

A Menstrual Education toolbox for youth educators



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01

Introduction

About us

The Menstrual Education Network is a project funded by the Erasmus + program and developed from September 2024 to September 2025. Its core goal is to gather insights, materials and practices on menstrual education, a necessary, yet still quite unknown approach to teaching menstruation to youth in order to equip them with important knowledge about bodies and puberty, prevent period poverty and promote a more equal society.

But who is behind this project ?

First, say hello to Règles Élémentaires, the French nonprofit making periods everyone's business — not just women's, not just health professional's, but society as a whole. They were among the first in France to say: "Hey, why are menstrual products not considered basic necessities?" And then they did something about it.

So, what do they actually do?

- They collect and distribute menstrual products to people who can not afford them — think shelters, schools, prisons, community centers.
- They deliver honest, scientific and shame-free menstrual education workshops to youth aged 8 to 18.
- They train adults — from teachers to social workers to HR teams — to talk about menstruation with confidence, clarity, and empathy.
- They also built tools. Lots of them. Printed materials, flipcharts, handbooks, and more — all designed to help youth and educators talk about periods in ways that are age-appropriate, inclusive, and stigma-busting.
- They advise on public policies that aim to make menstrual health a right, not a privilege.
- They run bold national campaigns to put periods where they belong : in public conversation.
- They work hand in hand with partners all over Europe and beyond. Because period poverty is not just a French issue — it is a European one (and a global one)

Their role in the Menstrual Education Network ?

They are the main coordinator, which means :

- They managed the budget, the calendar, and the paperwork (with love).
- They led the communication and made sure no one missed a meeting (or a deadline).
- They built a collaboration framework that made sure everyone felt respected, supported, and safe.
- They organized everything — from Google Drive folders to meeting notes — so the flux stayed creative, not administrative.

→ They organised the in-person meeting in Paris, because real connections > endless Zooms. And yes, they made sure everyone had a place to sleep and enough snacks.

What is the big picture?

They do not just want to change the conversation. They want to change the system — so that one day, no kid misses school, no adult misses work, and no one feels ashamed just because they menstruate.

Now, let's meet Tiiiit! Inc.

Tiiiit! Inc. is a powerhouse feminist crew from North Macedonia who have been shaking things up for over 10 years by mixing activism, art, and menstrual justice.

What they're all about:

- Running the Firstborn Girl Feminist Festival — a space where youth, NGOs, and even government folks chat openly about gender and inclusion.
- Leading big projects on menstrual justice, including hard-hitting research and eye-opening campaigns on period poverty.
- Crafting education and digital tools that make learning about periods easier and way less awkward.
- Hosting events like Breaking the Taboo: Menstrual Justice for All! that get everyone talking — and thinking!
- Diving deep into surveys and research, turning data into action.
- Teaming up with other groups across Europe to push period justice even further.

Who they reach:

- Teens aged 12 to 18 (high school heroes).
- Young adults 18 to 26, because periods do not just stop at 18!
- Youth workers, so the message spreads far and wide.

What Tiiiit! Inc. rocked in the M.E.N. :

Evaluation Moves.

With the other partners, they tracked what was working, what was not, and how we could all grow. Because menstrual education deserves the same rigor as any other field.

- Making sure everyone fills out surveys and shares feedback.
- Keeping the peace and sorting out any bumps in teamwork.

Gathering the good informations for the focus groups and the guide:

- Picking out the relevant bits from the youth survey.
- Making sure 3 tailored education programs hit the mark for different age groups.
- Taking notes, solving problems, and summarising all the best insights.
- Sharing resources, checking in with partners, proofreading like pros, and steering creation meetings.
- Making sure the guide and the big launch event vibe perfectly.

Youth Co-Creation Champs:

- Helping decide where the project should head next, based on earlier results.
- Building super handy contact lists of youth groups, schools, and organisations working in the field of youth.

Last but definitely not least, meet BruZelle!

BruZelle in Belgium is a period poverty pioneer, on a mission since 2016 to smash taboos and get free period products to those who need them.

Here is what they do best:

- Collect and hand out menstrual products to people who can not afford them
- Spread the word and spark honest conversations about periods, health, and stigma.
- Run fun and educational workshops for kids and teens.

- Share their expertise with facilitators, organisations and policymakers.
- Fight for period justice through advocacy, especially with youth councils.

Their favorite crowd:

- Kids and teens aged 8–18 across Wallonia , Brussels and Flanders.
- Young adults up to 26, because everyone deserves period education.
- Educators and youth workers who want to break the silence around periods.

In the M.E.N., BruZelle took charge of... Dissemination (aka spreading the word!):

- Cooking up a slick plan to share the project results far and wide.
- Keeping the dissemination schedule on point.
- Making sure every partner shouted out about the project on their own channels.
- Sending out templates and tracking progress like a pro.
- Wrapping it all up in a final dissemination report.





