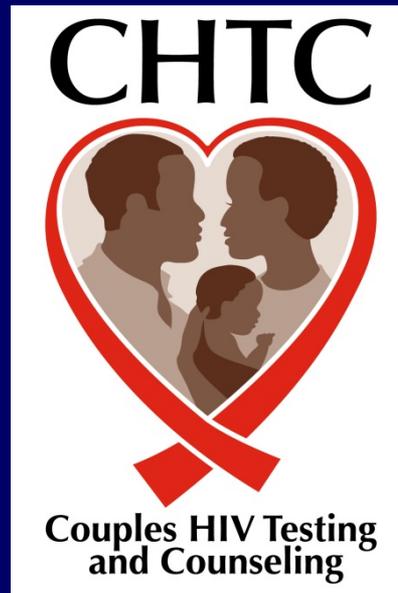


Couples HIV Testing and Counseling (CHTC) *- in Health Care Settings -*



Module Two: Couples Communication Skills

Objectives for Module Two

- ❖ List the basic communication skills of CHTC providers
- ❖ Identify the unique challenges of communicating with couples
- ❖ Mitigate tension and diffuse blame that may arise during a CHTC session
- ❖ Direct communication to effectively facilitate CHTC
- ❖ Utilize the solution-focused model for delivering CHTC
- ❖ Discuss the importance of gender issues
- ❖ Identify gender issues that may arise during CHTC and identify strategies for addressing these issues

Solution-Focused Model of CHTC

- ❖ Effectively delivered, brief couple interventions make a difference.
- ❖ It is the couple's present and future that are most important.
- ❖ It is most effective to build on strengths rather than weaknesses.
- ❖ Providers should focus on solutions instead of dwelling on problems.
- ❖ The couple understands how to use their strengths to address HIV-related issues in their relationship.
- ❖ The counselor validates feelings, but the focus is on positive actions.
- ❖ Acknowledge that small behavior changes can lead to bigger ones.

Self-Awareness Allows Providers To

- ❖ Ensure that their values, beliefs and experiences do not influence their interaction with couples
- ❖ Reduce the potential for biasing the couple's decisions
- ❖ Understand that they are not responsible for test results or the couple's relationship
- ❖ Understand the couple's concerns and offer empathy and support

Issues That Affect a Provider's Ability to Provide High Quality Services

- ❖ Provider's own relationship with his or her partner
- ❖ Provider's experience and values about couple relationships, including gender roles and expectations
- ❖ Provider's experience with intimate partner violence
- ❖ Provider's dreams for his or her relationship
- ❖ Provider's experience receiving HTC (HIV testing and counseling), including his or her willingness to receive CHTC
- ❖ Provider's history with disclosure

Self-Awareness Exercise

1. What are some examples of personal issues that may influence how you interact with couples during a CHTC session?
2. How can you prevent these issues from negatively influencing CHTC sessions?

