



Chiedza
Ukukhanya
Health For Our Future

PARTNER NOTIFICATION TOOLKIT: *Discussion Guide for Providers*

Supporting sexual health providers and clients throughout
the stages following diagnosis of an STI syndrome or laboratory diagnosed STI



LONDON
SCHOOL of
HYGIENE
& TROPICAL
MEDICINE



Biomedical Research
and Training Institute

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Partner Notification Toolkit: Discussion Guide for Providers

This toolkit consists of 4 activities designed to support sexual health providers and clients throughout the stages following diagnosis of an STI syndrome or laboratory diagnosed STI. It is based on a similar toolkit developed and evaluated by researchers in Cape Town, South Africa to assist enhanced STI partner notification counselling with adults diagnosed with an STI syndrome (1). This toolkit has been adapted for both diagnosis of an STI syndrome and a laboratory diagnosed STI, and to reflect the specific needs and experiences of young people, informed by key findings from a qualitative study conducted with young people (aged 18-24) living in Harare, Zimbabwe. Participants in this study had recently been diagnosed with an STI and had received testing and support from a CHIEDZA intervention cluster. Subsequent workshops with CHIEDZA providers in Harare and Bulawayo have also shaped the development of this toolkit.

Why we need a toolkit

Notifying a partner of a STI diagnosis is difficult for anybody, but particularly for young people. It is also hard to support young people to prepare for partner notification: every young person's situation is different and there is only a limited amount of time providers can spend with each client. A one-size fits all approach just doesn't work. This toolkit is designed to assist providers when navigating this conversation with their clients.

During interviews in Harare, we asked young people what they found most challenging about telling their partners that they had tested positive for an STI. The most common response was that they felt unequipped to handle all that the process of partner notification demanded of them – that it is complex, difficult, risky, and unpredictable. For young people, partner notification involves more than handing a slip to their partner. First, they must find a way to start the conversation, then they must educate their partner about STIs even though they have only heard the information for the first time when they received their test results. Then, they must somehow convince their partners to attend the clinic for treatment. We also learned from talking to young people that partner notification is not always possible. In fact, there are so many risks that it is often impossible. Many reported that their partner reacted badly to the news. Physical assault, emotional distress, and harm to young people's reputation and relationships are common outcomes of partner notification. Often, young people said that they had experienced a negative outcome and yet their partner still did not receive treatment, leading them to question whether telling their partner was worth it.

The activities and talking points included in this toolkit make space for clients to share with providers their perception of the challenges and risks associated with partner notification within their unique relationships. They are also designed to assist clients to develop alternative strategies to keep themselves safe in the case that they cannot tell their partner about their STI diagnosis. The tools can be used consecutively or individually, to meet the individual needs of the client.

The tools:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Visualising sexual networks | 2 | Mapping my sexual network |
| 3 | Making a plan, sharing tips, and role-playing | 4 | Take-home STI information cards |

This Discussion Guide explains each tool and gives examples to demonstrate how they each work in practice.



Tool 1: Visualising Sexual Networks

'Visualising sexual networks' is a tool to assist conversations between providers and clients about how STIs are transmitted. It uses a visual web-like representation to illustrate potential STI transmission pathways between immediate sexual partners and each partner's past and current sexual partners. The tool can be used to show how people within a sexual network are connected. It can also be used to trace STI transmission or protection (sex with/without condom). The effectiveness of condom use can also be explained with reference to different STIs. To check client's understanding, providers can first trace one transmission pathway and then invite the client to trace another, whilst explaining the relationship between condomless sex and STI transmission.

