

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.

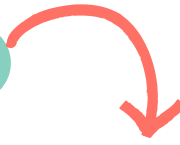


Sources:

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	
4-8	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.
9-11	Recommended minimum menstruation standards in schools	This gives hints and tips and practical changes that can be made to support menstruators at school.
12	Medical conditions and terminology	This gives an overview of potential medical conditions related to the menstrual cycle.
13	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.
14-15	Developing Peer-Led Learning	Hints and tips in taking the education one step further and developing peer-to-peer support within your school.
16-17	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.

Involve Parents and Guardians: inform about the topics covered in class. Consider sending home information about the menstrual cycle to help continue the conversation at home. For example, share what is normal and not normal to help support girls and young people who menstruate with medical help if needed. This also helps parents feel involved in the learning.



Cultural considerations

Whilst there has been a shift in cultural attitudes to menstruation, there are still different approaches and beliefs amongst different cultures. These perspectives often shape the experience of girls and young people who menstruate.

In many cultures, the menstrual cycle is still considered a taboo subject, leading to a lack of open discussion and education. In some places menstruation is still perceived to be 'unclean' or 'impure' and there may be societal pressure to conceal menstruation.

In some cultures, menarche is seen as a significant transition into womanhood. It may be celebrated with rituals, ceremonies or special observances.



In some cultures, people who menstruate may be expected to observe certain seclusion practices. This could involve staying away from communal spaces such as kitchens or places of worship, due to beliefs about menstruation's impact on purity or spiritual significance.

Access to menstrual products such as pads or tampons can be limited in some cultures due to economic constraints, cultural norms or lack of infrastructure.

Religious considerations

Religious considerations around menstruation are diverse and deeply ingrained in many societies. These beliefs influence the ways in which the menstrual cycle and menstruation are perceived, how menstruating individuals are treated, and what practices are followed.

While traditional views persist, there's also an increasing movement towards a more progressive, open, and inclusive approach to the menstrual cycle, advocating for respect, equality, and better access to menstrual health resources.

The list below outlines some common beliefs about periods associated with different religions but is intended as a guide only. It's better to talk to learners about their cultural and religious practices as individuals.



Buddhism

Buddhist views on menstruation are less focused on ritual purity, but certain practices may be influenced by cultural norms. For example, in some Buddhist cultures, people who menstruate may avoid entering temples or participating in certain ceremonies, as it is believed that menstruation can affect the spiritual environment.

However, many modern Buddhist teachings emphasize the natural and non-ritualistic aspects of menstruation, suggesting that females should not feel shame or guilt regarding their menstrual cycles.

Hinduism

Hinduism traditionally views menstruation as both a natural and impure process. There are restrictions during menstruation that vary by region and community. For example, some females refrain from participating in religious rituals, touching sacred objects, or visiting temples during their period. In some conservative Hindu families, females are expected to avoid cooking or interacting with family members during menstruation.

At the same time, there are also celebrations and recognition of a person's first menstruation, known as the "ritu kala" or "menarche ceremony".

Islam

In Islam, menstruating people are considered ritually impure (in a religious sense). Girls or women are not allowed to pray, fast, or engage in sexual relations during menstruation. However, menstruation does not make a female "unclean" in the everyday sense. After menstruation ends, females perform a purification ritual called "ghusl" (a full-body wash) before resuming religious activities. Menstruating females are exempt from fasting during Ramadan but must make up the fasts later.

Judaism

In Judaism, menstruation is associated with the concept of "niddah," where a female is considered ritually impure during a period. After menstruation ends, a female is expected to immerse in a mikvah (ritual bath) to regain purity before resuming marital relations. These rules are particularly followed by Orthodox Jewish communities.

Christianity

In Christianity, views on menstruation vary widely depending on denomination and cultural context. There is generally no strong doctrinal focus on menstruation in most Christian traditions. In some conservative or traditional Christian communities, menstruation may still be regarded as a natural but somewhat private matter.

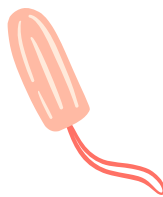


Considerations for Additional Learning Needs and Disabilities

If children have special educational needs or require additional support, ensure that tailored lessons or accommodations are provided to help them understand menstruation in a way that suits their learning style. Schools may offer extra resources for children who need them.

There are good external resources available, for example The [National Autistic Society](#) and the [University of Edinburgh](#) have produced information relating to menstruation for neurodivergent children.

For children with learning disabilities or developmental delays, visual aids, simple language and hands-on practice with menstrual products (such as pads or tampons) may be helpful in making the concept more understandable.



Period product selection: pads and period underwear options are easier to use.

Mobility and accessibility to change products: ensure children with additional accessibility requirements do not face any barriers when managing their periods.

Privacy and dignity: young people should be involved in decisions about assistance and caregivers may need training or guidance on how to provide additional support.

Menstruation can be stressful, especially for learners with additional learning needs or disabilities. Encouraging open conversations, body literacy and emotional support is important.

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:

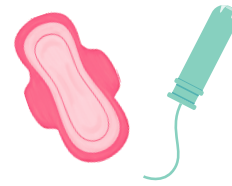


Easily accessible

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.



