

# Maarifa

The Armor of positive Living for Youth

FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

*Maarifa*, n. (2) a plan, means of getting over a difficulty

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## About the Author

Jessica Hasslen Steyn, went to Kenya in 2001 as a volunteer with a Minnesota based non-profit organization. God led her to continue her relationship with the people of Kenya, specifically to fill an important gap in the services offered to adolescents living with HIV.

In December of 2012, Jessica was asked to write the stories of adolescents living with HIV at a camp for HIV+ youth in Kijabe, Kenya. She realized very quickly that once a year for a week was not enough psychosocial support for these young people. A number of mental and physical health complications were visible in the adolescents because of this important element of treatment was lacking. Prevention curriculum existed but materials that spoke to the needs of adolescents already infected did not.

Jessica decided to put her master's degree in international journalism to use and endeavored to write an HIV curriculum for adolescents infected with HIV. God orchestrated the gathering of materials, knowledge, and people that made the writing of the Maarifa curriculum possible. Maarifa is a Swahili word that means, "a plan or means to get over a difficulty."

Jessica now resides, in North Carolina with her husband Daniel and daughter Nadia. The Maarifa curriculum continues to be used by various clinics and faith-based counseling programs in Kenya. Her main focus now is to get the Maarifa curriculum into the hands of adolescents living with HIV worldwide.

To learn more about the curriculum please go to [www.mymaarifa.org](http://www.mymaarifa.org). You can contact Jessica directly at [maarifainfo@gmail.com](mailto:maarifainfo@gmail.com)

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# Forward

Having been involved in HIV education since 1985, I have seen major changes in the approaches being taken toward slowing the spread of the virus, motivating people to take their medication consistently, and overcoming stigma and the discrimination that results. Some of those changes have been very good, others, not so helpful.

One of the most important things to understanding for any who are involved is that HIV is not just about disease or medicine or facts or statistics or information. It's about people! If we lose sight of the people involved, we fail to be effective HIV educators, care givers, researchers, or in any other sense involved.

Maarifa is the product of a great deal of study and the heart of a woman who knows the importance of remembering people and, specifically, cares so deeply for young people that she is compelled to put her creativity and knowledge into a curriculum that will make a major difference in their lives.

Young people continue to be at the highest risk of infection. Jessica Steyn understands that the most important element in HIV education is not information, but motivation. If they are not motivated to apply what they learn about HIV, it will not have any impact on the choices they make. She also understands that fear alone is not an effective motivator.

Steyn incorporates positive, hope filled motivation into the lessons to help young people see that there are wonderful benefits that come with healthy choices, not just the risks of other choices. Having spent many years of her life living in Africa, she also understands that motivation that is effective comes from people within the local culture, not outsiders. She also understands that the people of Africa make up many, many cultures, not just one.

One of the most important obstacles to addressing HIV is stigma. It motivates people to avoid testing. If they test positive, stigma makes it harder to seek and stay on treatment. Stigma must be overcome! Steyn understands that this will not happen by just educating people about HIV or telling them it is not appropriate to stigmatize. She incorporates the understanding that stigma is a negative attitude toward those living with HIV. As such, to overcome it, the attitude must be replaced with positive attitudes. These can include caring, friendship, compassion, and the understanding that people living with this virus are valuable. When people come to the point of realizing how much they have to gain from friendship with those with HIV, they are motivated to build relationships that make stigma a thing of the past.

Steyn believes in young people. She believes in their value as people and in their ability to make and carry out healthy choices. That includes saving sex for marriage and being faithful in marriage, undoubtedly the most effective way to stop the spread of HIV. She also understands that not everyone will make those choices. As a result, she is committed to being sure young people understand the truth about other approaches to slowing the spread of HIV. That includes teaching the truth about the effectiveness and failures of condoms.

Young people's lives are worth saving and Maarifa is a tool that has the potential not only to save their lives, but also to make their lives more fulfilling, productive, and abundant.

- Duane Crumb, Founder and Director of HIV Hope International

*Duane Crumb is the Founder and Director of HIVHope International. In that role, he travels around the world speaking and facilitating seminars to equip and empower people to develop their own creative strategies, materials, and programs to effectively address the issues involved in HIV in their local cultures and meet the needs of those living with the disease. Through 2015 he has facilitated 76 seminars in 23 countries on 4 continents. Previous to this he co-founded the American Institute for Teen AIDS Prevention and became its Executive Director. There he developed and distributed HIV education materials primarily targeting the public schools of the United States. He presented motivational HIV prevention assembly programs in middle and high schools and other settings in 38 states and many other countries, addressing more than 800,000 students.*