02

The Menstrual Education Network

Genesis and purpose of the network

Millions of girls and young menstruators across Europe are missing school every month because of their periods — and that is a big problem! In France alone, half of girls aged 15 and more have skipped school due to menstruation¹. In North Macedonia, period poverty is a hidden crisis, and menstrual justice is not getting the attention it deserves, while Belgium faces similar challenges. And Youth are the first ones to want things to change. A 2022 survey by Règles Élémentaires showed that over 90% of young people aged 16-24 want proper menstrual education². So, our project's main goal started with this concrete idea in mind : fighting period poverty and stigma across Europe through education.

Why does menstrual education matter? Because it is about much more than just periods — it is about gender equality, health, and giving young people the power to understand their bodies and break down taboos. A lack of menstrual education can lead to bullying, embarrassment, and discrimination. Studies show that 1 in 3 girls face humiliation about their periods at school³ — and most girls get little info before their first period hits. Plus, periods can cost a lifetime of over €21,000⁴, so making products and info accessible is also an economic justice issue. Educating everyone, no matter their gender, helps reduce shame and silence around menstruation.

Because let's face it — menstruation is totally natural, but it is still often treated like a secret or a shameful thing. Many products out there actually reinforce myths and taboos, and even harm the environment. That is where the Menstrual Education Network steps in: bringing together partners to share knowledge, create youth-led awareness tools, and spread menstrual education far and wide — tailored to fit different experiences and needs.

During one year, the project focused on creating reliable, fun, effective education tools with young people that all educators could appropriate easily to start the talk about periods within their own structure.

By the end of the project, we wanted to feel ready and confident to talk about periods openly in any situation, and for youths to feel empowered to start their own period-positive projects. By involving all stakeholders and putting youth as its centre, this network hoped to amplify the impact, share resources, and hopefully build a more period-friendly future.

In the next part of this guide, you will follow how we thought and developed our project. We believe it can be replicated, in whole, or some phases if it suits your organisation and practice better.

Countries and partners involved

The Menstrual Education Network was proudly built across three countries — France, Belgium, and North Macedonia — each bringing its own cultural context, youth perspectives, and challenges when it comes to menstrual education. Reflecting the linguistic and cultural richness of these countries, we worked in four languages with the youth (French, Flemish, Albanian, and North Macedonian) and used English as our common language for teamwork between partners. Because intercultural dialogue was central to our vision, we made sure that every step of the project involved young people from all three countries equally. The first Key Activity of the project (KA1) took place in Paris and was a way for partner organisations to properly get to know each other and start working together. It began with a needs assessment survey to understand participants' expectations and backgrounds, followed by ice-breakers and get-to-know-you activities to build a friendly, collaborative atmosphere. A collective brainstorming session was held to define what menstrual education means to the group. Working in teams, participants then defined the main component of menstrual education workshops, fostering creativity and peer learning. The rest of KA1 was made of three focus groups to address common challenges the organisations have faced: Facing backlash and sociopolitical tensions; teachers, parents, and their part in menstrual education; and educational programs about periods: a comparative and collective analysis.

From this very first phase, we noticed that the menstrual taboo existed everywhere — but it did not always look the same. In some places, it was louder and more visible; in others, quieter and more insidious. Its shape seemed to shift depending on how strongly patriarchal norms influenced daily life — either nationwide, or in specific towns, schools or communities.

Historically, each partner organisation responded to these realities in different but complementary ways. In North Macedonia, for example, Tiiiit! Inc. started by gathering data on period poverty and pairing that with artistic and cultural projects (like their feminist festival) to open up space for discussion and imagination. In France, Règles Élémentaires took a data-driven approach too, launching for example a dedicated youth survey in 2023 to explore young people's experiences and needs when it comes to menstruation.

1 - Règles Élémentaires. (2023). Règles Élémentaires – Étude auprès des filles âgées de 11 à 18 ans. OpinionWay. <https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/11-octobre/R%C3%A8gles%20%C3%A9l%C3%A9mentaires%20-%20Etude%20aupr%C3%A8s%20des%20filles%20%C3%A2g%C3%A9es%20de%2011-18%20ans.pptx.pdf>

2 - Règles Élémentaires. (2022, mai). Baromètre 2022 : Règles Élémentaires x Opinion Way. https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/Barometre_2022_Regles_Elementaires_Opinion_Way.pdf

3 - Règles Élémentaires. (2022, mai). Baromètre 2022 : Règles Élémentaires x Opinion Way. https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/Barometre_2022_Regles_Elementaires_Opinion_Way.pdf

4 - Moss, R. (September 3, 2015). Women Spend More Than £18,000 On Having Periods In Their Lifetime, Study Reveals. The Huffington Post. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/03/women-spend-thousands-on-periods-tampon-tax_n_8082526.html?utm_hp_ref=tw&guccounter=2

In Belgium, BruZelle built a strong foundation by embedding menstrual education in its core mission from the start, co-developing learning tools with and for young people. At the same time BruZelle advocates for free access to menstrual products and distributes them to people in need.

