

Mother Knows Best

A Mother's Love Is A Powerful Weapon Against AIDS

(NAPSA)—Mothers across America celebrate their children's growth and accomplishments with graduation gifts, birthday presents and special treats. Now, three women say there is another way to tell your kids that you care: talk with them about HIV/AIDS.

Laura Hall, Ina Wilson and Michelle Lopez—three of the hundreds of thousands of mothers who have lost a child to AIDS, or whose son or daughter is living with HIV—know that now is not a time for crying, silence or fear. They're past that. To them, the time has come to speak out, so other women can avoid the heartbreak that HIV brings to a family. These women are on a campaign to stop AIDS in their communities.

For Laura Hall of Alabama, breaking the silence about AIDS means fulfilling the promise she made to her son, Ato, on his deathbed in 1992. As a state legislator, Laura turned her personal tragedy into a political priority. She has led the Alabama state government's efforts to stop AIDS, particularly in the African-American community, by creating a state commission on HIV—which she now chairs—and helping expand state programs that provide life-saving AIDS drugs to people who can't afford them.

Medical treatment for AIDS is what Michelle Lopez has been speaking out about for the past 14 years. When this New York City mother of two was diagnosed with HIV in 1990, she was less worried about getting AIDS drugs for her-



When Ina Wilson's son was diagnosed with AIDS, she became a leading advocate.

self than for her then-18-month-old daughter, Raven, who was infected at birth. Michelle educated herself and used her sheer maternal willpower to get Raven into medical studies of new AIDS drugs that were available for adults but had never been tested in children. Today, both mother and daughter are going strong.

For Ina Wilson of Chicago, love for her son Phill enabled her to fight the social stigma that comes with an HIV diagnosis. When the family's minister told her he didn't approve of Phill talking about AIDS with members of the congregation, Ina fought back. "Phill is my child, he will always be my child, and he will always have the love and acceptance of my family," she told the minister. "You have to accept that."

These three women know too well the tragedy of AIDS in the family. They have three things to

say to other moms to avoid or cope with the heartache they have experienced:

Learn about it. It's important to know the facts—not the myths—about AIDS so you can teach your kids. Pick up pamphlets from a local health department or community organization and discuss them with your family. You can also check out www.blackaids.org for information about AIDS in the black community.

Know where to get tested and treated. Studies show that less than one-third of sexually active teens have ever been tested for HIV, and two-thirds don't know where to get one. You can call CDC's 24-hour National AIDS Hotline at 800-342-2437 (in Spanish, 800-344-7432) or search www.hivtest.org to find a nearby location or get answers.

Talk about it. Forty percent of teenagers want to speak with their parents about AIDS. Tell your kids what you've learned about HIV prevention, testing and treatment, and encourage them to ask questions, too. Keep talking about it as they grow and mature. And remember, it's never too late to start the conversation.

Faced with a difficult choice—to speak out or stay silent—Laura, Michelle and Ina realized that ignoring HIV doesn't make it go away. Though their individual challenges are unique, they all agree on one life-saving piece of advice for America's moms: Speak up about HIV/AIDS with the people you love the most—your children.