

# Guidance and support for menstruation in schools

*Education, ideas and creating a period positive environment*



**Period Education UK**



# HELP & GUIDANCE

## Overview

Period Education© is a group of academics and specialists working in schools, communities and elite sport across the United Kingdom. We are experts in the menstrual cycle, menstrual cycle education and in relation to sport, exercise and physical activity. We are committed to improving menstrual cycle education across the UK, ensuring educational resources are evidence-based and fit-for-purpose for both teachers and pupils. All resources and lessons were co-developed with higher education lecturers in physical education and biology, secondary school physical education teachers and pupils. Valuable input and feedback were provided by pupil representatives, schoolteachers and from the Senior Education Officer for Health & Wellbeing Curriculum, Education Scotland.

## Why is menstrual cycle education important?

Half of the world's population will menstruate and have a menstrual cycle. Menstruation is normal and having a menstrual cycle is a sign of health for most menstruating people. Our peer-reviewed research [1](#) highlights that menstrual cycle-related symptoms can be troublesome for adolescent menstruators and result in school absences and avoidance of social and physical activities. We also know that 39-78% of girls will abstain from physical activity when on their period or they will cite menstruation as being a barrier to physical education participation [2,3](#) This is often due to a lack of knowledge, preparation, and poor management practices surrounding menstruation and menstrual-related symptoms. Our research identifies that pupils and teachers want more education for both menstruators and non-menstruators [1, 4](#).

## What these resources aim to do

Starting menstruation can be a time for celebration, but for some individuals it can be embarrassing, confusing and concerning. Our resources aim to reduce any embarrassment, confusion, fear and misconceptions around menstruation whilst also empowering menstruators to manage their menstrual cycle and associated symptoms, advocate for themselves and others, and normalise conversations.

The benefits of physical activity, exercise and sport are multi-fold for adolescents; improving physical, psychological, social and behavioural domains. Given the menstrual cycle and menstruation can affect all of these domains, physical activity and exercise are at the core of the resources provided. Our learning resources are the first known school resources to embed menstrual cycle information and learning activities into physical education, whilst being informed by young people.



### Sources:

1. Brown et al. (2020) *Front Glob Womens Health*; 827365
2. Women in Sport (2022) *Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Tackling teenage disengagement*
3. Youth Sport Trust (2021) *Youth Sport Trust. Girls Active research 2021*
4. Brown et al (2023) *in review*



What this pack includes



Page	Resource	Content
2	Background and why is menstrual cycle education important?	Brief background of the team producing the resources
2	What these resources aim to do	
4-5	Considerations for before, during and after menstrual education delivery	Outlines some teaching and environment considerations. We have provided some additional considerations that can help improve and foster a period positive environment to best support pupils.
6-8	Recommended minimum menstruation standards in schools	This gives hints and tips and practical changes that can be made to support menstruators at school.
9	Poster: A Period Positive Environment	A poster about creating a period positive environment in schools. This can be printed out and displayed around your school.
10-11	Developing Peer-Led Learning	Hints and tips in taking the education one step further and developing peer-to-peer support within your school.
12-13	Additional links and signposting	For inquisitive minds there are links to external resources which include more advanced education. Teachers have also found some of these resources helpful in enhancing their knowledge. Also look out for embedded hyperlinks throughout the document to support learning!

When we refer to female (or girls if it's referencing published work) throughout this document and the lessons, then we are referring to those that are assigned female at birth.



## Considerations for before, during and after delivery of menstrual education

Schools are pivotal in creating a period positive environments that allow young people to thrive. Education (for both menstruating and non-menstruating adolescents) is at the core of nurturing and promoting this environment. However, there may be some young people (and educators!) that feel awkward or embarrassed about talking about the menstrual cycle and menstruation.

### Before and during lesson delivery

You may need to consider how your class or cohort will respond to this topic. Your school may already have rules and expectations for pupils and staff when participating in PSHE/PSE/RSHP lessons. If not, setting some rules and expectations can be useful to **ensure that the environment is safe, respectful and inclusive**. Examples of this include:



### Confidentiality

Although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, ask pupils to agree that questions and class discussions are not to be used to shame, bully or tease individuals.

Look out for signs of bullying or excessive teasing - our research highlights that menstruating young people often feel teasing negatively impacts their ability to openly communicate about menstruation.



### Respect

Listen to and be open to the views of others. Acknowledge individual differences and responses. Be sensitive to different backgrounds, cultures and experiences. Do not assume someone will have certain views. Although we are striving for openness, avoid pushing people to answer personal questions they may be uncomfortable with.



