are starting again, with children who already have their own characters, opinions, habits, needs and life experiences. It is not possible, or reasonable, to expect any child to quickly accept major changes and to adapt easily into a new family – especially if the child has been through extreme shock and loss.

If a family does not try to welcome or understand bereaved children, the children will have a much harder time, and will probably disrupt the new household. It is important for every member of the household to know that they have a role to play in helping the new child or children to feel safe and welcome. This means that families need to prepare themselves. Parents need to involve existing children in working out how to help new children feel both welcome and valued. The positive aspects of newcomers in the family should be emphasised – for example the new child could offer new friendship for the children, bring new skills and interests to the household, and share the family workload.

Relationships between children

(These notes can be adapted and integrated into the module activities to be relevant to parents and carers alike.)

Parents should expect to see jealousy, fear and possessiveness when children from the outside join an existing family. Both sets of children will compete for parental attention, but the new children carry an extra burden of grief, separation and change.

Parents cannot do everything. But an investment of time, planning, sensitivity and careful words in the early stages may help to avoid long-lasting problems for the whole family.