

# Together for Each Other: **Health Is Happiness**

Storybook Discussion Guide



# Acknowledgements

*The Together for Each Other: Health Is Happiness* storybook discussion guide was developed by the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project. Multiple stakeholders contributed, especially the technical team of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and treatment partners in South Sudan, including Jhpiego, ICAP, RTI International, and IntraHealth, as well as Moving Integrated, Quality Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health and Family Planning and Reproductive Health Services to Scale (MOMENTUM), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in South Sudan.

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- Young Positive South Sudan (YPSS)
- Impact Health Organization (IHO)
- National Women Empowerment and Rehabilitation Organization (NWERO)
- Christian Agenda for Development (CAD)
- Initiative for Livelihood Improvement and Development Organization (ILIDO)
- National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU)

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# Introduction

*The Together for Each Other: Health Is Happiness* storybook discussion guide was developed to improve the health outcomes of children under age 15 living with HIV by encouraging HIV disclosure between parents of these children. This is important because when parents hide their own or their child's HIV status, it can be harder to access HIV treatment and medicine for their children.

To encourage HIV disclosure between parents, this discussion guide helps participants:

- Understand the benefits of HIV testing during antenatal care (ANC) and importance of disclosing one's HIV status
- Identify approaches to discuss HIV and disclose HIV status
- Locate services available in their area
- Address negative beliefs about HIV

## How to Use

*The Together for Each Other: Health Is Happiness* storybook discussion guide is used by someone trained to facilitate small group discussions. The ideal size for these groups is six to eight individuals, but no more than 12. The groups can be formed in a community setting or health facility. The guide can also be used to facilitate one-on-one discussions.

Participants in these discussions should be men and women of reproductive age and elder community members. Depending on the context, it may work best to form groups of the same gender or age range.

The flipchart format allows participants to view illustrations as the facilitator tells the story. Each page is divided into several sections.

**Story narrative** – To be read in the local language and delivered in an engaging and lively manner.

**Audience engagement** – Prompts used by the facilitator to keep participants involved.

**Talking points** – Prompts used by the facilitator to summarize key messages from the story.



1/18

### Story Narrative:

In a busy town in South Sudan, a young man was out hustling to make money. He saw a young woman in the market and decided to greet her. She responded, and they begin chatting and agreed to meet again.

### Audience Engagement:

NA

### Talking Points:

NA









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### Story Narrative:

One year later, the young man and woman are married and living with his parents. The young man and his father were having a tense discussion. The bride price had not been paid, it was hard to earn a living, and the cost of goods was increasing.

### Audience Engagement:

NA

### Talking Points:

NA









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### Story Narrative:

Meanwhile, the young woman had been feeling sick in the mornings. Her mother-in-law thought she might be pregnant and congratulated her good fortune. The mother-in-law shared her memories of having children at home because there were so few hospitals at that time. Some of her children had died during childbirth because care was not available.

The mother-in-law encouraged her to go to the health center to confirm the pregnancy and, if pregnant, to have an early antenatal care (ANC) checkup. She said, “South Sudan has come so far since I was young. I wish I had these health services when I was pregnant.”

### Audience Engagement:

1. What are the benefits of visiting the health center during a pregnancy?

### Talking Points:

1. Health center visits during pregnancy help the mother and father understand how the baby is progressing in growth, and things they can do to ensure the unborn child's health.









4/18

### Story Narrative:

The wife told her husband she thought she was pregnant, which brought him joy! Pregnancy is a gift from God and children add to the respect and wealth of the family. The wife discussed going to the health center for a checkup. The husband agreed and encouraged her to go. He was filled with joy thinking about his growing family.