How to use the tool:

Each tool begins with the index case. Throughout this toolkit, the index case appears like this:



The index case represents your client in tools 2 & 3 and looks like this:



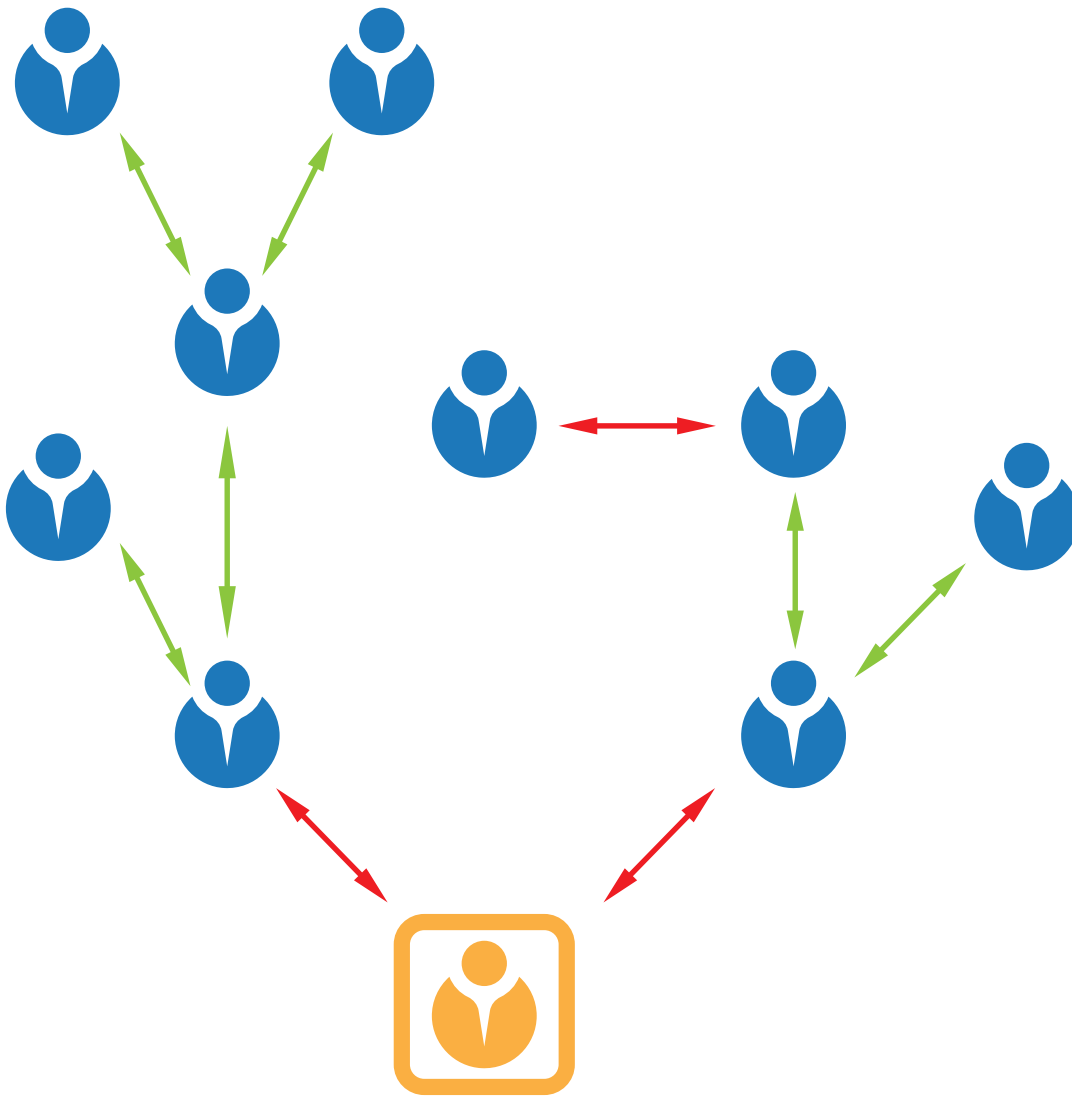
Steps:

- Start with the index case.
- Using a pen, trace one pathway from the index case to one of their sexual partners, explaining potential transmission resulting from condomless sex as you go.
- Then, move on, tracing the connection between the index case's sexual partner and that partner's sexual partner, and so on.
- To demonstrate the positive effect of using condoms, demonstrate 'blocked transmission', making sure to connect it back to the likelihood of infection in the index case.



