Not My Child

How Claytonia Jones of Washington, DC, coped with her daughter's HIV diagnosis

November 29, 2007 By Nicole Joseph

I found out Charlene was HIV positive in February of 2004. She was 33. She came in looking kind of funny and started crying a little bit, then she told me.

I used to work at Howard University Hospital in clinic admissions, so I knew a bit about HIV. I'd also had a couple of HIV-positive friends and watched them progress to AIDS. I couldn't help but think that would happen to her. At first, I went into denial. I wanted her to go get tested again. She kept saying, "Mom, mom, mom, I've had all the tests, I've done all that."

In the months that followed, I would pray to God to take the HIV away. But I reached a point where I accepted this is not a cold; it's not going to go away. So my prayers changed to asking Him to help us deal with this and to give me strength.

Thankfully, Charlene's health was fine—her viral load was low enough that she didn't need medications. She started reading about HIV on the Internet and made a lot of friends online whom she could talk to about living with HIV. She seemed to be dealing with it, so I was like "OK, we can do this." I knew that if she did the things she was supposed to do, she'd be all right. I try to stay positive and help her do the same—when she comes home from the doctor, I just want to know if what's supposed to be up is up and what's supposed to be down is down.

There are still some days where I'm angry about her having it and think, "Lord, I know you give us no more than we can handle, but this is a big load." But my faith has been a very strong support for me. I know it's going to be all right.

—As told to Nicole Joseph

Motherly Advice
Claytonia's tips for other HIV-affected parents

Accept the anger.
You'll have days where you'll be angry with everybody, but just be strong. Take it one day at a time.

Treat your child the way you always have.
If Charlene is getting on my nerves, I tell her!

Be thankful.
For Charlene's third anniversary of living with HIV, we went out to celebrate—three years without needing medication. You have to work to keep negativity out.

Educate yourselves.
Use the Internet or support groups to connect with other people living with or affected by HIV (try poz.com). Communicating with others really helped to lift Charlene's spirits.

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