

Delivering Menstrual Cycle Education through Physical Education

*School help and
guidance*



**Period Education
UK**



HELP & GUIDANCE

Overview

Period Education@ is a group of academics and specialists working in schools, community and elite sport across the United Kingdom. We are experts in menstrual cycle education and the menstrual cycle 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. The structure of the lessons and activities were co-developed with higher education lecturers in physical education and biology, secondary school physical education teachers and a student. 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 everyone [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. The lessons aim to reduce any embarrassment, confusion, fear and misconceptions around menstruation whilst also empowering individuals 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 learning activities provided.

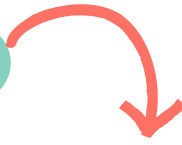


Sources:

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 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.
6-7	Recommended minimum menstruation standards in schools	This gives hints and tips and practical changes that can be made to support menstruators at school.
8	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.
9-10	Developing Peer-Led Learning	Hints and tips in taking the education one step further and developing peer-to-peer support within your school.
11	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

Schools are pivotal in creating a period positive environments that allow young people to thrive. Education for everyone 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 8** 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 girls want everyone to be educated about the menstrual cycle, but also want time to ask questions and have discussions in smaller groups, just girls, 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 11**

Recommended Minimum Menstruation Standards in Schools

Simple could make your school period positive, allowing pupils to thrive through better attendance, engagement, health and wellbeing.

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. Girls desire everyone 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 11** 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. Avoid keeping products in locations where pupils are embarrassed to access them or have to ask such as in reception. This has been requested by girls during our research.

Ensure products are:

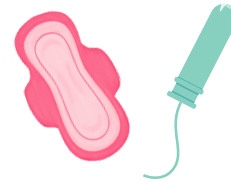


Easily accessible

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.



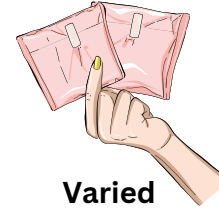
Accessible when there are school trips
(e.g. sports competitions)



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.

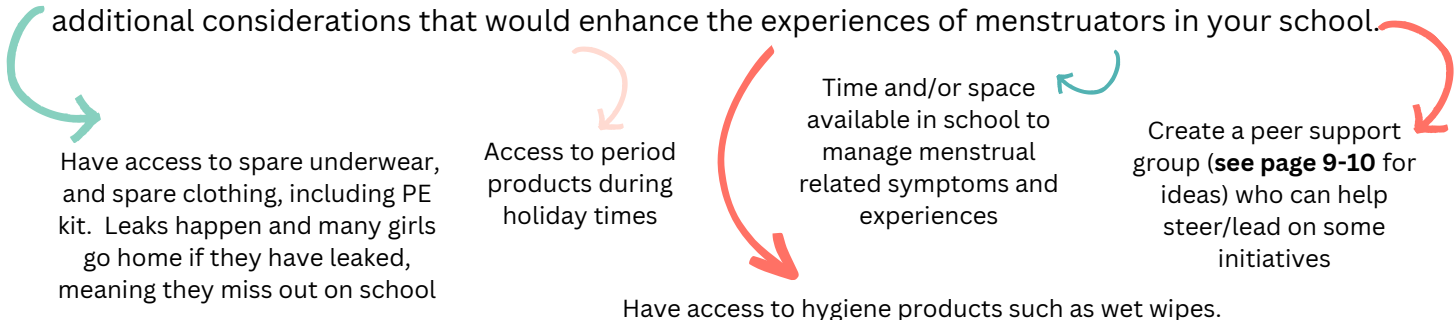
Almost 70% of girls are not allowed to go to the toilet during lessons. Many menstruating young people are also embarrassed to ask to go the toilet, especially if needing to ask in front of their peers. School policies or practices around toilet access should make it easy for menstruators to change period 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 pupils 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.

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.



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

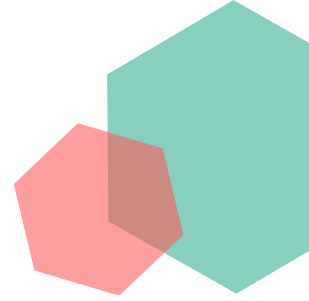
Opening the conversation ensures people feel supported and can speak about their periods if they want to. The menstrual cycle is a natural process and shouldn't be a taboo subject. Use the correct terminology to help remove barriers - use the word 'period' or 'menstruation'.



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.

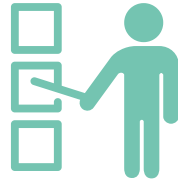


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What peer educators/steering group members may need?



To have a solid underpinning knowledge and understanding of the subject matter to avoid perpetuating misconceptions and myths



Develop skills to educate other young people e.g. practice and guidance on making lesson plans, leading and facilitating large and small group activities and to develop resources



Ongoing support and mentoring from teachers and/or senior management

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.



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.

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

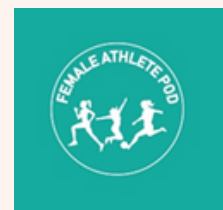
Information about the environmental cost of period products by City to Sea and Wen

Information on period activewear



Additional Continued Professional Development

The Female Athlete Pod – Dr Georgie Bruinvels, Dr Jessica Piasecki and Lucy Lomax host a podcast which 'shine a light and bring focus to topics around the female body and sport and exercise which have originally gone under the radar ... this podcast isn't just for female athletes', but also people who want to learn more about the female body. Found on most podcast apps, or listen online here.



Additional Continued Professional Development cont.

The Female Athlete Pod – The following episodes provide evidence-based information on various topics such as menstrual cycle dysfunctions, tracking the menstrual cycle, symptom management and hormonal contraception:

[Puberty and Periods. How to Normalise the Area for Young Girls.](#)

[Menstrual Cycle Dysfunctions Part 1](#)

[Menstrual Cycle Dysfunctions Part 2](#)

[Menstrual Cycle terminology, tracking, PMS, gut health and hormonal contraception](#)

[CONTRACEPTION \(Part I\): The different types, how they work and the story of long-term OCP use from marathon runner Jess Piasecki](#)

[Mapping your menstrual cycle, nutrition and can you exercise whilst on your period?](#)

[Nutrition: Good habits, how to swerve cravings, menstrual symptoms and behaviour change](#)

Australian Institute of Sport free modules – [The Australian Institute of Sport have developed short modules on factors that affect female athletes.](#) There are two modules which focus on the menstrual cycle (Normal Menstrual Cycle and Menstrual Abnormalities 1), however, there are other modules which look at 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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