### Inclusive

Be mindful that not all menstruating people are girls/women and not all girls/women menstruate. Note: if this is an area you feel the class need to discuss further, or have further clarification around, there is a [great blog by Clue](#) on this topic.



### Class size

We would also encourage you to consider the size of the class as pupils report increased comfort in smaller groups and avoid 'tick box' lesson delivery as pupils recognise when this is happening.



It is good to remind pupils why it is important that we *all* know about the menstrual cycle. If you have time, starting with the question ‘*Why do we ALL need to know about menstruation and the menstrual cycle?*’ can be a good icebreaker. The Period Positive Environment poster on **page 9** to help facilitate discussion. Pupils may even want to produce their own acronym or poster.

### After lesson delivery

Provide closure to the lesson by re-capping and relating back to the ‘rules and expectations’ set at the start.

#### Question time



Pupils often have questions about menstruation. Add a question box or use a platform such as Google Form. Ensure you fulfil any promises around gathering more information or timelines in replying to questions. Our research suggests that although menstruators and people who will menstruate want non-menstruating people to learn about this area, they also want time to ask questions and have discussions in smaller groups as they don’t always feel comfortable or confident in asking questions.



#### Signposting

If pupils (or educators) are interested in learning more than is provided in the lessons, then there are some great free resources available. We have compiled some for ease of use - **See Page 12**



## Recommended Minimum Menstruation Standards in Schools

Simple changes in practices, organisation and facilities management could make your school period positive, allowing pupils to thrive through better attendance, engagement, health and wellbeing.

Minimum Standards Recommended for a Period Positive School Environment:

### 1. Education for pupils



Our research shows that students acknowledge the need for more education about menstruation, including awareness of menstrual abnormalities, lived-experiences, product choices, symptom management, and staying active. We have listened to what teachers and pupils want and have responded by providing resources for teaching emotional, social, and physical aspects of the menstrual cycle.

Teachers and pupils have asked schools to prioritise menstrual cycle education by scheduling more lessons, increasing their frequency, starting at an earlier age (Year 10 pupils in England felt PSHE lessons were too late), and including real-life experiences rather than just biological facts. Menstruators also desire both menstruators and non-menstruators to be educated, but also want a separate space and time to learn, discuss, and ask questions.

### 2. Education for teachers



According to our research, many teachers feel they need more menstrual cycle education and pupils also perceive teachers require greater understanding. The menstrual cycle will affect all teachers that teach menstruating people. Do not underestimate the difference more education, knowledge, awareness, understanding and empathy can have on your pupils' experiences and productivity in school. Refer to **page 12** for further resources and signposting.

### 3. Access to free products

**All UK state schools must offer free period products to combat period poverty, ensure equality, and allow menstruating individuals to concentrate on their studies and physical activities and help improve participation in sports and extracurricular activities.**

Plan International UK reported in 2017 that **10% of UK girls could not afford period products, and 20% had to switch to less suitable products due to the cost.** Don't let period product accessibility be a barrier to learning and physical activity in your school.

While the stigma associated with menstruation and period products has improved over recent years, people who need to access period products for free often still feel ashamed and embarrassed.





Ensure products are:

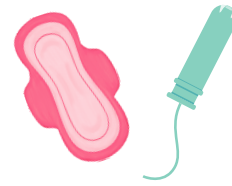


**Easily accessible**

Young people don't want to ask teachers or staff for products, don't want to justify why they need them or how much they need. This includes transgender boys and non-binary pupils.



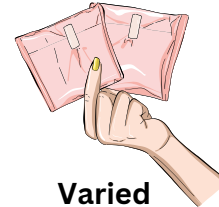
**Accessible when there are school trips**  
(e.g. sports competitions)



**Frequently replenished**



**In discreet places**  
Ask your students where would be best for them.



**Varied**  
There are a range of products and absorbencies available.

Consult your pupils and ask them what they need. What period products? Where should they be kept?

## 4. Access to appropriate toilet and changing facilities



**Almost two-thirds of young menstruators report a fear of leaking in the classroom whilst menstruating** (Plan Int UK, 2017), leading to distraction, reduced focus on schoolwork and participation issues in subjects such as PE.

**Almost 70% of girls are not allowed to go to the toilet during lessons.** Many menstruating young people are also embarrassed to ask to go the toilet, especially if needing to ask in front of their peers. School policies or practices around toilet access should make it easy for menstruators to change period products, even if this is during a lesson. This becomes heightened when pupils are away from toilet access for extended periods of time (e.g. sports day and outdoor PE).