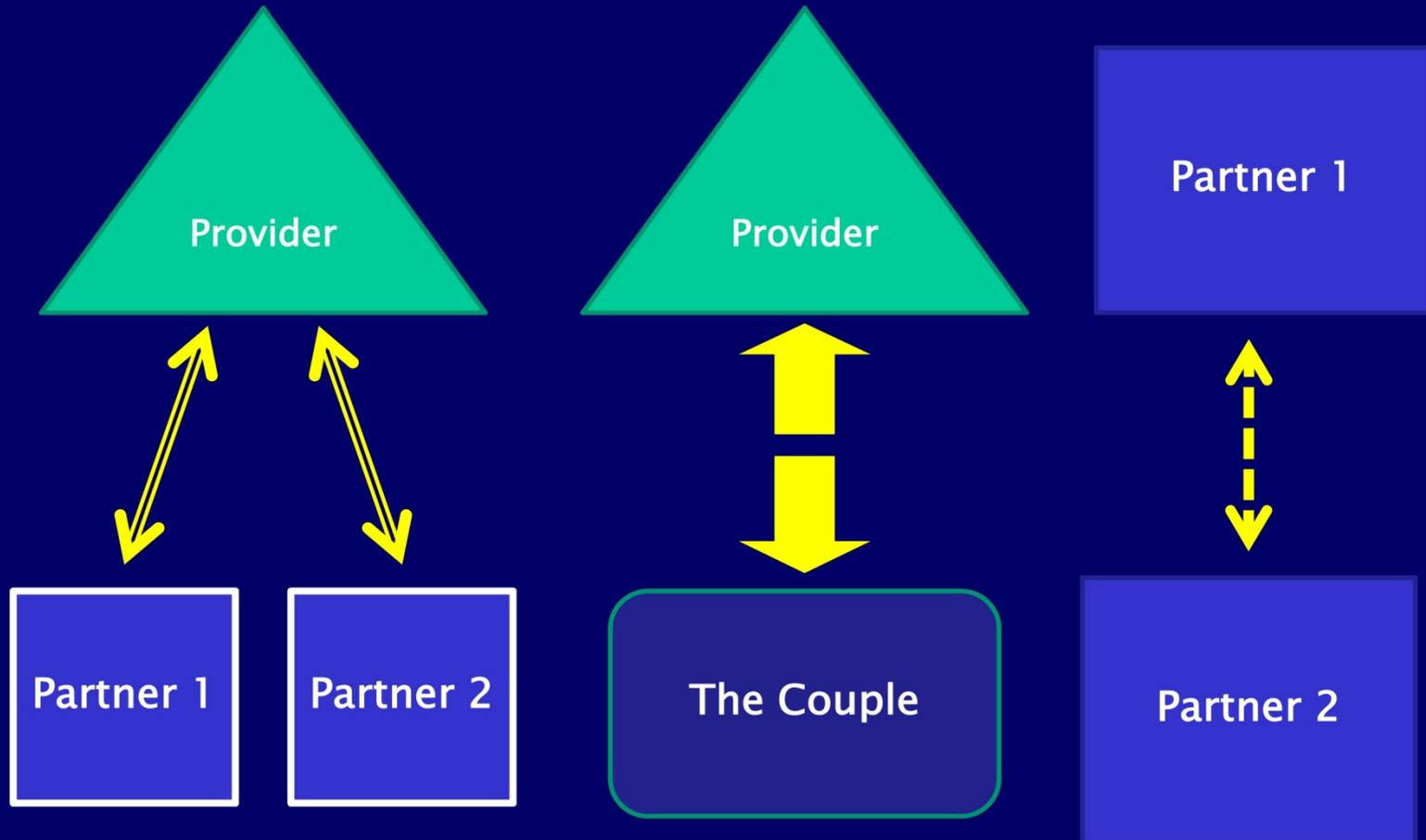
Skills for Communicating with Couples

- ❖ Demonstrate neutrality and nonbiased concern for both members of the couple
- ❖ Convey respect for the couple's relationship
- ❖ Facilitate balanced participation of both partners during the session
- ❖ Model appropriate listening and communication skills
- ❖ Facilitate dialogue between the couple
- ❖ Raise difficult issues that the couple may need to address
- ❖ Ease tension and diffuse blame

Skills for Communicating with Couples (continued)

- ❖ Be able to tolerate intensity
- ❖ Recognize that relationships are full of contradictions
- ❖ Understand relationships in the context of cultural values and norms
- ❖ Recognize that couples can handle difficult situations

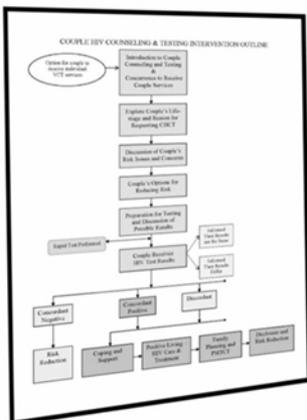
Four Essential Communication Pathways in CHTC



Mediation Skills for Easing Tension and Diffusing Blame

1. Normalize feelings, reactions, and experiences.
2. Remind the couple that many people are living with HIV infection.
3. Focus on the present and future.
4. Avoid and deflect questions aimed at identifying the source of infection.
5. Express confidence in the couple's ability to deal with HIV-related issues.
6. Acknowledge feelings and emotions, and predict that in time their intensity will likely change or shift.
7. Remind the couple of the roles and responsibilities outlined at the beginning of the CHTC session.

Couples Communication Scenario



Please understand that your test results do not indicate whether or not any other sex partner is infected with HIV. The only way to know one's status is to be tested.



Gender Issues in CHTC

- ❖ Economic dependency
- ❖ Property rights and legal issues
- ❖ Equal access to care, treatment and support services
- ❖ Domestic violence, abandonment, or both

CHTC and Violence

- ❖ CHTC is not associated with increased violence or negative events.
- ❖ There is no evidence that inviting male partners to ANC (antenatal care) and VCT (voluntary counseling and testing) increases the risk of IPV (intimate partner violence).

Determining Safety in CHTC

- ❖ Ensure that both partners are there voluntarily.
- ❖ Engage both partners and recognize and address power imbalances.
- ❖ Refer to other services and individual HTC.