SESSION 3:

ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS TRAINING

Rationale:

This session addresses the difficulty of refusing pressures from partners to engage in unsafe sex practices. These difficulties often result from the women’s lack of assertion during sexual encounters. In order for women to be assertive about safer sex intentions, they must possess the requisite communication and negotiation skills with which to initiate and negotiate these desires. In this session, women will learn the difference between assertive, non-assertive and aggressive behavior. Additionally, the women will learn how to recognize partner pressure and practice dealing with it assertively. Finally, the women will learn a step-by-step approach to decision-making about safer sex.

Materials Needed:

Materials Provided in the HAPPA Program Box:
- Opening and Closing Poem: “Excerpt”
- “Key Concepts on HIV/AIDS Education” handout
- “Being Assertive not Aggressive nor Non-Assertive” handout
- “Vignettes” handout
- “The SISTAS Assertiveness Model” handout
- “Here Comes Trouble!” homework
- Session 3 evaluation form

Other Materials You Will Need for this Session:
- Flip chart, markers & tape
- Ground Rules/Expectations poster (developed after Session 1)
Goals:

a) To discuss the difference between assertive, aggressive and non-assertive behavior.

b) To discuss the consequences of assertive, aggressive and non-assertive behavior.

c) To role play scenarios in which the women initiate a discussion about safer sex.

d) To role play situations requiring assertiveness in order to decline unsafe sexual behaviors.

e) To develop the women's decision-making skills as they apply to safer sex behaviors.

Objectives:

- Recognize the difference between assertive, aggressive and non-assertive behavior.
- Recognize the consequences of assertive, aggressive and non-assertive behavior.
- Increase the women's comfort level in initiating a discussion about safer sex.
- Increase the women's skills in initiating a discussion with their partner about their intention to engage in safer sex.
- Recognize that initiating a discussion about safer sex can serve to clarify health interests and values.
- Recognize that initiating a discussion about safer sex can serve to establish ground rules for engaging in safer sex behaviors.
- Learn to identify risk situations.
- Be able to identify the six steps in good decision making.
- Be able to correlate different options with their consequences.
Session 3 Outline

1) Opening Poem: “Excerpt”
2) Session 2 Review, including Homework
3) What is the Difference Between Assertion and Aggression?
4) Handling Sticky Situations
5) Learning the SISTA Assertiveness Model
6) Homework for Session 3
7) Evaluation for Session 3
8) Closure

I. Opening Poem

b) Read the poem with and/or to the participants.

II. Session 2 Review

a) Key Concepts on HIV/AIDS Education
   i. Prior to the group meeting, write the key concepts on the flip chart for easy reference during the meeting.
   ii. Distribute the “Key Concepts…” handout to the participants.
   iii. Discuss the key concepts of the HIV/AIDS Education session.

b) Discuss Session 2 homework.
   i. When discussing the “Myths and Misconceptions” sheet, ask the women to correct the statements so that they are true.
   ii. When discussing the “HIV/AIDS Knowledge Test,” go over each question individually.
III. What is the Difference Between Assertion and Aggression?

a) Ask the women if they have ever wanted to talk about sex with their partner but they did not know what to say or how to say it.

b) Ask the women how they felt about being in this situation.

c) Inform the women that today’s exercises will help them feel more comfortable about expressing their feelings about safer sex. However, in order to express themselves effectively, they first need to be able to recognize the difference between being assertive, aggressive and non-assertive.

i. Distribute the “Being Assertive not Aggressive nor Non-Assertive” handout.

**WHAT DOES BEING ASSERTIVE MEAN?**

Being assertive is being able to tell someone how you feel, what you want or need in a way that doesn’t threaten, punish, or put them down. Being able to express yourself without anxiety or fear. Being assertive is a skill, meaning that it is something that we learn, not something that we are born with. Being assertive means direct and honest communication between people rather than hoping the other person will figure out what’s on your mind. The other person may not agree, accept or want the same thing you do. But you can feel satisfied knowing that you expressed yourself while considering the other person’s feelings.

Example:

Tanya and Eric have been friends for a long time. Eric borrowed money from Tanya in the past, but never pays her back. Now Eric asks Tanya to lend him $25.

Tanya says: *Look Eric, I know you need some money, but I’ve loaned you money before and you never pay me back. I’m not loaning you any more until you pay back what you already owe me.*
**WHAT DOES BEING AGGRESSIVE MEAN?**

Being aggressive means expressing yourself in a way that is punishing, demanding or threatening to the other person. The person who responds aggressively fails to consider the feelings of the other person. Aggression can be expressed directly or indirectly.

