



Dinner and AIDS

“Hey, Elizabeth,” Jade said, approaching her best friend in the hallway. “Would you like to go to dinner with me and Carly tonight?”

Elizabeth looked up from her locker.

“You mean, the girl with AIDS? No thanks, I’m not about to get AIDS over dinner.”

Jade’s smile faded into a blank stare.

“Are you serious? I thought you were open-minded and smart, Liz, but it sounds like you’ve heard some misconceptions about HIV and AIDS creating some stigma.”

“What is stigma?” Elizabeth asked, suddenly curious.

“Stigma is defined as a mark that differentiated people from others and because of this, they are separated from others. People who are living with HIV or AIDS often find themselves negatively viewed, like you are doing with Carly. It’s not just those with the disease that find themselves discriminated against. One time, Carly’s younger brother had rocks thrown at him because they knew his sister had AIDS.”

“That’s terrible,” Elizabeth said, realizing how uniformed she had been. “Why is there such a stigma against HIV and AIDS?”

“There is such a stigma because it is a life-threatening disease. It is also related to socially taboo topics, namely sexuality that prevents people from wanting to talk about that issue,” Jade explained.

“Well, does this really matter?”

“Of course it does,” Jade responded. “Stigma and discrimination is a great barrier for talking about this problem and preventing it from becoming worse. When people are discriminated against, there is less of an interest to seek testing and medical services. When the society has certain beliefs about HIV and AIDS, it relates to how often services are utilized. When stigma is established, people tend to increase their denial of the disease. No one wants to think or talk about HIV and AIDS when there are so many negative ideas surrounding it. As a result, this prevents any change in the current trends and hinders educational efforts.”

Elizabeth sighed.

“I kind of understand, but wouldn’t it just be easier to separate those with HIV away from the other people. Wouldn’t that stop the epidemic?”

“No,” Jade told her. “It has been shown that this type of overt discrimination would increase stigma and no one would become tested because of it. This halt of testing would end up increasing prevalence because no one would have knowledge of their HIV status.”

“Wow, how do you know all of this?” Liz asked, grabbing her backpack and walking down the hall with her friend.

“I used to be like you, Elizabeth. I was petrified to be around someone with AIDS, but the more Carly explained it to me, the more I realized that my fears were unfounded.”

“I see,” Elizabeth said. “You know, I think I will go out to dinner with you guys tonight. Maybe she can help me understand the disease more so I am able to spread the word and inform others.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” Jade said, pleased that she had changed the mind of another person.