### Audience Engagement:

1. What health center do members of this community prefer for pregnancy checkups?

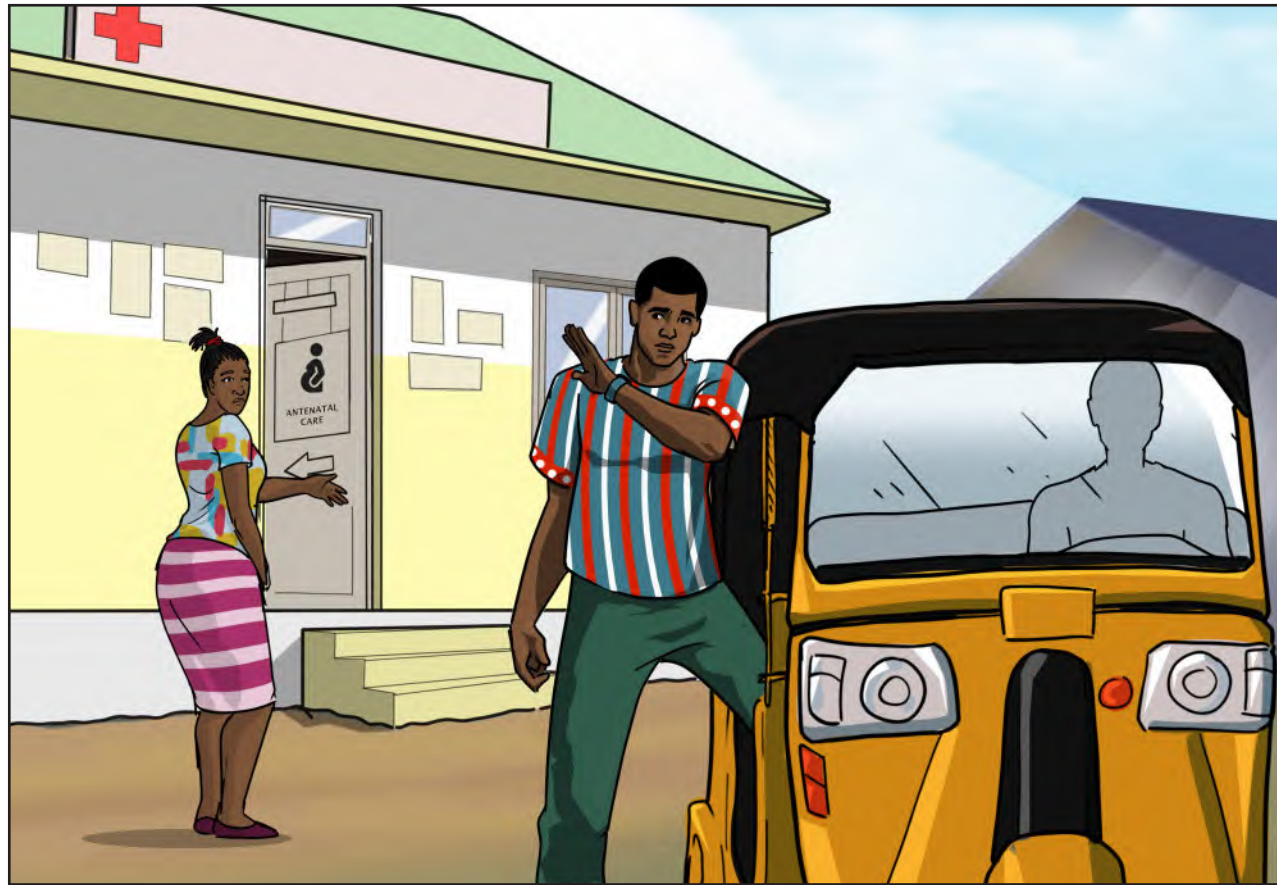
### Talking Points:

1. Some health facilities may offer different levels of service. If you are unsure, consider asking a community health worker (CHW), your local religious leader, or your community chief for guidance.









5/18

### Story Narrative:

On the day of the checkup, the husband took his wife to the health center. The wife was nervous because it was her first visit to ANC services. She asked her husband to come inside with her, but he refused, saying he had too much work and would come back to meet her later.

### Audience Engagement:

1. Why do you think some men refuse to go to the health center with their wife?
2. Has anyone ever attended ANC together with their spouse? What was your experience?

### Talking Points:

1. Men often find reasons for not going to the health center with their wife. When they skip these visits, they miss important information about their growing family and what they can do as leaders of the household to support a healthy birth.









