Caring and support for our learners

In this chapter you will:
1. Find out more about how learners can be affected by HIV and AIDS.
2. Understand the special needs of orphans.
3. Find out what ill learners need.
4. Understand the rights of learners with HIV.
5. Know how to identify learners who need support.
6. Look at ways that schools can create a caring environment.
7. Look at ways to take action.
1. **Find out more about how learners can be affected by HIV and AIDS**

In society we have to deal more and more with family members who are ill or die. In this chapter we look at the role of the school and the educator in dealing with affected and infected learners. Zama’s story illustrates the problem of many children affected by HIV and AIDS.

**Case study**

“My name is Zama. I have been living with my two uncles. One is in jail, one was in hospital but they sent him back. My mother is in Durban. I last saw her when I was very young. No one is bringing money into the house. When I eat, I eat peanut butter, bread, tea. I am feeling very bad. I make my uncle food and I ask if he needs water. He doesn’t want to eat, he just wants cigarettes and cool drink.”

Zama is the only one looking after his uncle. “His wife used to look after him but she has left him. The traditional healer also visits but it is mostly me who helps him at night, and before and after school and on weekends. When I’m at school he is left alone. He got worse not long ago. Even early this year he was working. He was the one who used to bring us money.”

When Zama was asked whether his educator knew about how things are at home, he said no. He had also never been visited by a social worker.

**Discuss**

- What emotional needs does Zama have?
- What practical needs does he have?
- What kind of support do you think he needs most?
Emotional trauma

Zama is probably lonely and depressed. He seems to have very little support and protection in the world. Emotional suffering is probably the strongest effect of HIV and AIDS on children. Their worries can last for a long time as they watch their parents, friends, relatives or caretakers suffer. Some, like Zama, have to care for the dying. They have to find ways to comfort them. These children also suffer from anxiety. They may worry that they too are infected. They fear death and they may wonder where they will go when their parent or guardian dies. They may feel hopeless about the future.

Signs of depression can include:

- Tiredness
- Tearfulness
- Eating too little or too much
- Too much or too little sleep
- Not caring about appearance
- Lack of motivation
- Drop in school performance – poor marks
- Poor concentration and memory
- Withdrawal from others
- Feeling negative and uninterested
- Thinking about suicide.

To add to the suffering of children, families affected by HIV and AIDS are often judged and treated badly. So, instead of getting help and support, some children are met with silence. This adds to the depression and creates low self-worth.

Material suffering

Zama also needs material help. He is not getting proper food and probably needs clothes and toiletries. Orphaned children often have to work to support their brothers and sisters. Looking after the dying involves hard physical labour, including lifting and turning adults, bathing them and helping them to the toilet.

The struggle to get educated

Learners affected by HIV and AIDS can also find it difficult to attend school regularly. This is especially true for children whose parents are ill or who have died. It may be difficult for girls to go to school when they are needed at home to care for those who are sick. They also have to help care for other small children or work in the fields and carry water. They might have to care for younger children in a child-headed household. Such children may find it difficult to go to school, to find school fees or money for school uniforms. They may also be blamed because of someone who has been sick or died of AIDS.

Schools can help such learners to deal with their emotional problems and provide them with skills to make money and survive.

Discuss

- What problems do learners affected by HIV and AIDS in your community have to deal with?
Chapter 3: Caring and support for our learners

2. Understand the special needs of orphans

It is likely that in 2005 over one million children under 15 will have lost one parent to AIDS. This creates new problems. In the past most orphans were taken care of by the extended family. Today families may find it difficult to cope with the numbers of children who need care. Orphans generally have similar problems to children affected by AIDS, but death brings many more problems.

Dealing with grief

Many children don’t have the opportunity to grieve properly. They may be separated from their brothers and sisters when they are put into foster homes. They may have to grieve in silence for their losses, because of the silence around HIV and AIDS. Their loss and the silent grieving can affect them for the rest of their lives.

One way to help children to grieve is to talk to them about death. This has to happen over time. It must take into account the age and culture of the child. Grieving takes time. A child who is grieving needs patience and space.

Discuss

- How does my culture deal with death and dying?
- How can I and others around me help people to grieve?

Lack of care

Losing a loved one can make a child vulnerable to bad treatment from relatives and guardians. Sometimes families fight over the property of dead people and leave children without anything. They make children work and do not care for them properly. Some families speak badly about a parent who has died of AIDS. This makes the grief and anger even worse for the child.