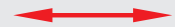
How to explain sexual networks to clients:

A sexual network is like our social group – the people we spend time with – but for a sexual network the people are just those who we have sex with. When you have sex (including oral sex) without using a condom, you become connected to your partner's current and previous sexual partners, and they become connected to people in your sexual history. This is called your sexual network. Let's look at an example of a sexual network. We can also see how STIs are transmitted in a sexual network.

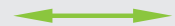


An example of the Visualising Sexual Networks tool worksheet in use:

Inconsistent condom use:



Consistent condom use:



Tool 2: Mapping My Sexual Network

Every relationship is different. Telling your partner that you have been diagnosed with an STI might be possible in one relationship, but not in another. This activity will help providers to work with clients to first map out the people they have had sex with during the time in which they could have passed on the infection. They can then begin to discuss the challenges and concerns they have in relation to discussing their positive STI test with each sexual partner.

Clients might have more than one current partner and might not be sure if they plan to continue a sexual relationship with all or any of them. This activity allows you to capture as much detail as possible. The tool sheet is divided into 3 sections: past sexual partners (in the last 3 months); current sexual partners; and partners the client expects they might continue a sexual relationship going forward. Ask them to map their relationships according to these sections, recognising that partners might not fit perfectly into only one section.

This can be a creative task. You might encourage the client to use different types of lines or colours to represent the client's feelings about the relationship. For example, a bold line might represent a committed relationship, while a dashed line might represent an 'on-again/off-again' relationship.

How this tool might be explained to young clients



Now that we understand what a sexual network is, and how STIs are passed between people in a sexual network, let's map out your sexual network. It will help us see who you have had sex with during the time when you could have passed the infection on.

Then, we can think about what it would be like to tell that partner about your STI infection.

The sheet is divided into 3 sections: past sexual partners (in the last 3 months); current sexual partners; and partners the client expects they might continue a sexual relationship going forward. Go ahead and use these coloured pens to add your past, current, and ongoing relationships to the page.

An example of an 'already used' Mapping my Sexual Network worksheet is included on the next page.

My sexual partners
in the past
3 months

Initials M.P.
(ex-boyfriend,
ended 3
months ago)



Initials R.T.
(casual,
ended 1
month ago)



My current
partners



Initials MB
(casual and
ongoing)



Initials BB
(serious and
ongoing)

Of your current
partners, who do
you think you will
continue a sexual
relationship?



Tool 3: Making a plan, sharing tips, & role playing

Ideally it would be possible to tell each partner without needing to worry about them responding negatively. In reality, we know that it is not always possible. It is ok not to tell all/any of your partners – the most important thing is that you are safe. Notifying your partner so that they can receive treatment is one way to protect yourself from re-infection. This activity helps us explore all the options.

In this activity we will take a closer look at each partner you identified in your sexual network. This will allow us to consider if it is possible to tell them about your STI diagnosis and make a plan for how, where, and when you could have the conversation.

We have been working with lots of young people just like you, so we have some tips we can share, including different strategies others have used to navigate telling their partners. Then, we can have a go at practising the conversation. We can pretend that I am your partner. Many young people find that saying the words out loud can help them prepare.

How to structure the activity:

Start with 1 partner identified when using Tool 2: Mapping your Sexual Network.

Allow the client to tell you about the relationship – is it serious or casual? Are they involved with one another's family? Is the client concerned about a violent reaction to partner notification? What are their concerns – are they worried about any social or emotional impacts that they would like to discuss? Are there members of their/partner's family who might be helpful in persuading the partner or lending emotional support?

What to consider when using this card:

Is it even possible to tell this person? If not, the conversation should turn to thinking through what will happen if they do not tell them. What does that mean for their possible re-infection? What other strategies can they use (breaking up, role playing suggesting to their partner that they use of condoms) Where would be a good place to have this conversation?

When will this partner be most receptive to having this conversation?

Where is a place you feel safe that you could plan to go after the conversation?

This card can be re-used (if laminated) or duplicated. Preferably it will be a new card (not the sexual network card) so the client doesn't get distracted or overwhelmed by other partner dynamics represented in the Sexual Network

On the next 3 pages, you can see 3 different examples to represent the kinds of situations a client might share. In each case, the type of relationship, the likelihood of an ongoing sexual relationship, and the challenges the client perceives in relation to partner notification in each scenario.