6/18

### Story Narrative:

The wife went to the receptionist and explained she thought she was pregnant. The receptionist directed her to the correct ward where many pregnant women were waiting, some with their husbands. She wished her husband were with her. After some time, she was called to a private room where she received a confidential health check, counseling, and tests. The nurse confirmed she was pregnant.

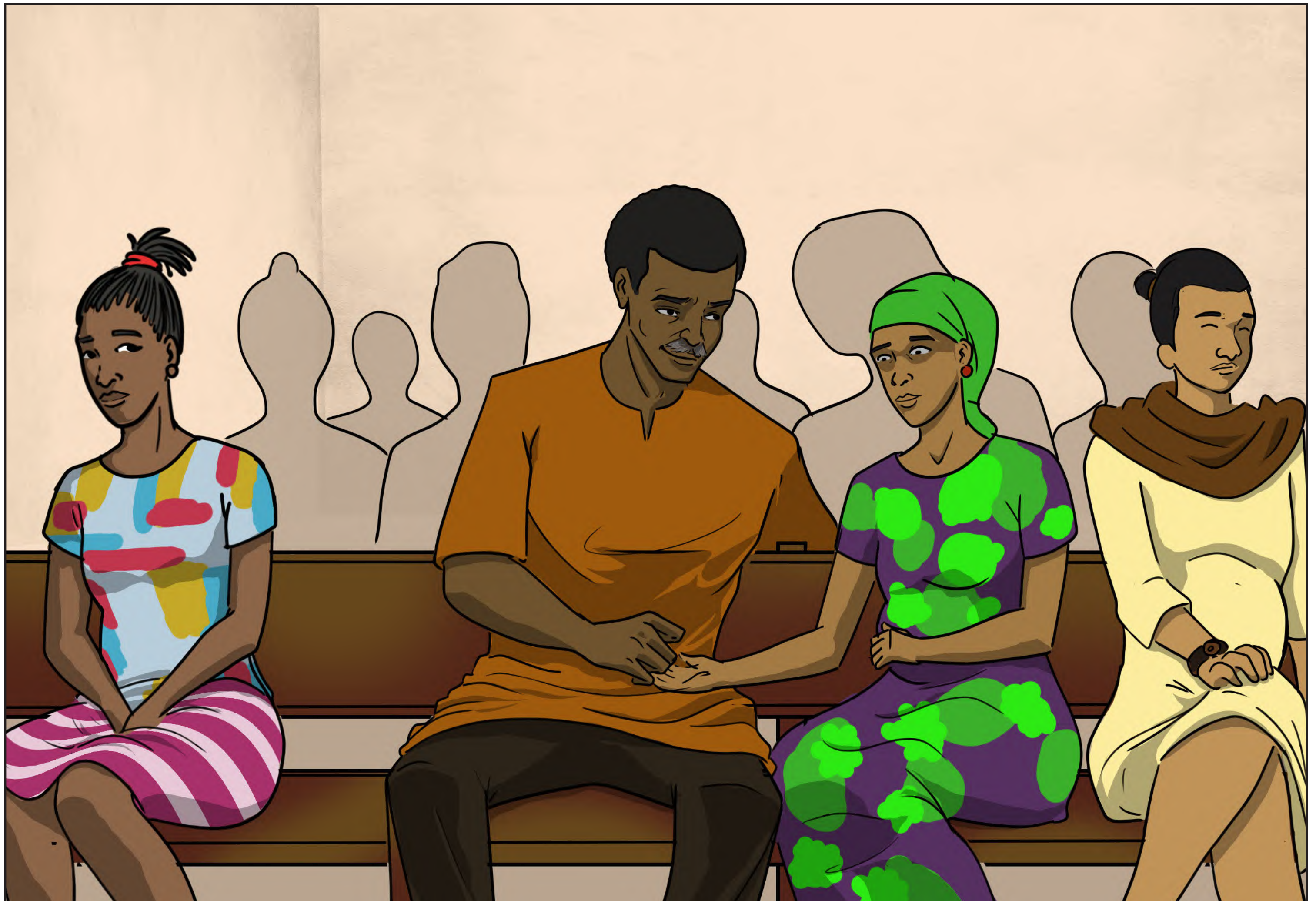
### Audience Engagement:

1. Does anyone remember the tests one receives during pregnancy health checks?

### Talking Points:

1. Many tests are done during an ANC visit. These include tests to confirm pregnancy, and to check for anemia, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV. These tests are important to ensure the mother and baby are safe and healthy.