Uncertainty

Death makes life uncertain for a child. Sometimes children are separated from the people they know. Some children may also be afraid that they will lose more people close to them. Children who do not get emotional support may find it difficult to deal with their feelings.

Discuss

- What problems do orphans in your community face?
3. Find out what ill learners need

Learners who are ill with AIDS have similar needs to any other person struggling with illness. However, because HIV attacks the immune system, they need to be especially careful to protect themselves from any infection. They may need the following help:

- Access to a clean and quiet sick bay where they can lie down if they feel sick during school time.
- Help with taking medicine.
- A more understanding approach to schoolwork if they miss classes and tests.
- A clean environment with access to safe drinking water, running water to wash their hands, healthy food preparation and clean toilets.
- A well-balanced diet.
- A safe and accepting environment.

4. Understand the rights of learners with HIV

The National Education Policy on HIV and AIDS looks after the rights of children. It states that:

- No learner with, or thought to have HIV or AIDS, may be unfairly discriminated against.
- Learners with HIV should be treated in a just, sympathetic way.
- No learner should be refused admission to, or continued attendance, at school on account of HIV.
- The testing of learners for HIV as a condition for admission to, or continued attendance, at school is not allowed.
- Learners with HIV are expected to attend classes in accordance with legal requirements for as long as they are able to function effectively.

(Extracts from National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners in Public Schools)

Discuss

- Do you know who the sick learners at your school are? Do you know what they need?
5. Know how to identify learners who need support

The first step is to find out who needs support. To do this the school needs to collect information about learners in a confidential and unharmful way. This could be done through a school audit.

Activity – Do your own school audit

The purpose of this exercise is to find out the following:

- How many vulnerable learners there are and what problems they experience.
- Monitor what is happening to vulnerable learners and find out if they are being referred to services offered by the DSD, DOH or other local or community organisations for care and support.

Step 1: Ask each educator to identify learners who are vulnerable or who have special needs. Encourage educators to do this as confidentially, sensitively and ethically as possible. For example they could ask learners in their class who may be experiencing any of the following: death of a parent, difficulties living with relatives, abuse, alcoholism, neglect, HIV and AIDS related problems, to come and talk to them privately about their problems. Educators could also ask learners to come and tell them of fellow learners who are experiencing difficulties who may find it difficult to tell the educator themselves.

Step 2: Ask educators to fill in an audit sheet like the one shown on page 48.

Step 3: Once these sheets are completed, educators should pass them on to their SMT.

Step 4: The SMT should draw up one combined list from all the separate class audits. They should decide on the most common and important problems.

Step 5: The SMT should hold a meeting with SGB, colleagues and parents to discuss the kinds of problems that children are experiencing. They should also discuss ways to deal with these problems e.g. putting child headed households in touch with a feeding scheme, the DSD or a faith based organisation.

Step 6: The SMT should agree to repeat this exercise every six months.

Step 7: Design and implement the audit every year on an agreed date. This will keep information on learners up to date.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 Problems faced by learners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April, Tumi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brink, Sue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown, Jon</td>
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<td>Cele, Thabo</td>
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</table>
6. Look at ways for schools to create a caring environment

Helping all those affected learners seems a huge job. But Zama’s story can teach us a few simple and practical actions.

For example

- The school could help Zama access a grant or get food parcels.
- It could also provide an educator who is trained in basic counselling. The educator can listen to and support him regularly.
- A school can become one of a number of circles of support for learners and educators. It can network with other government and non-governmental organisations.
- A school can help to identify learners at risk, and ensure that they are supported.

Schools can provide spiritual support for traumatised learners

Spiritual support can bring meaning into the life of such learners. For example:

- A school could invite spiritual leaders to be part of the team that deals with learner support.
- Spiritual leaders could also be asked to come and speak at assembly.
- Lighting a candle and saying a prayer at assembly is a simple way of showing you care.

Schools can get material support for affected learners

Whilst schools themselves cannot provide material support, they can network and get access to material support for learners in need.

This kind of support was shown by some learners from Inkonjane School in Meadowlands, Soweto. Many come from very poor families themselves. Yet, when they heard of the suffering of the AIDS orphans in rural Ingwavuma in KwaZulu-Natal, they were prepared to go without bread to help them. The learners collected enough money, food and clothes to fill a bakkie and take it there. Two learners went along to hand over the goods and to express their love and care.