## 2 Breastplate = Self-acceptance

**Objectives:** To understand one's value to God. To understand the benefits of accepting one's status.

**Resources needed:** Pencils, pens, writing and drawing paper, crayons, markers, or paint.

**Approximate time:** 120 minutes



**Opener:** Mirror Exercise: Have youth write down three physical aspects of themselves that they like (are unique, special, interesting). They shouldn't tell anyone what they've written. Give each person in the room a name of another person. Have them describe that person to the rest of the group by saying what is unique, special or interesting about their physical appearance. Then the facilitator can read what each participant wrote about them self. ***Through this exercise we are learning to value ourselves and others. Facilitators may need to model this for the participant to understand what is expected of them. See appendix for more information.***



**Devotion:** Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV) - *13 For You shaped me, inside and out. You knitted me together in my mother's womb long before I took my first breath. 14 I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your unique creation, filled with wonder and awe. You have approached even the smallest details with excellence; Your works are wonderful; I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.*

What is this? *Hold up a \$1 bill – one that is worn out, dirty, maybe ripped.* Who wants it? Everyone wants it! Why? It's dirty and old and crumpled. Why do you want it? *They will say something about the fact that it still has value.* Will a store take it if it looks like this? Maybe not, but if you take it to the bank, they will replace it with a new one. That's what God does when we come to Him broken whether our brokenness is an illness or something we did wrong or something that wasn't our fault at all. God forgives us, or cleans us up, or heals our heart. He basically makes us new again. That's how much He values us. We are never too broken to be valuable to God. He loves us no matter what.

Sometimes we look at ourselves and hate who we are; we judge our physical appearance, our status and our family harshly. Our past mistakes and failures may make us want to isolate ourselves from others. But like the psalmist, we need to remember that God loves each of us just the way we are. It's not what you have that defines who you are, but what God is doing in your life. Money, power and popularity don't add value to your life.

What are the benefits of accepting your HIV status? (Have the participants list examples to these questions)

- Accepting yourselves gives you the power to move on.
- It improves your self-image
- It boosts your ability to live positively.
- It gives you a sense of belonging.

What are the consequences of failing to accept your HIV status?

- Poor interpersonal relationships
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Isolation
- Poor performance



When we are aware of how valuable we are to God; we will want to thank him for giving us life.



**Prayer:** Dear God, please help us to always remember how valuable we are to you and respect and love ourselves and others as you love us. Amen.



**Maarifa Play:** Have youth read aloud Act Two of the Maarifa play from their booklet. Then break up into age-appropriate groups and go through the discussion questions.



**Small Group Discussion:** (create age-appropriate groups)

Before the discussion the facilitator can say: When you get bad news, how do you react? Where do you feel it first?

For most people they feel it in their chest! Your heart beats rapidly. When we hear the news that we have HIV we feel it first in our chest. That is why the breast plate of the armor of positive living is so important. The breastplate represents acceptance of ourselves and our status. Unless we have accepted ourselves and our condition and therefore put the breastplate in place, it is impossible to live positively and be able to live out God's purpose in our life, as well as to live positively.

Have participants answer first, then fill in where needed with the answers provided.

1. What makes you special and valuable? Who are you valuable to?
  - *You were created in God's image. You are one of a kind. God knew you before you were born, He formed and created you and He knows everything. Even if you have HIV, you are still treasured by God and a valuable member of your family, your school/community. There is only one of you in this world, with the specific talents that God gave you! If you don't use those talents something will be missing!*
2. Who is God?
  - *God is love. God is our saviour. God is our friend. God is our strength.*
3. How do you think God sees you?
  - *He knows that you have HIV, and He knows how to take care of you. But remember, God does not behave or think like men, He does everything at His own time and for His own reasons, and He desires that we listen to Him and be obedient to Him.*
4. How has Truth's HIV status changed who he is? How has your HIV status changed who you are?
  - *Part 1: He must eat healthier and take medication. But is Truth different? No. He made the healthy choice to talk to the counselor and learn how to live positively.*
  - *Part 2: It hasn't, but how will his peers perceive it? Examples: He isn't as strong as before. He gets sick more often. His friends don't speak to him anymore. The neighbors talk about him behind his back. None of these things will change who you are inside. Your favorite color is still green, and your favorite food is still chicken. HIV is an illness, nothing more. It can't change you unless you allow it to.*
5. What does "accepting your status" mean for your health, your relationships, and your education?
  - *Health: You don't get sick as often, you'll be healthier longer, and you'll live longer.*
  - *Relationships: You'll not be as isolated. You'll have friends and relatives who support you. Your mood will be generally positive.*
  - *Education: You study harder because you see opportunity in the future. Education improves your chances of making a good living.*

So, when God says that you are special, and He loves you, you must believe that! God does not say that He only loves you when you are healthy! God loves you always... when you are healthy and when you are sick. God loves you when you are scared and when you are courageous! God has a plan for your life.



**Express Yourself:** Ask participants to write or draw what self-acceptance looks like. Examples: A heart with those who support you inside, a hug; how does accepting your status make you feel?

Handout **Takeaway** sheet and make sure food is consumed or distributed.