

SISTA Project Overview

The SISTA Project—or **Sisters Informing Sisters About Topics on AIDS** -- is a social skills training intervention aimed at reducing HIV sexual risk behavior among African American women at highest risk. It consists of five two-hour sessions delivered by peer facilitators in a community based setting. The sessions are gender and culturally relevant and include behavioral skills practice, group discussions, lectures, role play, a prevention video, and take home exercises. The five sessions that generate these discussions and activities include Ethnic/Gender Pride; HIV/AIDS Education; Self Assertiveness Skills Training; Behavioral Skills Management; and Coping.

SISTA applies both the Social Cognitive Theory and the Theory of Gender and Power. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, people need information (HIV risk-information), social and behavioral skills and norms to apply risk-reduction strategies. A change in behavior is dependent upon self efficacy, self confidence and outcome expectations.

The Theory of Gender and Power is a Social Structural Theory that accounts for gender-based power differences in male-female relationships. It examines by gender– the division of labor and the distribution of power and authority within relationships and gender-based definitions of sexually appropriate conduct. In addition, the theory considers the impact of a woman’s willingness to adopt and maintain sexual risk-reduction strategies within heterosexual relationships as it pertains to her lack of power, her commitment to the relationship and her role in the relationship.

The study was originally implemented with 128 heterosexual women. Results indicated a social skills training that is delivered in a community setting can positively affect condom use. Specifically, women in the experimental condition, reported more condom use than women in the control condition.¹

The SISTA intervention should be facilitated by two peer health educators (at least one full time employee). Peers should be of the same race/ethnicity and gender as the target population. The staff should be well versed on HIV transmission and methods for preventing HIV transmission and should have a non-judgmental attitude toward people living with HIV/AIDS. Partnering agencies, if any, should be identified as well as a location to conduct five group sessions with 10-12 women.

Agencies implementing SISTA should choose a location that is easily accessible from public transportation routes. The intervention sessions must be conducted in a secure location such that confidentiality of participants is maintained. It is important that sessions are not interrupted by distractions, such as people entering and exiting the room, or outside noise levels. The location should be able to accommodate 10-12 persons comfortably and privately. In addition, the agency should take into consideration the intervention activities, including role play and role demonstration.

¹ DiClemente RJ, Wingood GM. A Randomized controlled trial of an HIV sexual risk reduction intervention for young African American women. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1995, 274(16), 1271-1276.

SISTA Core Elements:

- **Convene** small-group sessions to discuss the session objectives, model skills development, role-play women's skills acquisition, and address the challenges and joys of being an African American woman.
- **Use** skilled African American female facilitators to implement SISTA group sessions.
- **Use** cultural and gender appropriate materials to acknowledge pride, enhance self-worth in being an African American woman (e.g., use of poetry by African American women).
- **Teach** women to communicate both verbally and nonverbally to show that she cares for her partner and needs to protect herself (i.e., negotiation skills, assertive communication skills).
- **Instruct** women on how to effectively and consistently use condoms (i.e., condom use skills).
- **Discuss** cultural and gender-related barriers and facilitators to using condoms (e.g., provide information on African American women's risk of HIV infection).
- **Emphasize** the importance of partner's involvement in safer sex (i.e., enhance partner norms supportive of condom use).

SISTA Sessions:

The SISTA Project consists of five weekly two hours sessions. The goals and activities of the sessions are as follows:

Session 1-Ethnic/Gender Pride

Goal: Generate a discussion about being African-American and female, having pride in oneself, and valuing oneself.

Session 1 Activities:

- Read Opening Poem
- Greetings and Introduction
- Ground Rules and Expectations
- Facilitate Gender/Ethnic Pride Discussion
- Homework
- Session 1 Evaluation
- Read Closing Poem and Recite SISTA Motto

Session 2-HIV/AIDS Education

Goal: Provide factual and statistical information on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), correct misconceptions about HIV/AIDS, and discuss the importance of protecting oneself.

Session 2 Activities:

- Read Opening Poem
- Review Ground Rules and Expectations
- Review Session 1 Key Concepts
- Distribute HIV/AIDS Informational Materials and Initiate Discussion
- HIV/AIDS Educational Activity
- Video Presentation and Discussion
- Homework
- Session 2 Evaluation
- Read Closing Poem and Recite SISTA Motto.

Session 3-Assertiveness Skills Training

Goal: Teach the distinction among assertive, aggressive and non-assertive behaviors and teach skills to initiate assertive qualities.

Session 3 Activities:

- Read Opening Poem
- Review Session 2 Key Concepts and Review Homework
- Facilitate a discussion on Assertion and Aggression
- Review Situational Vignettes and Discuss Steps in Decision Making
- Homework
- Session 3 Evaluation
- Read Closing Poem and Recite SISTA Motto.

Session 4-Behavioral Self-Management

Goal: Decrease participants' anxiety about condom use, demonstrate and role-play how to use condoms and discuss reasons that women do not insist upon using condoms.

Session 4 Activities:

- Read Opening Poem
- Review Session 3 Key Concepts
- Discussion on Condom Use and Overcoming Barriers to their Use
- Distribute condom packets and lubricant
- Condom Demonstration and Assessment of Participants' Knowledge
- Role Play Negotiation Exercises
- Homework
- Session 4 Evaluation
- Read Closing Poem and Recite SISTA Motto

Session 5-Coping Skills

Goal: Initiate discussion about coping with life experiences --including the link between alcohol and AIDS, coping with alcohol and sex, and coping with negative responses. This session also serves as a review of the previous sessions.

Session 5 Activities:

- Read Opening Poem
- Review Session 4 Key Concepts and Homework
- Review Session Handouts
- Discussion of Coping Skills and its Relationship to Alcohol Consumption
- Distribute Coping Handout
- Purpose of Booster Sessions
- Final Evaluation
- Read Closing Poem and Recite SISTA Motto

For more information on the SISTA project please visit our website at www.effectiveinterventions.org, email interventions@aed.org or call (800) 462-9521.