(Ref. “Our Young People Take It On”.)
Families should be encouraged to deal with their financial problems in the following ways:

- Poor, HIV affected families should apply for exemption from paying school fees. Every school principal and chair of the SGB must assist with this process. If they do not, families should contact the local district office in order to get help.
- The school could start a fund to help families in need. There are many fun and meaningful ways to raise money.
- Schools should link up with the national nutrition programme.
- Schools could ask businesses to donate school uniforms.

**Schools can provide emotional support for traumatised learners**

Because of the AIDS epidemic, it is important that every educator learns basic counselling skills. Here are some simple ways to help a learner who is suffering:

- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- Make sure that the learner is the centre of your attention. Be relaxed. Make eye contact. Lean forward slightly.
- Listen carefully so that you understand the learner’s point of view and feelings.
- Ask for more information, opinions and feelings. Encourage the learner to tell you more by asking questions.
- Don’t interrupt or judge. Control your own emotions. Don’t question the learner too strongly. Don’t be afraid of silence.  

*(Adapted from “HIV&AIDS: Care and Support of Affected and Infected Learners”. DoH)*

Set up a ‘listening hour’ after school. Learners can talk to a sympathetic educator who will listen and allow them to ‘offload’ their problems. Also start a mentoring programme, where educators with counselling skills could offer help to learners. The school audit could help you to find out who these learners are. Mentors could also be responsible for referring learners with special needs. If appropriate, certain learners could also learn counselling skills themselves and visit affected learners.

**Schools can strengthen their support structure**

Every school needs to have a structure or team in place. (See page 29 to get some ideas about a Youth Peer Health Team.) Such a team could help in various ways. It could refer learners, find practical solutions to problems and access support that is already available. A team like this could help to register orphans and access subsidies, grants or food parcels. It could find out which families would benefit from home-care services and put them in touch with the right organisations.

**Case study**

Gahlanso Primary in Tembisa has a School Based Support Team (SBST). It is made up of volunteers from the community and Life Orientation educators at the school. They teach learners life skills and provide HIV and AIDS education. Their major target is child abuse. “Many of our kids are abused ... We won’t take that: we want this school to be the safest place for kids,” says Austin Ledwaba, a member of the SBST. If necessary, the SBST members visit learners at their homes. Parents living with HIV and AIDS are given support, e.g. they are shown how to approach the SGB for exemption from school fees.
**Activity - A safety survey for learners**

All learners need a safe and stable environment to learn in. To get information about the safety of your school do a safety survey like the one below. Protect the learners by telling them that they do not have to fill in their names. They need only indicate their gender and grade.

The survey outline shows how safe learners feel at school.

**Boy/Girl:** ________________________  Grade: ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How safe do you feel in these areas?</th>
<th>SAFE</th>
<th>UNSAFE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom with educator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom without educator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toilets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play area</td>
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<td>Sports ground</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside school gates</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How safe do you feel at these times?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During lessons</td>
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<td>During break</td>
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<td>Coming to school</td>
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<td>During extra-mural activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waiting after school</td>
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<td>Going home</td>
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<tr>
<th>How safe do you feel with:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators from the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys from your class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls from your class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older boys from the school</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Older girls from the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger boys from the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger girls from the school</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Is there any game/activity at the school that makes you feel unsafe?**

**Discuss**

- What should the SGB/SMT say in our policy about what we aim to do about:
  - Our willingness to make our school more caring?
  - Our willingness to make our school safer?
  - Our willingness to make our school environment healthier?
How can educators show that they care?

Promote care in the classroom
Find ways to promote tolerance and respect in your classroom. A positive classroom atmosphere helps learners do well.

Educators can do things like
- Allowing learners to express their feelings of sadness, loss and hope through drawing, writing and drama.
- Teaching entrepreneurial skills so that learners can help support their family financially.
- Helping learners to speak about their feelings of anger, sadness and grief. They can also invite a speaker to talk about feelings.

Discuss
- What should the SGB/SMT/Staff/RLC say in our policy about what we aim to do in showing learners that we care?

“We must remember that HIV infected or affected learners have the same kinds of hopes, dreams and desires that all learners have. They have feelings of sadness, worry, anger, excitement and joy. They want to have friends, play games and want to be treated like any other learner. They also want to be admired and gain recognition for something well done... Treating the learner differently will intensify his/her feelings of being different and have a negative effect on his/her self esteem.”

(DoH HIV/AIDS: Care and Support of Infected and Affected Learners.

Provide academic support for ill learners
Educators can help ill learners with their work in the following ways:
- Letting an ill learner sit near the door.
- Allowing ill learners to take textbooks home so that they can study there if they are unexpectedly sick.
- Helping learners to organise the work they have to catch up on.
- Involving their colleagues and friends in helping them.