7/18

### Story Narrative:

A health worker took her to a private room where no one else could hear. Once there, the health worker told her that she tested positive for HIV.

The wife was shocked and sad, wondering how she got HIV, and how she would tell her husband. She wondered what their families and the community would say if they found out. She started crying.

The health worker was patient and explained that HIV used to be seen as a deadly disease and people would lose hope, but that is not true anymore. She explained that modern HIV medicine can lower the amount of HIV in the body so you do not have symptoms. If taken as directed, people with HIV can live long and healthy lives without showing signs of infection or passing HIV to others, including during pregnancy.

The health worker asked if her husband was with her. “No,” she cried. “I don’t know how I will tell him.” The health worker told her that her husband will not know if he is HIV positive until he takes a test. If he is HIV positive and does not begin taking modern HIV medication, he will become very sick. She explained that modern medication is available for free, and managing HIV is easier when both husband and wife support each other. It’s a team effort. The health worker asked her if there was someone else she could talk to.

### Audience Engagement:

1. The health provider explained to the wife that managing HIV is a team effort.
  - a. What does “team effort” mean in the context of husband and wife?
  - b. What are some challenges you expect the wife and husband to face in managing HIV as a team?

### Talking Points:

1. It is common for someone to feel shock and sadness when learning they are HIV positive. This is a normal response.
2. Modern medication, if taken as directed, can prevent passing HIV from mother to child and between partners. The earlier you begin medication during a pregnancy, the better. This is just one reason why going for early ANC is important!
3. Spouses should go for an HIV test if their partner tests positive. The only way to know your HIV status is to take a test. If you have HIV and do not get on treatment, you can become very sick.
4. Modern medication is available for free, but managing HIV is easier when both husband and wife support each other. It’s a team effort.









8/18

### Story Narrative:

After the ANC visit, the husband returned to pick up his wife. She was very quiet and looked worried. He asked, “How was the visit?” She confirmed she was pregnant but did not say anything about her HIV diagnosis.

### Audience Engagement:

1. Why do you think she did not tell her husband about her HIV test results?
2. How long should the wife wait before telling her husband?

### Talking Points:

NA









9/18

### Story Narrative:

For the following week, the wife could not sleep. She did not know with whom to share her HIV status. She thought about her husband and his family, her religious leader, and her own parents. She even considered keeping it a secret, but such a thought was too painful. She wanted to stay healthy and strong for her unborn child and family.

### Audience Engagement:

1. Who should the wife share her HIV status with first? Why?
2. What should the wife consider before she shares the news with this person?
3. How should the wife share the news with her husband?

### Talking Points:

1. Many people are afraid to share their HIV status with others. They are often afraid of how people will react to the news. Many of these fears and the harmful reactions that a person receives continue due to outdated and incorrect information about HIV.







10/18

### Story Narrative:

After a stressful week and some prayer, the wife decided to tell her mother-in-law about her HIV diagnosis. She hoped her mother-in-law could help her talk to her husband. The mother-in-law was shocked and angry. She accused the wife of bringing HIV into the home. The wife insisted she was faithful and explained that she went to the health center for the baby's health, just like the mother-in-law had suggested.

The wife remembered what the health worker had said and told her mother-in-law: "Modern medicine can stop HIV from passing to the baby, I can still have a healthy child and not show any symptoms if I take the medication as prescribed. But I need your help to explain this to my husband. I am afraid he will not listen to me alone."

