

THE POSITIVE GUIDE TO

(h) disclosure

www.HerpesOpportunity.com

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“An opportunity? What? How?”

As you can imagine, I get this question a lot. And you downloading this e-book is a courageous first step in discovering how this can truly be your opportunity. To transcend limiting beliefs. To connect deeply. To embrace vulnerability. It's not all going to be easy ... but it will be oh-so worth it.

I'm proud of you for taking this big first step.



In support,
Adrial
(creator of H Opportunity)

“It’s not just about the words ... It’s about the value behind the words and how we construct those values. Our language affects our thinking, and how we view the world, and how we view other people. In fact, many ancient societies believed that to utter a curse verbally was so powerful because to say the thing out loud brought it into existence. So what reality do we want to call into existence? A person who is limited, or a person who is empowered?”

— Aimee Mullins

“Don’t let anyone, or any rejection, keep you from what you want.”

— Ashley Tisdale

“We accept only the love we think we deserve.”

— Unknown

You're only as **alone** as you **want** to be.

Do you think you're alone in this herpes thing? If you do the math, that thought becomes much harder to believe. With around 18 million Americans ages 15-49 with genital herpes (and counting ... there are >2,000 new cases daily), "Herpesville, USA" is a few million more populous than the Netherlands! *(And if all Americans with genital herpes were to hold hands, the chain would reach across the U.S. 6 times over!)*

Yet we may still insist on isolating ourselves, which isn't all bad; yes, some aloneness is good. It can be healing and nourishing to be alone, especially if we are using alone time to recuperate and be kind to ourselves through the herpes healing process.

And when you're done being alone, you may just venture out into that wide, wide world and stumble upon that special someone. And what comes next? (Drumroll, please ...)

*If all Americans with genital herpes were to hold hands,
the chain would reach across the U.S. 6 times over.*

6x over!

disclosure.

(Hear that ominous music playing?)

Most people will tell you that dealing with herpes itself is no big deal: It's simply a minor physical inconvenience that pops up every once in a while, after all. It's that whole "telling someone else about it" part that tends to bring up the anxiety, fear and shame. No worries. We got this. It all starts with your perspective. Let's jump right in, shall we?

Your perspective

"Hey, nice glasses!"

You've heard the whole "rose-colored glasses" cliché, right? Why is that phrase considered so self-deceptive? What's so bad about wearing a shade of peepers that helps you look at your world in a more vibrant way? This begs the question: What kind of disclosure glasses are you wearing anyway? Are they a bright, positive shade of possibility ... or a dull, sludgy poop shade of blah? You get to decide which glasses you wear. “

In other words, here's a train of thoughts that might be running through your mind in a **sludgy perspective** when considering disclosing:

Sludgy: *"I'm so afraid of being rejected. This sucks. Is there an option to run away and hide, please? What am I doing putting myself at risk of being demolished? I'm offering myself up to be judged, to be seen as dirty, disgusting. After all, there is something horribly wrong with me ... no one is going to want me. I'll have to do a damn good job convincing Bruce to want me. And if I do it wrong, I'll be all alone. Forever."*

TABLE 1 2 perspectives on disclosure ...

Sludgy	Optimistic
<i>focuses on ...</i>	<i>focuses on ...</i>
The herpes	The relationship
Fear	Opportunity
This sucks	It's what I make it
Protection	Vulnerability
Closed	Open
Rejection	Acceptance
What I have	Who I am
Victim	Empowered
"Something's wrong"	"I'm okay"
Convincing	Curious
Distance	Intimacy
Alone	Together

“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

— Wayne Dyer

“The next time you face something that’s unexpected, unwanted, and uncertain, consider that it just may be **a gift.**”

— Stacey Kramer

Ouch. Those sludgy thoughts could quickly lead into a downward spiral of shame, self-pity and depression. It’s amazing how much we can convince ourselves of things simply by thinking them. Good reminder: *Don’t believe everything you think.*

Here’s what an alternate stream of thoughts from a more **optimistic perspective** might sound like:

Optimistic: *“Okay, so this relationship is going well enough for me to trust Paul with my vulnerability. Why am I doing this? Because I care. Because I’m courageous when it comes to doing the right thing. And because telling him shows the kind of person I am. I want to tell him because my awesome integrity will have it no other way. There’s huge potential here for a deep, connected partnership with trust at the outset. That’s what this disclosure is supporting:*

trust, authenticity, vulnerability, honesty, heart. Even if he can’t hang with herpes, i I’m still okay because who I am is way more important than what I have.”

Ah, much better. So what narrative is running in *your* head? What’s the flavor of it? Listen to it. It might just clue you in on what sort of perspective you’re working from: one that will help “ or one that will hinder.

The container

Come on in, the water’s fine!

Think of the when, the where and the how of the disclosure as the container in which your conversation will take place. What does this container feel like to you now? Let’s consider what kind of a space you want to create together. As you read down the **sludgy**

i Yeah, what about rejection?