Discuss
- What should the SGB/SMT/Staff/RLC say in our policy about what we aim to do in finding useful ways to provide academic support to ill learners?
How can learners care for each other?

Educators can encourage learners to help one another

- Educators could organise voluntary homework buddies. Academically successful learners could help classmates who are often absent. They can help them to catch up with class work and homework.

- At a youth club or an AIDS club at your school, learners could organise various activities. Some ideas are: start a cooking club where learners prepare cheap healthy meals for needy learners, or run a home-care club where they learn the basic skills of caring for ill people. Youth clubs could also teach the skills of home-care, and raise funds to give material support.

- Learners living near ill or affected colleagues can visit them and offer academic or practical support.

Discuss

- What should the SGB/ SMT/ Staff/ RCL say in our policy about what we aim to do in terms of learners making the school a more caring place?

Activity – Go back and work on your HIV and AIDS policy

- Go back to the template on page 10 and fill in what you aim to do about Priority 2: Providing care and support for learners.
7. Look at ways to take action

A school community can respond to many of the problems we have raised.

Here are some actions that deal with supporting learners affected and infected with HIV and AIDS.

Priority 2: Care and support for learners - A summary of issues

In this chapter we discussed five main areas. These are:

1. Creating a caring school:
   For example
   - Providing spiritual, material and emotional support to affected and infected learners.
   - Strengthening support structures in the school and putting learners or their parents in touch with available support.

2. Creating a safe school:
   For example
   - Doing a survey to find out how safe learners feel in the school and then acting on the result of the survey.

3. Creating a healthy school:
   For example
   - Looking carefully at the school to find out how to improve the health of learners.

4. Creating a caring classroom:
   For example
   - Building the self-esteem of learners and helping them to deal with emotional problems.
   - Providing academic support for ill and affected learners.

5. Making use of peer support:
   For example
   - Creating a system of homework buddies and peer teaching.
**Action 1 – Think differently**

In what ways can you use the examples above and your own creative ideas to provide care and support for learners?

**Action 2 – Find out about services and support**

Find out about the care and support services that are available. They will help you to care for learners and improve school safety and health. Then make a list of these services, including contact details, and make sure that the school community has access to it.

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**Action 3 – Look to other schools for ideas**

Look at Rebone Primary’s action plan on the next 2 pages. They already have a School Based Support Team in place that deals with safety and health issues. They have decided to delay action on health and safety until they have done an audit. A very important part of their action plan is to form a Youth Peer Health Team (YPHT) which will soon start functioning. After six months they will plan a meeting to check that the YPHT works well.

- What can your school learn from this example?
- What are they doing well?
- What would you do differently?

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"Teachers are not social workers ... Nevertheless, they can, with others, provide care and support for those affected with HIV and AIDS ... particularly orphans. It is easy to create a culture of care in schools. You do not have to be a social worker to have a culture of care in schools, to ensure a secure environment ... Central to teaching in a secure environment, is observing zero tolerance for violence or abuse in the school setting."

Professor Kader Asmal, MP, Minister of Education

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**zero tolerance**
- Ukungabekezeleli nhlobo
- glad nie geduld word nie
- Ukungabi nalausini
- Go ielwa gothilele

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Chapter 3: Caring and support for our learners
### Action 3 – Look to other schools for ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
<th>Budget?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 January</td>
<td>1. Create a Youth Peer Health Team (YPHT) that can solve and monitor learner problems.</td>
<td>School Based Support Team (SBST) and the new YPHT.</td>
<td>Access to emergency funds for learners in need. Will discuss budget needs at meeting on 19 June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Decide who should be involved.</td>
<td>SBST and staff.</td>
<td>Photocopying of 363 surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Decide how the Youth Peer Health Team (YPHT) functions and what its responsibilities are.</td>
<td>SBST and YPHT.</td>
<td>From results of audit see if budget is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Find out what help/training you can get.</td>
<td>Mr Walter.</td>
<td>Catering R800</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Begin monthly problem-solving meetings.</td>
<td>SBST, SBST and YPHT.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>e. Feedback and monitoring meeting.</td>
<td>SBST, staff and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Plan action for the rest of the year.</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 February</td>
<td>2. Do School Safety Audit</td>
<td>SBST and staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Meet with staff to get cooperation.</td>
<td>SBST and staff.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Carry out audit in school.</td>
<td>SBST.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. Summarise and analyse results.</td>
<td>SBST.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Hold feedback session and plan action where necessary.</td>
<td>SBST, staff and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21 March.</td>
<td>3. Do School Health Audit</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do a health audit of school and draw up an action plan.</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 May.</td>
<td>a. Send out invitations and plan workshop; invite guest speaker.</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Hold workshop.</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 March.</td>
<td>4. Hold community awareness workshop around needs of infected and affected learners.</td>
<td>SBST and SGB.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key Actions:**
- Create a Youth Peer Health Team (YPHT)
- Do School Safety Audit
- Do School Health Audit
- Hold community awareness workshop around needs of infected and affected learners.
### Resources needed