### Audience Engagement:

NA

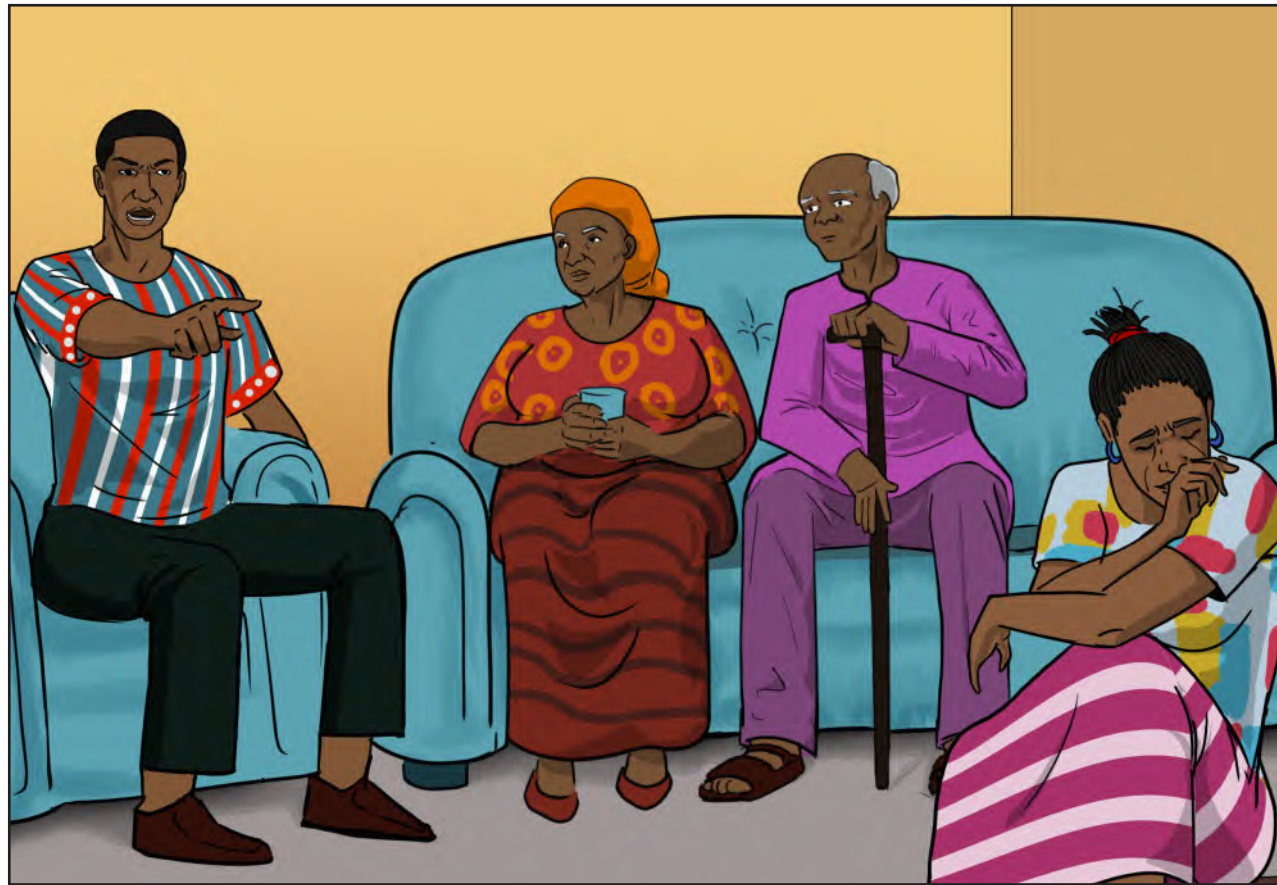
### Talking Points:

1. Managing HIV is easiest when families work together, beginning with the husband and wife. Secrecy makes it difficult for the household to maintain access to modern medication and services.









11/18

### Story Narrative:

The mother-in-law agrees to discuss the matter with her husband, who calls a family meeting. The father-in-law tells his son that his wife tested positive for HIV at the health center. The son is shocked and very angry. He yells at his wife and accuses her of giving him HIV. He denies any responsibility, and his wife begins to cry.