Scenario 1:

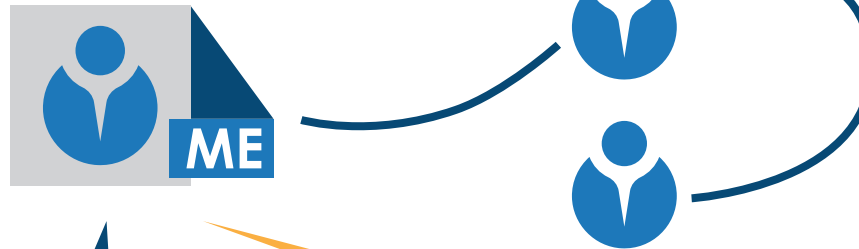
Client & BB

The client and BB have been together for 2 years. They both consider it a serious committed relationship.

The client expects to continue this sexual relationship into the future.

She is scared to tell BB about her STI diagnosis. She doesn't want to endanger the relationship and BB has a bad temper.

This leaves her very confused about what to do.



Tell?

If you were to tell,

- Where could you have the conversation that is safe?
- When might be the best time to tell?
- Where could you go after the conversation?

Don't tell?

- What are you imagining might happen if you tell?
- What are outcomes of not telling?
- Let's work out an alternative strategy to keep you safe from re-infection

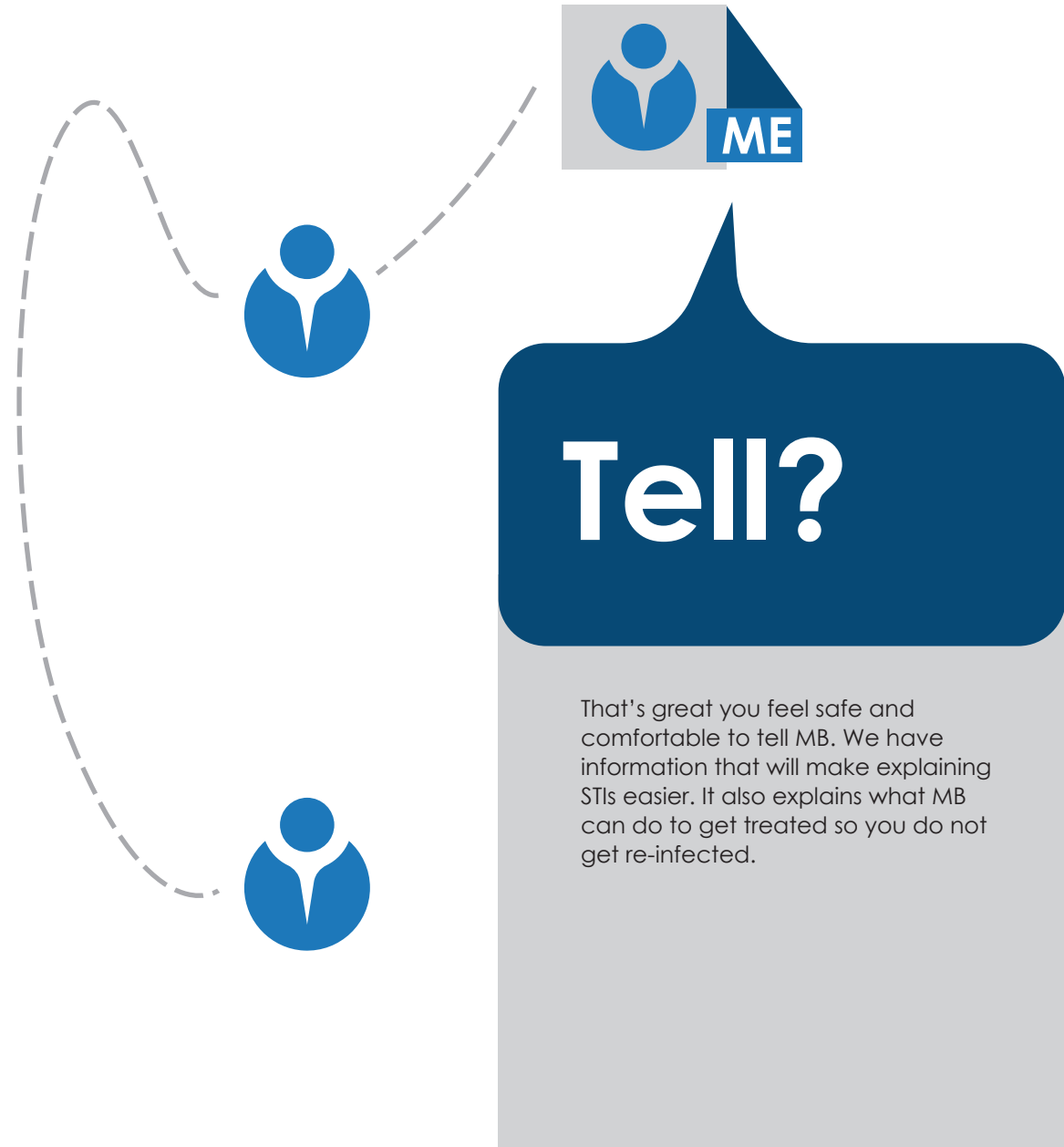
Scenario 2:

Client & MB

This is a casual relationship. MB works away in South Africa, so they only meet up every 4 weeks for casual sex.

The client expects to continue this sexual relationship into the future.

She expects MB will be responsive to PN – they talk about everything, and he is not easily worried - but she doesn't know enough information about STIs to explain it properly. She would like to practice how to tell him.



Scenario 3:

Client & MP

MP is the client's ex-boyfriend. She is sure they will never have sex again.

The relationship didn't end well, and the client is afraid to tell MP because he might tell their mutual friends.

She is also scared that MP's family might find out. Their families attend the same church, and she is worried his father might tell hers.



Don't
tell?

Are you sure you will not resume a sexual relationship with MP in the future?

Ok, well it sounds like you have many good reasons not to tell him and you are not at risk of re-infection.

Tell?

Tool 4: STI information card

Tool 5 is designed to equip clients with the information they need during partner notification conversations with their sexual partners. Many young people expressed that they felt ill-equipped to educate their partner about STIs. Often, they had only found out about STIs when they were given a diagnosis of an STI and their partner had little knowledge themselves. It was most difficult if their partner said they did not have any symptoms.

The cards include easy to follow information about common STIs, as well as important information about where to access treatment.

The information card is designed so that it can be used by a client without disclosing their positive test results, as though they simply picked the card up at CHIEDZA.

The card is specific to either Mashonaland East (orange) or Bulawayo (Blue)

When the card can be used:

The card should be used where necessary throughout the provider-client conversation.

For example:

- **Tool 1:** To explain STI transmission; validate existing knowledge; and to clarify any misunderstandings about STI symptoms and long-term impacts.
- **Tool 3:** The information can be used to facilitate role-playing strategies for partner notification. The wording used on the STI information card is simple so clients can practice saying the words out loud.
- **Tool 3:** The card might be used as part of a 'sharing tips' moment when a client has decided not to tell their partner. In this case, the provider can suggest taking the card home to enable indirect education of a partner.
- **Tool 3:** The card could be used when a client feels that CHIEDZA-endorsed information would be helpful in convincing their partner of the legitimacy of their STI diagnosis.

Mashonaland East

What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs are infections that can be passed from person to person during:

Vaginal sex Anal sex Oral sex

STIs are very common

How can I reduce my risk of getting an STI?

Using condoms every time you have sex (vaginal, anal, and oral sex) and making sure you use them properly is the best way to protect yourself

What are the most common STIs that affect young people?

Chlamydia * Gonorrhoea * Trichomoniasis * Herpes Simplex

What are the most common symptoms of STIs?

Women

Abdominal pain
Discharge from vagina
Pain when urinating or during sex
Unusual bleeding patterns
Unusual sores, ulcers, rashes, or lumps around genitals, anus, groin, or thigh

Men

Discharge from penis
Swollen or painful scrotum
Pain when urinating
Unusual sores, ulcers, rashes, or lumps around genitals, anus, groin, or thigh

Some STIs have no obvious symptoms, so you or your partner/s could have an STI without knowing.