| 1. Phone calls and visits. | District Office ELSEN team, NGOs, DoH, local businesses for donations of food and clothing for needy. | Invite District Support Team members, and local service providers to feedback meeting on 19 of June | a. A YPHT is formed.  
   b. The YPHT is clear about its duties and functions.  
   c. The YPHT has a list of support services they can contact.  
   d. Regular monthly meetings are held where learner problems are discussed and solved  
   e. Learners and educators become aware that there is support from the YPHT.  
   f. The meetings have cleared up any problems. The YPHT has a clear sense of the way forward. |
| 2. Contacts. | | Feedback meeting with SBST and SGB after staff meeting – have we met our deadlines? | a. Staff is keen to help with the audit.  
   b. Audit is carried out.  
   c. A summary of the results shows the way forward.  
   d. An action plan is drawn up. |

### Who will support us?

| 1. Get help with analysis and possible solutions from district officials and CPU.  
   b. Invite speaker from DoE on safe schools. | Contact a nutritionist, and a district nurse to help with the audit. | SBST to give feedback at SGB meeting. | We know where the weaknesses of our school are and plan how to act on them. |

### Who/ how will we monitor our progress?

   4. Catering and school hall.  
   5. A gift for the guest speaker. | a. Contact the department to see whether they know of any good speakers  
   b. Invite District AIDS co-ordinator and social worker to help plan and facilitate the workshop.  
   c. Invite the local newspapers. | A report on the workshop will be presented to the District HIV/AIDS co-ordinator. | a. There is a good turnout at the workshop  
   b. Participants indicated a change of attitude.  
   c. They want to become involved in local home-care programmes. |
**Activity - Work on your Action Plan.**

Work on the part of your action plan that deals with Priority 2: Care and support for affected and infected learners.

- Make sure you cover at least four of the five issues summarised on page 54.
- Decide what the priorities are for your school. For instance, a poor school in an unsafe area should create a safe and healthy school (issues 2 and 3). Where safety and health are not so important, focus more on creating a caring classroom and making use of peer support (issues 4 and 5).
- Remember your aim is to create a more caring school for everybody.
- You can use the example of Rebone Primary on the previous pages to guide you.

(Refer to page 38 for more detail on how to fill in the template.)
### Priority 2: Care and support of affected and infected learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of success</th>
<th>Who/How will we monitor our progress?</th>
<th>Resources needed</th>
<th>Budget?</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Who will support us?</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Indicators of success</th>
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**HIV and AIDS ACTION PLAN OF ________________________**

**Date:** Participants:

**Activity - Work on your Action Plan.**
Summary

In this chapter you:

1. Found out more about how learners are affected by HIV and AIDS.
2. Understood the special needs of orphans.
3. Found out what ill learners need.
4. Understood the rights of learners with HIV.
5. Learned about ways to identify learners who need support.
6. Looked at ways to create a caring environment.
7. Looked at ways to take action.

List of useful resources:

- “HIV/AIDS: Care and Support of Affected and Infected Learners” (Department of Health)
- “Courage to Care” by G. Winkler
- “Signposts for Safe Schools” (DOE), 2003
- “Conference on HIV/AIDS and the Education Sector: Report and Sector Plan of Action”
- Soul City Booklets
  - Grants for Children
  - Choose Life – Living with HIV and AIDS in our World
  - Living Positively with HIV and AIDS
  - Talking about HIV and AIDS
  - AIDS in our community
  - George’s Story
  - Simanga’s Choice
  - Soul City Workbooks
Caring for our educators

In this chapter you will:

1. Find out about how educators can be affected by HIV and AIDS.
2. Think more deeply about disclosure.
3. Learn more about the rights of educators.
4. Understand the responsibilities of educators.
5. Understand the needs of educators living with HIV.
6. Think of ways in which schools can respond to educators’ needs.
7. Find possible solutions.
8. Find ways to take action.