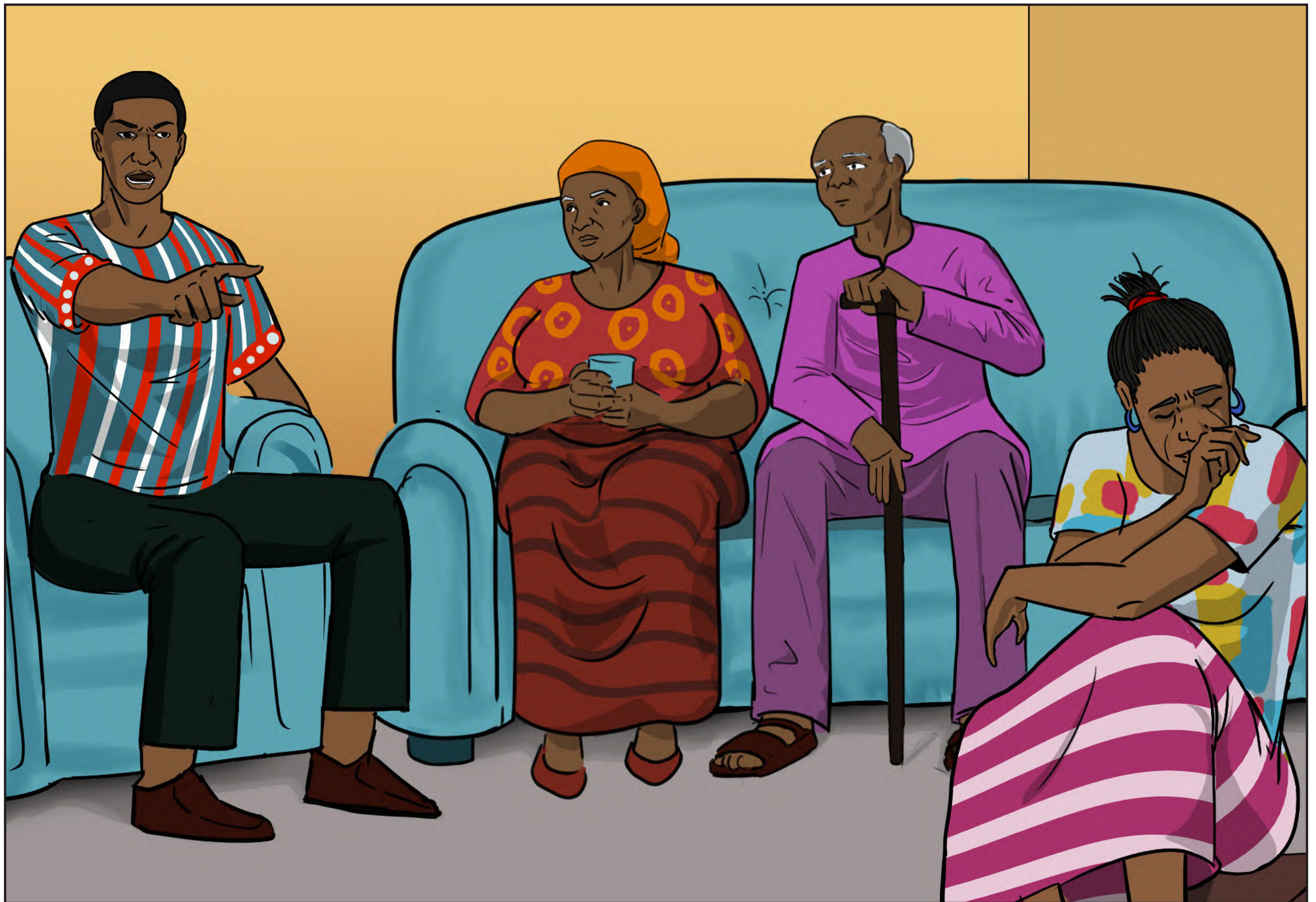
### Audience Engagement:

1. How do you think the husband's behavior is affecting his family?
2. How might the husband's behavior be perceived in terms of his role as the leader of his family?

### Talking Points:

1. While it is common for people to become angry and scared when they learn they or their spouse has HIV, this behavior spreads fear, shame, and secrecy.
2. As head of the household, the husband needs to make a plan to ensure his family and unborn child can access free modern medication. This is the husband's responsibility as the leader of his family.









12/18

### Story Narrative:

The mother-in-law reminded her son that they both encouraged his wife to go to the health center for a checkup. This was a good decision because now they know her HIV status and can get free modern medication to keep her and the unborn baby safe and healthy.

