HIV Transmission Game

Goals:
- To demonstrate how easily HIV is transmitted.
- To discuss the stigma and myths surrounding HIV.

Have Ready:
- Pens and paper for every participant.
- A small circle drawn on the back of one piece of paper.
- A small triangle drawn on the back of another piece of paper.
- Flipchart paper and markers.

Instructions:
- Handout the papers, ensuring that the circle and triangle have been handed out.
- Be aware of who gets the circle and the triangle. The person with the circle on the back of their paper will become the first person with the infection, pick someone who you think will be able to handle the experience; someone who demonstrates confidence and comfort with themselves. Use your discretion wisely so one feels picked on. Unless necessary, do not explain the circle/triangle yet.
- Instruct the group to get three legible signatures each on their paper.
- Each person needs at least one signature of someone they don’t know very well.
- Tell the group that they are not supposed to sign their own paper.
- Encourage them to walk around the room and mingle (they should be going to the other side of the room for signatures, emphasize that they cannot just get the people around them to sign their paper).
- Once they are finished, ask the person with the circle on their paper to come to the front of the room.
- Explain that for the purpose of this game only, the circle on the back of the piece of paper represents that this person has HIV.
- That person then reads out the three people they have on their paper. These represent the people they had high-risk activities with (not necessarily unprotected sex). Ask these youth to come to the front of the room as well.
- Once at the front, get the new people standing to read out the names on their list. If all goes well the whole class will be standing at the front of the class by the end of the exercise.
- Now ask the person with a triangle on their paper to step forward. Tell the group that this person practiced safer activities with the people on their paper. They have not contracted the HIV so they can sit down. However, everyone on their sheet probably has HIV because they engaged in unsafe behaviours with other people in the room.
- Ask class to sit down.
- Note: This activity can also be done with any STI instead of HIV.
Debrief:

- **Discuss: What is stigma and how stigma may prevent people from using protection?**
  The hurtful names that people may get called or the negative way they are treated because they have an STI, have had an STI in the past, or are rumoured to have an STI, are examples of negative moral judgements called stigma. These examples of stigma not only make people feel ashamed and/or prevent them from getting tested; it can also affect/harm all of us by making us feel hesitant about using condoms or other forms of protection, for fear of being called names.

- **Discuss: What are some myths surrounding condom use and how do they affect stigma?**
  Sometimes there are statements/assumptions made that are often not true that can increase stigma. These are called myths. There are many myths about STI. Ask the youth to give you examples of myths surrounding STI; what they have heard. (You may want to write these on a flipchart)
  - “I can tell if someone has an STI”
  - “He’s not a player,“
  - “I don’t date dirty people”
  - “I know my partner really well/ I’ve known my partner for a long time, I’m sure they don’t have an STI”
  - “I’ve never had sex before, so I can’t get an STI”

  Ask if there are any other myths they would like to add to the list. Debrief how each of these myths are false and explain that if you buy into these myths you may not think you are at risk for an STI and therefore, not protect yourself.

- **Discuss: How can we take responsibility for our own health?**
  Respond by explaining that while someone may feel hurt, angry or embarrassed if they get an STI, part of taking responsibility is realizing that ultimately only you can be responsible for your health. This is why it is important to become comfortable communicating with your partner/s about using protection and getting tested.

- **Discuss: How could someone protect themselves from an STI?**
  Abstinence, using condoms and dental dams, getting tested and communicating comfort levels and boundaries.

- Talk about where youth can get tested and the testing procedures in your area.