Toilets should have appropriate bins and working locks, be clean, and support all genders who menstruate.

Private changing facilities should be available, especially for PE. Many menstruators have anxiety around changing in front of others for PE. Having appropriate changing facilities overcomes this barrier and allows individuals to continue being active whilst on their period.



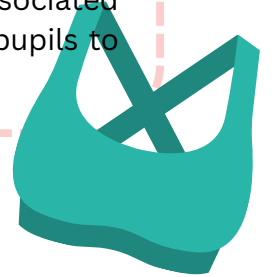
## 5. School Uniform and PE Kit



As highlighted above, **almost two-thirds of young menstruators report a fear of leaking in the classroom whilst menstruating** (Plan Int UK, 2017), leading to distraction, reduced focus on schoolwork and participation issues in subjects such as PE.

This concern is enhanced if wearing light coloured clothing or items such as skirts. Pupils have highlighted the positive experiences of school uniform being dark and the option to wear trousers, this is similar for PE kit ensuring dark colours and providing choice to wear shorts, trousers or leggings has encouraged participation in PE and physical activity.

Adding sports bras as part of the PE kit list can also be helpful to encourage menstruators to wear supportive sports bras which can reduce breast pain associated with the menstrual cycle, alongside more generally increasing comfort for pupils to complete jumping and running activities.



## Additional considerations

If your school has the time, budget, or they are redeveloping/refurbishing facilities, there are a few additional considerations that would enhance the experiences of menstruators in your school.

Have access to spare underwear, and spare clothing, including PE kit. Leaks happen and many girls go home if they have leaked, meaning they miss out on school

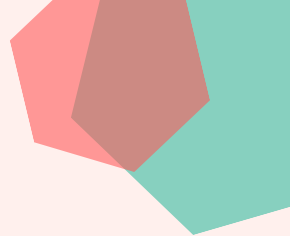
Access to period products during holiday times

Time and/or space available in school to manage menstrual related symptoms and experiences

Create a peer support group (see page 10-11 for ideas) who can help steer/lead on some initiatives

Have access to hygiene products such as wet wipes.





# PERIOD POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS

Why do we ALL need to know about menstruation (i.e. periods) and the menstrual cycle?

## Prepared

Being prepared can help reduce any negative experiences or symptoms related to the menstrual cycle, but it is also important to help support others to be prepared.



## Empathy

Everyone's menstrual cycles and experiences are different. Just because menstrual cycles don't affect you, doesn't mean it won't others.



## Respect

Respect different backgrounds, experiences and cultures. Our views may be different to others. Don't bully or tease menstruators - 1 in 5 menstruators will be teased or bullied about their period, leading to shame and school participation and attendance being affected.



## Informed

Knowledge is power. Being informed means:

knowing what's normal and what's not, therefore reducing anxieties

being able to support someone in getting help or managing their symptoms

reducing period misinformation

being able to have conversations about the menstrual cycle

symptom management, support or advice can be sought early

being able to have understanding & empathy



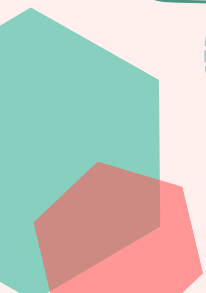
## Open

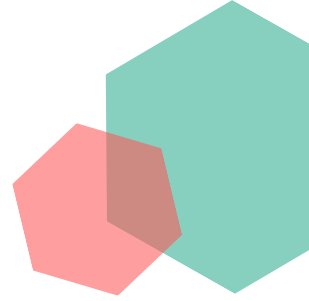
Opening the conversation ensures people feel supported and can speak about their periods if they want to. The menstrual cycle is a natural process and shouldn't be a taboo subject. Use the correct terminology to help remove barriers - use the word 'period' or 'menstruation'.



## Dignity

Whether you menstruate or not, everyone should advocate for improved access to period products and facilities (within and outside of school) to ensure menstruators are treated with dignity.





## Developing Peer-Led Learning and Support

### Why have peer-led education and/or peer support in your school?

There is evidence that young people are more likely to seek help, support and information from informal sources such as friends in comparison to adults, especially when related to health aspects. In addition, older pupils are often perceived as role models by their younger peers. This presents a great opportunity for peer-to-peer learning. Peer educators also benefit through increasing leadership skills, confidence and if done correctly, they will also gain greater subject knowledge.