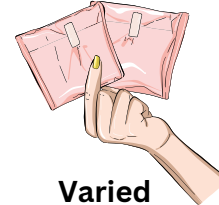
Accessible when there are school trips
(e.g. sports competitions)



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.

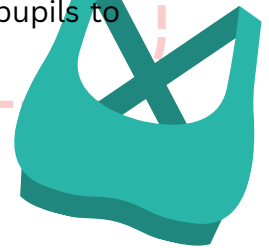
5. School Uniform and PE Kit



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.



Medical conditions and terminology

There are a number of medical conditions related to the menstrual cycle that can be useful to have an awareness of.

Primary amenorrhea: when a girl or young people that have periods reach 16 and have not started their period

Secondary amenorrhea: the absence of a least 3 consecutive periods in non-pregnant females and who are not using hormonal contraceptives

Oligomenorrhea: infrequent or intervals longer than 35 days between each period.

Anovulation: a cycle that does not include ovulation

Heavy periods: abnormally heavy periods (e.g. needing to change a period product every hour, large clots, bleeding lasting more than 7 days, always needing to use 2 period products) that interferes with quality of life.

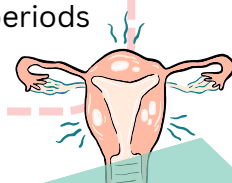
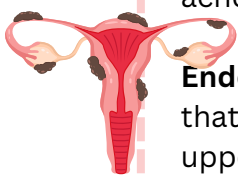
Dysmenorrhea: this is the medical term for menstrual cramps and painful periods. This can be primary (pain is not caused by another condition) or secondary (pain that is caused by another condition, such as endometriosis, fibroids, or pelvic inflammatory disease)

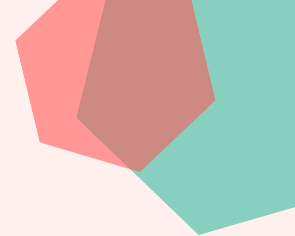
Premenstrual dysphoric disorder: a severe form of changes in mood and emotions a week or 2 before a period and includes feeling anxious or depressed, and causes significant distress or impaired functioning.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS): a hormone disorder resulting in irregular or absent periods, elevated androgen hormones which might result in excess facial and body hair, acne and ovaries may contain cysts.

Endometriosis: tissue similar to the inner lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus that can lead to chronic pelvic pain, painful periods, urinary pain, bowel pain, and/or upper leg pain along with many other signs.

Adenomyosis: the uterine lining (endometrium) grows into the muscular wall of the uterus (myometrium). This misplaced tissue behaves like normal endometrial tissue, thickening and bleeding during each menstrual cycle, leading to heavy, painful periods and an enlarged uterus.





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

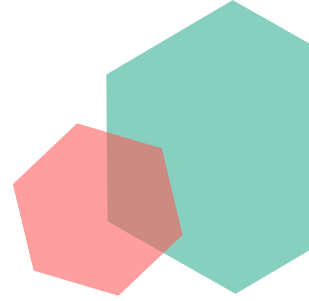
Opening the conversation ensures people feel supported and can speak about their periods if they want to. The menstrual cycle is a natural process and shouldn't be a taboo subject. Use the correct terminology to help remove barriers - use the word 'period' or 'menstruation'.



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?

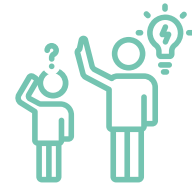
Peer education and support 'projects' or 'steering groups' can work in various ways. Start with modest aims and aspirations and ensure the peer educators and teachers review and reflect on the experiences or projects.

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!



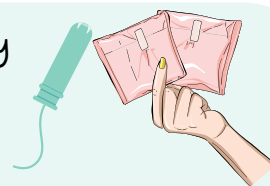
Additional Information on Period Products and Sustainability

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](#).




Care&Protect

Additional Continued Professional Development

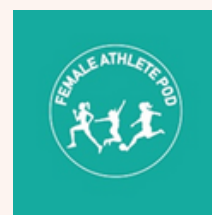
Optimal Period - provides information on the menstrual cycle, along with advice for [symptoms and management](#).

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.

Authors and contributions:

Content developed by Dr Laura Forrest*, Dr Natalie Brown and Beky Williams.

Associated activities co-designed by Dr Laura Forrest, Dr Natalie Brown, Beky Williams, Dr Shirley Gray, Elaine Wotherspoon, Julie Isdale, Tilly O'Donnell.

Valuable feedback received from Megan Padden, Tracy Johnston, Dr Jessica Piasecki and Dr Georgie Bruinvels..

*Dr Laura Forrest was supported by the Royal Society of Edinburgh Research Fellowship during the development of these resources



Period Education ©2024 (www.periodeducation.org)

All rights reserved. These resources may be reproduced by anyone working to promote the menstrual health of women and girls as long as it is clearly referenced. It may not be used for commercial purposes unless written permission has been obtained from Period Education.



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Swansea
University
Prifysgol
Abertawe



STRIDE
ACTIVE

NOTTINGHAM
TRENT UNIVERSITY