**Direct Aggression:** Name calling and threats

**Indirect Aggression:** Waving your arms and hands, glaring looks

**Example:**

Same situation as above with Tanya and Eric.

Tanya says: *Look you son-of-a-bitch, I'm not giving you anything. I'm not a bank!*

**WHAT DOES BEING NON-ASSERTIVE MEAN?**

Being non-assertive means that you fail to express yourself in a situation. You may not tell the other person how you feel, what you want or need. For example, agreeing to have sex or drugs when you prefer not to. When you are non-assertive, you often have poor eye contact, hesitant speech, low voice level or nervous body movements.

**Example:**

Same situation as above with Tanya and Eric.

Tanya says: *If there isn't anyone else you can get it from, I guess I'll let you have it.*

d) Talk to the women about the importance of using "I" messages to indicate what they value and what they want.

i. Statements that begin with "I" help communication because when you say, "I feel this way..." you take responsibility for your own feelings and thoughts.

ii. Beginning a sentence with "you" (especially with "you always" or "you never") blames someone else for what you feel and think.
IV. Handling Sticky Situations

a) Distribute the “Vignettes” handout.

b) Read the scenarios (below) aloud with the group (or, as an alternative, invite three volunteers to read the scenarios from the “Vignettes” handout).

c) After you have read them, ask the women to give examples of assertive, aggressive and non-assertive responses to these vignettes.

d) Then ask the women what the consequences would be of responding in an assertive, aggressive or non-assertive manner.

Vignette A: Breaking Up With a Nice Guy
You have been spending a lot of time with a new friend. You are starting to worry about your friendship because he likes you in a romantic way, but you don’t feel the same way. You really like the person, and do not want to hurt his feelings, but you don’t want to give him the wrong idea. What would you say?

Vignette B: Braids Are Us
You have finally decided to get your hair braided. You hear that the new hairdresser at the beauty salon does braids. You make an appointment with her. After she braids your hair, you look in the mirror and the braids are all lop-sided and you look like a freak. The hairdresser tells you that you owe her $60 for braiding your hair. What do you say?
Vignette C: He's Just a Horn Dog!
You have always had a secret crush on James, but at the same time, you know he sleeps with every woman in the neighborhood. He finally asks you out. You go out on a date. After the date, you feel pretty sure that you are not ready to have sex with him, but you are afraid that he will not go out with you again if you say no to his request to have sex. What do you do?

V. Learning the SISTAS Assertiveness Model

a) Inform the women that now that they know how to be assertive, they have to learn how to be assertive when they are making decisions about safer sex.

i. Remind the women that in Session 1, we talked about our values and how they helped us in making a decision; and that in Session 2, we talked about the facts that we need to know to engage in safer sex behaviors.

b) Now we are going to look at the different steps that go into making a decision.

i. On the flip chart, write a situation that involves making a decision (consider using the “Vignettes,” above, as examples).

c) Write the 6 steps of the decision-making process:

1. I need to think of myself first. What are my values?
2. I need to use the information that I have about sex and HIV/AIDS. What is safe for me to do?
3. I need to think about the situation. What trouble does it place me in?
4. I need to state the trouble to my partner. What are my choices? What are the consequences?
5. I need to be assertive. What is my decision?
6. I need to suggest alternative. Can I live with the consequences of the alternatives?
d) Distribute “The SISTAS Assertiveness Model” handout.
   i. Review the steps with the women.

e) Then write what you would do for each of the 6 steps in the situation on the flip chart.

VI. Homework

a) There are two assignments for Session 3 homework.
   i. The first is called, “Here Comes Trouble!” In this exercise, the women will utilize the SISTAS Assertiveness Model to identify a time when they got into trouble (i.e., when they did something they didn’t want to do but felt pressured to do it) to answer the series of questions using “I” statements.
   ii. For the second assignment, ask the women to initiate a conversation about safer sex with a friend and a partner.

VII. Evaluation

a) Distribute anonymous evaluation sheets to the participants.
   i. The women will evaluate this session as to how the information was presented and the extent to which the session accomplished its goals and objectives.

VIII. Closure


b) Recitation of the Motto:

THE SISTA PROJECT Motto
SISTA Love is Strong,
SISTA Love is Safe,
SISTA Love is Surviving!