### Audience Engagement:

NA

### Talking Points:

NA









13/18

### Story Narrative:

The father-in-law said to his son:

“The time for finding blame for HIV has passed. It will only lead to more anger and pain and make things worse. Now is the time to act like a leader. There is free modern medication available. Take responsibility and control of your future and go with your wife to the health center. Listen to the health workers. This is a difficult journey but if you support one another, you will be stronger for it.”

### Audience Engagement:

1. What do you think the father-in-law meant when he said, “Finding blame for HIV has passed; this will only lead to more anger and pain”?
2. Based on the knowledge you have gained about modern medication, what should the husband do?

### Talking Points:

1. HIV is common and not something to be ashamed about, but families deserve their privacy.
2. When a husband and wife work together to manage HIV as a team and take modern medication as directed, it is easier to keep personal health matters private and no one will see any symptoms.









14/18

### Story Narrative:

The husband sat alone, feeling overwhelmed. He thought about the mean comments he heard people in the community make about people living with HIV. He felt like his reputation as a man and dream of having a big family were over and it might be easier to run away.

He also thought of listening to his parent's advice, thinking about his wife and unborn child and their future, and going to the health center to get tested. He wanted to forget his problems, but knew he had to face them to realize his dream of having a happy and healthy future with his family.

### Audience Engagement:

1. Why would the husband choose a harmful choice instead of seeking HIV testing and treatment?
2. What do you think the husband would accomplish if he ran away from this challenge?

### Talking Points:

1. Learning about one's HIV status can lead men and women to consider different choices and options. Some choices can cause harm, violence, and conflict. Some choices, while requiring work, can lead to a long and productive life with HIV.









15/18

### Story Narrative:

The husband knew the choice he had to make to safeguard he and his family's future. He found the courage to face his fears. He and his wife went back to the health center for him to have an HIV test. Even though he was scared inside, he stayed strong. After learning he was HIV positive, the health worker eased his mind by explaining how to manage HIV and the benefits of treatment.

### Audience Engagement:

NA

### Talking Points:

NA









16/18

### Story Narrative:

Ten years have passed, and the husband and wife continue to support each other. They take their modern HIV medication every day as directed. They both remain strong: the husband works hard, moving heavy sacks of cement when money is needed, while the wife handles household chores, including carrying heavy jerry-cans of water. Their teamwork brings them closer together.

### Audience Engagement:

NA

### Talking Points:

1. A lot of stigma is associated with HIV in South Sudan. It is based on outdated and incorrect information. People living with HIV can live long and healthy lives when they take modern medication as directed.
2. There are people in South Sudan who have been managing HIV for decades, some are 70 years old. This shows the hope that modern medication provides.









17/18

#### Story Narrative:

As a couple living with HIV, the husband and wife know it is important to take their newborn children for HIV testing. Testing each newborn child provides proof and assurance that the modern medication prevents the HIV from passing from mother to child, answering their prayers.