Ooh, rejection is a sticky word, ain’t it? A lot of negative feeling tends to get rolled up in it. If we aren’t careful, it can come with a side order of victimhood. If your partner doesn’t want to take the chance with you and herpes, keep in mind it’s less about rejecting YOU as a person and more about rejecting herpes, for whatever reason (maybe ignorance, negative beliefs, stigma, fear of the unknown, or all of the above). Not wanting to risk herpes is a preference. Just like people have other preferences when considering relationship (ex: smoker/non-smoker, general attitude of said person, has kids/doesn’t want kids, has bad debt, etc.) They get to voice their preference about herpes. And that has to be okay. Accept that as a perfectly reasonable possibility. No resentment harbored. This positive container we’re creating includes being accepting and loving of even their rejection, too. Being okay with whatever the result is leads to more openness and acceptance of what is. (Which is a great way to live life anyway, right?) Let this mean that the right person for you is still waiting in the wings. Because it’s true.

column of TABLE 1, pay attention to how you feel: maybe cold, scared, angry, detached? Does this container feel like a safe space to be yourself, to be vulnerable, to allow you and your partner to open up? Not likely.

So if that is what a sludgy container feels like, then what does a **optimistic** container feel like? Read down the positive column of TABLE 1. What shifts in you as you read these words? This container has a warmth and a depth to it, doesn't it? It feels like a space to open up in, to accept whatever shows up, a nonjudgmental space (both of yourself and your partner) ... What does this sort of container provide? Intimacy, honesty, vulnerability, trust ... a profound sense of "okayness." It's a place to share without fear or shame. It's a place to be in relationship with the other person and with whatever shows up from the heart. And whatever shows up is appreciated.

Words vs. Feelings

The words that are used are important in a disclosure. Words like outbreak, infected, disease, dirty all hold a

“ “It's not who we are that holds us back. It's who we think we're not.”

— Unknown

certain feeling. As the Aimee Mullins quote at the beginning of this book so eloquently told us, words are powerful. Consider that the words you use are actually forming your experience. They are forming how you think about yourself and others. They are forming how you see the world. They are forming your reality. The words you use communicate a lot. So use them wisely. Use them kindly.

Words can even make two things that are practically the same seem worlds apart. Consider this: WebMD categorizes oral herpes (HSV1) as a "skin condition" while genital herpes (HSV2) is considered an STD (aka, a "disease"). The only difference between the two is where they like to hang out on the body, HSV1 tends to (not always) show up above the waist, HSV2 below. So how do you categorize herpes for yourself? As a simple skin condition or as a disease?

What's the impact of these labels on how you feel about herpes?

Beyond the words. What is communicated during a herpes disclosure goes deeper than words. Words are simply containers that hold a lot more meaning than we might imagine. You've probably heard that most communication happens on the nonverbal level, just beneath the surface. Having herpes simply amplifies those feelings of "not enoughness" that we all have in varying amounts.

“ So how do you feel about having herpes? Are you disgusted by it? Do you consider it to be a universal dealbreaker? Anything you believe and all the feelings you hold about herpes will be communicated in some way during the disclosure.

If, however, you hold the belief that you are okay (which you are, aren't you?) and this is just a minor inconvenience

in the scheme of things (which it is, isn't it?), then that will be the tone of the disclosure. Because let's face it, it's not really how you feel about herpes; it's how you feel about yourself. There are about 1000 (give or take a few hundred) different ways you can say "I have herpes." And each way carries a different message about who you are. Which message will you be delivering?

The talk

Opening it up. It's super important to open it up in a simple way. Don't lead the witness; just open up the space for an honest discussion. Assume they can handle it. (Assume you can handle it, too.) Here's how our two extremes might look.

Sludgy: *"There's something absolutely life-alteringly, nauseatingly horrible I just HAVE to tell you ..."* [uh-oh ... this is gonna be painful ...]

Positive: *"I have something important I want to talk with you about ..."*

Simple. There's no negativity in that. It is important because the relationship is important. Trust and honesty are important.

The meat of it. So you've opened up the conversation. Great. They're patiently waiting for you to tell them something important ... now what? Speak from your heart, not your shame. Speak from what is true for you about the relationship, about how you feel about this person in front of you. The focus is on the strength of the connection between you two, not the negative possibility of rejection.

Sludgy: *"I've been suffering with this horrible, dirty thing, and I feel guilty if I don't tell you about it. I have ... [cringe] ... herpes."* [And now I'll quickly and awkwardly continue talking until you interrupt me ...]

Positive: *"It's been great getting to know you. Honesty and integrity are super important to me and I've come to trust you, which feels great. I wanted to tell you something before we continue ... I have herpes. What are your thoughts?"*
[space is wide open for an honest conversation, not a stump speech]

Here's the point: however you choose to have the herpes talk, be aware of what you're communicating to your partner. Be aware that you have choice over how you perceive your situation, and therefore your communication. And after all, your disclosing is only one side of the two sides of disclosing: The first side (you), you have control over. The second side (the other person), is out of your control. Accept that and you're home free.

Watch videos (of interviews and actual coaching sessions) about "the talk": herpesopportunity.com/tag/the-herpes-talk

Facts & Figures

Throw some numbers at 'em!

Inevitably, there will be questions after a disclosure. For the knowledge-hungry, start by downloading the two handouts that came with this e-book: herpesopportunity.com/lp/downloads

The end.

(Or is this just the **beginning**?) You so got this.

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