

MENSTRUAL HEALTH TALK

A Facilitator Guide for University Students

Audience: High-school-aged girls

Suggested duration: 35–45 minutes

Main message: Periods are normal, everyone's experience is different, and asking for help is a sign of confidence—not embarrassment.

1. Welcome and Ground Rules — 5 minutes

Suggested opening

"Today we are going to talk openly about periods, menstrual products, PMS and understanding your menstrual cycle. This is a judgement-free space. You do not have to share anything personal, and no respectful question is a silly question."

Group rules

- Respect each other's privacy.
- Do not laugh at or shame anyone.
- Nobody must share a personal experience.
- Use respectful and medically correct language.
- Questions may be placed anonymously in a question box.

Icebreaker: One Word

Ask:

"What is one word people use when talking about periods?"

Write the answers down. Discuss which words are helpful, unhelpful or based on stigma.

2. What Is a Period? — 4 minutes

Key explanation

A period happens when the uterus sheds its lining because pregnancy has not occurred. The blood and tissue leave the body through the vagina. A menstrual cycle is counted from the **first day of one period to the first day of the next period**.

For teenagers, cycles can sometimes be irregular, especially during the first few years after periods begin. Many teenage cycles fall between approximately **21 and 45 days**, while bleeding commonly lasts around **2 to 7 days**.

Talking points

- Period blood can be bright red, dark red or brown.
- Flow may be light on some days and heavier on others.
- Periods should never be used to shame or exclude someone.
- One person's cycle may look different from another person's cycle.

Ask the group

"What period myths have you heard at school or at home?"

Correct myths gently without making anyone feel embarrassed.

3. Pads and Tampons — 7 minutes

Pads

Pads absorb menstrual fluid outside the body and attach to underwear.

Pad safety

- Wash your hands before and after changing a pad.
- Change a pad **every few hours**, even when the flow is light.
- Change it sooner when it feels full, uncomfortable, wet or begins leaking.
- Heavier flow may require more frequent changes.
- Follow the instructions provided with the product.

Facilitator phrase

"A pad should not normally be worn for an entire school day without being checked or changed."

Tampons

Tampons absorb menstrual fluid inside the vagina.

Tampon safety

- Wash your hands before and after insertion.
- Use tampons only during a period.
- Change a tampon every **4 to 8 hours**.
- Never wear one tampon for longer than **8 hours**.
- Choose the lowest absorbency that manages the flow.
- Stop using it and speak to a healthcare professional if it causes pain, unusual discomfort or unusual discharge.

Important warning

Toxic shock syndrome, or TSS, is rare but serious. A person using a tampon should remove it and get urgent medical help if they suddenly develop

symptoms such as a high fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, faintness or a widespread rash.

Quick activity: Period Bag

Show or discuss useful items:

- Two or three pads or tampons
- Spare underwear
- Tissues
- A small disposal bag
- A calendar or tracking app
- Any prescribed or parent-approved medication

Ask:

“Where could you keep a small emergency period kit at school?”

4. Understanding PMS — 6 minutes

PMS means premenstrual syndrome. It describes physical or emotional symptoms that may happen during the days or weeks before a period.

Possible physical symptoms

- Cramps or bloating
- Headaches
- Tender breasts
- Tiredness
- Changes in appetite or food cravings
- Acne or changes in the skin
- Difficulty sleeping

Possible emotional symptoms

- Irritability
- Mood changes
- Feeling more emotional
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling less motivated

Symptoms differ between people and may also differ from one month to another.

How to spot a PMS pattern

Ask learners to notice:

1. What symptom occurs?
2. When does it begin?
3. Does it improve after the period starts?
4. Does the same pattern return during later cycles?

Tracking symptoms for at least two cycles can help a person recognise patterns and explain them to a healthcare professional.

Facilitator reminder

Do not dismiss someone's feelings by saying, "You are just hormonal." Their symptoms and emotions are real and deserve respect.

5. Tracking Your Period — 5 minutes

Tracking can be done using a paper calendar, diary or period-tracking app.