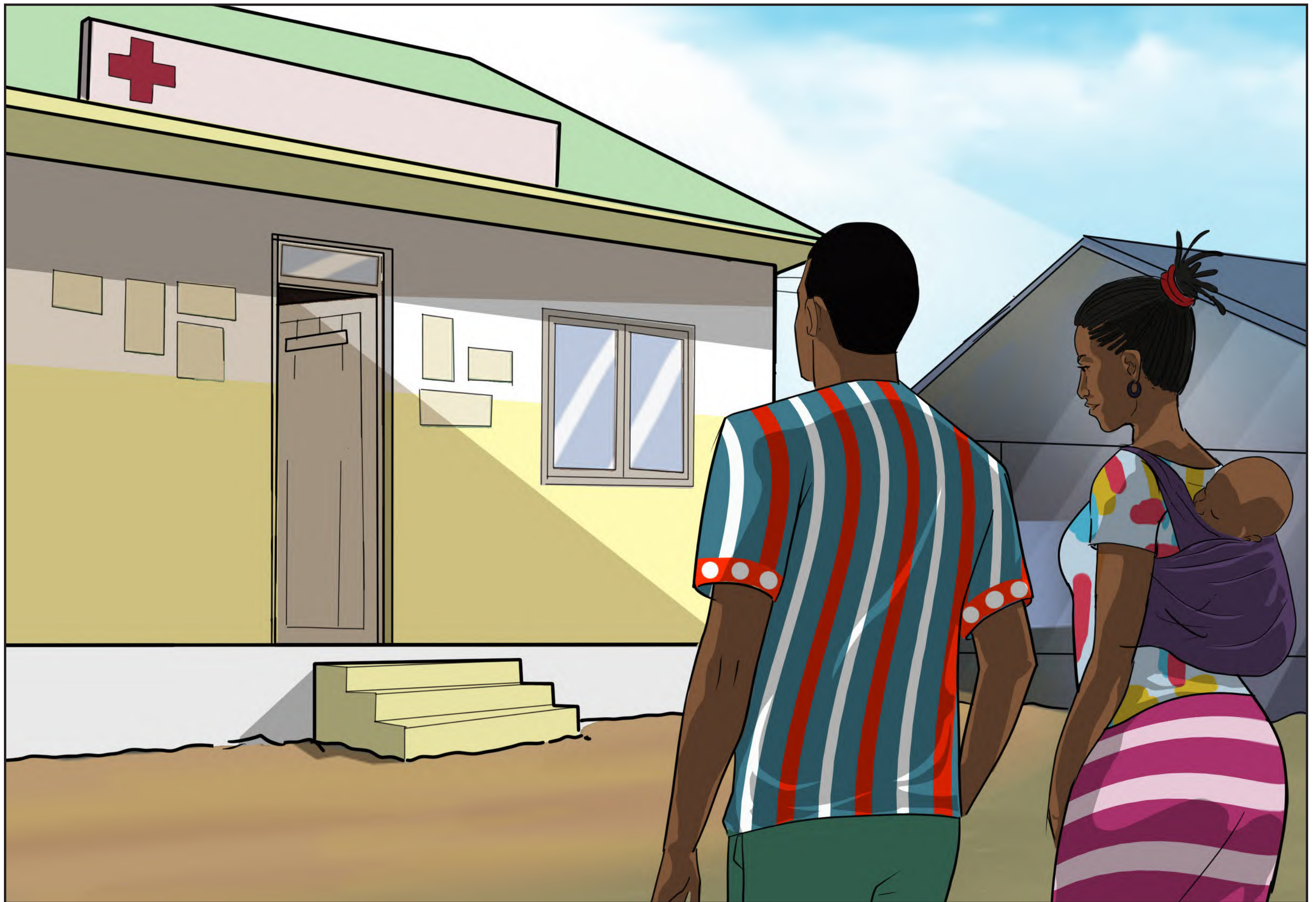
#### Audience Engagement:

NA

#### Talking Points:

1. For children born to a mother with HIV, HIV testing is always recommended. Some families may not have the opportunity to begin HIV treatment during pregnancy, before the child is born. For these families, HIV testing allows them to begin treatment as soon as possible.
2. For children living with HIV, the sooner the child begins taking the modern medication, the stronger they will be. They can grow up healthy, remain symptom-free, and prevent spreading HIV to others.









18/18

### Story Narrative:

With modern medicine, HIV did not stop the husband and wife from having more children. With each pregnancy, they visit the health center early and explain to the health workers they are living with HIV. The husband and wife know that the health workers can help them prevent their unborn children from contracting the disease with the proper medication and support.

### Audience Engagement:

1. What steps did the husband take to reach his goal of having a healthy family?
2. What steps can a husband take to support his wife if he learns he or his wife has HIV?
3. What new information did you learn from the story?

### Talking Points:

1. Our story has a happy ending because the couple was able to overcome their fears and support each other. Their journey began with a visit to the health center as soon as the wife believed she was pregnant. There, the wife and, later her husband, learned that HIV testing was just as important as ANC for keeping their family healthy.
2. Encourage the people you know to seek out ANC services if they think they might be pregnant. If they find out they are HIV positive, modern medication will make HIV manageable, and they can live a healthy and happy life. Knowing your HIV status and starting HIV treatment is the only way to protect the health of your family, especially your children.