### Recruiting peer educators/steering group members

Things to consider around recruitment if including peer-led learning within your school for the first time.

- Recruitment of more senior pupils generally works best as they have already received menstrual cycle education and are deemed as role models
- Recruit pupils who have shown a genuine interest in the area
- Recruitment processes should be open and transparent
- Recruit from a diverse background
- Attract candidates via assemblies, notice board information, school social media, newsletters

### How can peer educators/supporters help in school?

Peer education and support 'projects' or 'steering groups' can work in various ways. Start with modest aims and aspirations and ensure the peer educators and teachers review and reflect on the experiences or projects.

Examples of how peer educators or supporters can help:

- Monitoring and replacing period product stock**
- Social media campaigns** – given the popularity and reach of social media among young people, social media campaigns can be a good way of getting messages out to peers e.g. around period poverty and availability of menstrual products
- Development of school education resources** e.g. posters for changing rooms and toilets
- Delivering all pupils assemblies** – promoting projects such as period poverty or period dignity campaigns
- Drop-in or 'pop-up' sessions** – an informal space where younger pupils can come and speak to peer educators or supporters e.g. period product drop-ins where pupils can pick up period products and be exposed to various types of products. This often leads to younger pupils asking questions and the opportunity to provide informal advice.
- Peer buddy initiatives** – linking peer educators with young pupils  
Peer education lessons or workshops e.g. in PE where they could lead a session on managing periods during PE.



We have developed guidance and resources to work with pupils in your school and facilitate a session to develop peer led menstrual education. Resources include powerpoint slides to provide structure to run a co-design session with pupils; activities to complete during this session and additional resources for pupils to use to deliver peer led menstrual education.



We have created a video to help provide an insight into how this session might look and how to incorporate the provided activities.

Peer-to-peer learning and support should complement and enhance school menstrual cycle lessons and is rarely a replacement for lessons that teacher deliver and facilitate.



## Ideas & Signposting

This section includes links to external resources with additional multi-disciplinary approaches to delivering menstrual cycle education within schools, more information on period products and continued professional development resources for teachers. Teachers have also found some of these resources helpful in enhancing their knowledge.

### Videos developed to support menstrual education and PE

[Yoga to help manage and reduce physical period symptoms](#)

[Yoga to help manage and reduce mental/emotional symptoms](#)

Short on time? A [short animated video](#) to explain what the menstrual cycle is and how to managed related symptoms



### Multi-disciplinary approach to integrating menstruation into the curriculum



**Chemistry** - Royal Society of Chemistry

[This resource](#) provides activities around a life-cycle assessment for three period products where pupils decide which product they'd recommend as the most sustainable and why. Teacher notes are available.



**Drama** - why not try to bring the menstrual cycle and menstruation into the subject of drama or expressive arts? For example, pupils could role play the various emotions and physical symptoms throughout the menstrual cycle.



**Computing Science** - why not bring the menstrual cycle and menstruation into the subject of computing science? For example, developing a software package for period tracking, by analysing user problems, designing and implementing by using coding constructs.

Any teachers wishing to collaborate to produce lesson plans for multi-disciplinary approaches, please get in touch!

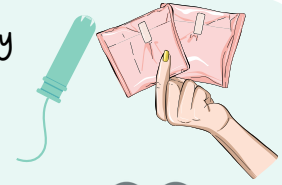


### Additional Information on Period Products and Sustainability

Information on period product 'ingredients' by City to Sea

Information on period activewear

Finding free products near you



Some companies will provide menstrual products for free to use as demonstration items such as menstrual cups - usually it is best to email them to request this. Always offer free period packs - register here.

### Additional Continued Professional Development

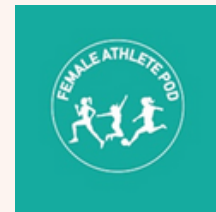
**Optimal Period** - provides information on the menstrual cycle, along with advice for symptoms and management.

**The Female Athlete Pod** – The following selected episodes provide evidence-based information on various topics such as menstrual cycle dysfunctions and symptom management, although there are many more related episodes to listen to

Puberty and Periods. How to Normalise the Area for Young Girls.

Menstrual Cycle Dysfunctions Part 1

Menstrual Cycle Dysfunctions Part 2



**Australian Institute of Sport free modules** – The Australian Institute of Sport have developed short modules on factors that affect female athletes. These include information on the menstrual cycle, pelvic health, breast health, bone health, body image, puberty and development and nutrition for female athletes. Although the modules focus on female athletes, these modules also largely transferable to an active population.

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