What to record

- The first day of bleeding—this is **Day 1**
- The last day of bleeding
- Light, medium or heavy flow
- Cramps, headaches, bloating or acne
- Mood and energy changes
- Products used and how often they were changed
- Any missed school or activities
- Unusual pain or bleeding

To calculate cycle length, count from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period.

Important privacy point

A learner does not have to use an app. A private calendar or notebook works too. Tracking predicts patterns, but it cannot guarantee the exact date of the next period and should not be treated as a guaranteed method of preventing pregnancy.

Mini activity

Give this example:

- Period started: 3 March
- Next period started: 1 April

Ask:

"Which date is Day 1 of the new cycle?"

Answer: 1 April.

6. The Four Menstrual-Cycle Phases — 7 minutes

The phases do not always happen on exactly the same calendar days. Cycle length, symptoms, mood and energy differ from person to person.

Phase 1: Menstruation

What happens: The uterus sheds its lining, causing period bleeding.

What someone may notice:

Cramps, tiredness, backache or no major symptoms.

Talking point:

Rest may help, but having a period does not automatically prevent someone from attending school, exercising or participating in normal activities.

Phase 2: Follicular Phase

What happens: The body begins developing an egg, estrogen rises and the uterine lining starts rebuilding.

What someone may notice:

Their period ends and their usual energy may gradually return.

Phase 3: Ovulation

What happens: An ovary releases an egg.

Important point:

Ovulation is often described as happening on Day 14, but this is only an example based on a 28-day cycle. The actual timing can vary, especially during the teenage years.

Phase 4: Luteal Phase

What happens: The body prepares the uterine lining for a possible pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur, hormone levels fall and the next period begins.

What someone may notice:

PMS symptoms may appear during the later part of this phase.

These phases are controlled by changing hormone levels, but they do not produce exactly the same moods or abilities in every person.

7. When Should Someone Ask for Help? — 4 minutes

Encourage learners to speak to a trusted adult, school nurse, clinic or healthcare professional when:

- Pain is severe or repeatedly prevents school attendance.
- Bleeding lasts longer than about seven days.
- A pad or tampon becomes soaked every one to two hours.
- Periods suddenly become very different from their normal pattern.
- There is bleeding between periods.
- A period stops for three months without an expected reason.
- PMS symptoms regularly interfere with school, relationships or daily life.
- A menstrual product causes itching, swelling, rash, pain or unusual discharge.

Facilitator phrase

“You know your body best. If something feels unusually painful, heavy or worrying, you deserve to be listened to.”

8. Myth or Fact Activity — 5 minutes

Read each statement and let learners vote.

“Everyone gets a period every 28 days.”

Myth. Cycle length varies, and teenage cycles may be less regular.

“You should change a pad during the school day.”

Fact. Pads should be changed every few hours and more often during heavy flow.

“A tampon can be worn for longer than eight hours.”

Myth. A tampon should never be worn for longer than eight hours.

“PMS can include both emotional and physical symptoms.”

Fact.

“You cannot exercise while menstruating.”

Myth. A person can participate in activities when they feel comfortable enough to do so.

“Severe period pain should always be ignored.”

Myth. Pain that disrupts ordinary activities should be discussed with a trusted adult or healthcare professional.

9. Closing Message

Ask each learner to remember these five points:

1. Periods are normal and should not be shameful.
2. Change pads every few hours and tampons every 4–8 hours.
3. Never leave a tampon in for more than eight hours.
4. Track dates, flow and symptoms to understand personal patterns.
5. Ask for help when pain, bleeding or emotional symptoms interfere with daily life.

Final question

“What is one useful thing you learnt today?”

End with:

“Knowing how your body works gives you confidence. Your period is personal, but you never have to manage a worrying problem alone.”

Facilitator Tips

- Speak naturally rather than reading every word.
- Avoid assuming that everyone has started menstruating.
- Never ask learners to reveal whether they have had their first period.
- Allow anonymous questions.
- Do not compare bodies, cycle lengths or pain levels.
- Avoid promising that a particular product will suit everyone.
- Refer medical questions beyond your knowledge to a qualified healthcare professional.
- Where possible, provide learners with a small period kit or information about where free products are available.