Sometimes symptoms go away, but the infection can stay in your body and cause damage.

If left untreated, STIs can have long term effects on your health and fertility.

If your partner has been treated for an STI, it is important that you get treated too to avoid re-infection.

How are STIs treated?

STIs are easily treated with antibiotics. You must get the right medicine from a doctor or nurse to cure the infection. It is important that you take all your medicine and do not share it with anyone else.

Where can I get STI treatment?

CHIEDZA

Anyone who has a PN slip can go to CHIEDZA for treatment. Treatment is free. There are a lot of reasons to come to CHIEDZA – you don't need to let people know that you are coming to be treated for an STI. These are the days and places you can go for treatment at CHIEDZA:

- Monday: Nehanda Hall, Marondera
- Tuesday: Unit L Community Hall, Zengeza
- Wednesday: Tariro Center, Hopley
- Thursday: Ruwa Clinic, Ruwa

Where else can I go for STI treatment?

These clinics will be able to provide medication if you give them a PN slip. At the clinic you will have to pay a user fee. Which one is closest to you?

- Dombotombo Clinic
- Seke L Clinic
- Tariro Clinic
- Ruwa Clinic

Is there anything else I need to know?

- Condoms offer the best protection against STIs
- Talk to your sex partner's about STIs. It is important that all your sex partners get treated to prevent re-infection.
- If you have an STI, it doesn't necessarily mean your current partner/s have cheated. You may have had it for a long time and not know who you got it from.

The main thing to remember is, don't panic. STIs are common and most can be cured with the right medicine. Come to CHIEDZA or your nearest clinic to find out more.

Bulawayo

What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs are infections that can be passed from person to person during:

Vaginal sex Anal sex Oral sex

STIs are very common

How can I reduce my risk of getting an STI?

Using condoms every time you have sex (vaginal, anal, and oral sex) and making sure you use them properly is the best way to protect yourself

What are the most common STIs that affect young people?

Chlamydia * Gonorrhoea * Trichomoniasis * Herpes Simplex

What are the most common symptoms of STIs?

Women

Abdominal pain
Discharge from vagina
Pain when urinating or during sex
Unusual bleeding patterns
Unusual sores, ulcers, rashes, or lumps around genitals, anus, groin, or thigh

Men

Discharge from penis
Swollen or painful scrotum
Pain when urinating
Unusual sores, ulcers, rashes, or lumps around genitals, anus, groin, or thigh

Some STIs have no obvious symptoms, so you or your partner/s could have an STI without knowing.

Sometimes symptoms go away, but the infection can stay in your body and cause damage.

If left untreated, STIs can have long term effects on your health and fertility. If your partner has been treated for an STI, it is important that you get treated too to avoid re-infection.

How are STIs treated?

STIs are easily treated with antibiotics. You must get the right medicine from a doctor or nurse to cure the infection. It is important that you take all your medicine and do not share it with anyone else.

Where can I get STI treatment?

CHIEDZA

Anyone who has a PN slip can go to CHIEDZA for treatment. Treatment is free. Until April 2022 you can call 0716 318 734 to arrange for a nurse to assist you with treatment. There are a lot of reasons to come to CHIEDZA – you don't need to let people know that you are coming to be treated for an STI. These are the days and places you can go for treatment at CHIEDZA:

- Monday: Pelandaba Hall
- Tuesday: Nketa Hall
- Wednesday: Tshabalala Hall
- Thursday: MMPZ Center, Nkulumane

Where else can I go for STI treatment?

You can take the PN slip to your nearest clinic to access treatment. At the clinic you will have to pay a user fee.

Is there anything else I need to know?

- Condoms offer the best protection against STIs
- Talk to your sex partner's about STIs. It is important that all your sex partners get treated to prevent re-infection.
- If you have an STI, it doesn't necessarily mean your current partner/s have cheated. You may have had it for a long time and not know who you got it from.

The main thing to remember is, don't panic. STIs are common and most can be cured with the right medicine. Come to CHIEDZA or your nearest clinic to find out more.

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