Although each strategy reflected specific contexts, all of them built legitimacy in their own ways — whether through research, anonymous testimonials, or art as a way to spark conversation. What we've learned is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to opening up about periods — but there are many effective starting points.

The second Key Activity of the project (KA2) took place online. It was designed based on the conclusions of KA1 and unfolded in two main phases: a youth survey and the organisation of cross-country online workshops.

Thanks to the incredible youth networks each organisation brought to the table, in phase 1 of KA2, we gathered input from 423 young people aged 8 to 24 for our first survey on youth priorities around menstrual health. These included 151 participants from North Macedonia, 142 from France, and 130 from Belgium. The majority (83%) identified as girls, with 12% identifying as boys, and 5% as non-binary or others. While 98% youth had heard of periods, only 52% felt confident explaining them to a peer. Confidence levels varied notably by gender, with girls and non-binary participants reporting higher confidence than boys. Knowledge generally increased with age, peaking at 17. Regardless of living environment, awareness remained high, though semi-urban youth showed slightly higher confidence. Sources of information differed by country: home and school dominated in North Macedonia and France, while Belgian youth relied more on peers. The internet played a growing role in France and Belgium. Topic preferences also varied — North Macedonian youth prioritized puberty and school facilities, while French youth focused on environmental aspects, and Belgians highlighted mental health.

For our second phase (KA2), which focused on simultaneous focus groups in each country, we again brought together diverse youth voices. While initially intended to be cross-country and collective, logistical challenges led each organisation to conduct its session independently in spring 2025, with a common restitution time led by each organisation.

In France, focus groups included:

- A group of 17 young people from an Equality Club (aged 11–14),
- A team of 16 young adults (18–25) volunteering as Health Ambassadors,
- And a group of 15 teenagers (17–18) from a football club in rural Normandy.

In Belgium, focus groups included :

- A group of 13 fourth-year secondary school youth, and 2 additional groups of 3 people (15-16) from Brussels
- A group of 20 second-year secondary school youth (13-14) from Antwerp
- And three groups of approximately 13 youth from Institut Marie des Filles in first-year secondary (11-12) in Brussels

In North Macedonia, focus groups included :

- A group of 9 teenagers at a Roma School in Skopje aged between 15 and 17. They did the 3 workshops. They were all girls.

These focus groups helped bring up the issues youth identified themselves as challenging connecting abstract concepts to real experiences — and enabling them to find concrete tools and solutions to question, change and challenge perceptions surrounding periods, thus in diverse realities and contexts.





Testimonies from menstrual educators

A moment when you realized the importance of menstrual education

"I don't have a single defining moment, but every time I see a young person stand up during debates to explain to their classmates why boys have a role to play in period justice — or when someone comes to me afterward saying they feel less scared about facing their first period — it reminds me how vital this work truly is."

"When a young person told me that she use toilet paper her first 3 menstrual cycles because it was prohibited to talk about it at home."

"I don't have just one experience but what is striking me is the need of reassurance for students and young pupils. Most of anonymous questions start with "is it normal if" and highlight the importance of menstrual education and the need to reassure them."

Key milestones and objectives

Agreeing on what we mean when we say “Menstrual Education”

The first step was simple, but essential: define menstrual education together. What should it include? What is its purpose? And what values should guide it?

We crafted a shared definition that reflected our diverse perspectives:

→ Menstrual education should cover every phase of life — from menarche to menopause — and acknowledge both the physical and mental load it can represent.

→ Its goal is to empower menstruated people to make informed choices about their bodies and their products, and to ensure everyone can live their menstrual experience free from shame, discomfort or anxiety.

→ Menstrual education should also shine a light on the very real challenges and inequalities that come with menstruation — whether it is the cost of products, pain management, or taboos. It is not just a personal issue — it is a public health and social justice matter. That is why menstrual education contributes to well-being, health, and equality for all.

From this, we are also able to define some leads to shape impactful menstrual education and shared ideas and good practices for designing workshops. Menstrual education should be:

- **Interactive** – videos, discussions, and group activities help break the ice and engage participants.
- **Clear** – explaining key concepts and definitions is essential to tackle misconceptions.
- **Practical** – using visual aids and menstrual products helps make the topic concrete.
- **Inclusive** – creating space for peer learning, anonymous questions, and open dialogue helps everyone feel safe and seen.
- **Evaluated** – having tools to measure progress before and after each session allows facilitators to adapt and improve their methods.

We also spent time discussing frequently asked questions, which will be featured in the practical part of the guide.

Co-creating with youth at the centre

The second phase of the project was all about creating menstrual education tools that truly speak to young people. And who better to help us do that than the youth themselves?

We began with a broad survey targeting young people aged 8 to 24. Originally intended for ages 8 to 18, we quickly saw the value of including older youth — especially students — who often face high levels of period poverty and can reflect on what was missing from their past menstrual education.

We also made a point to reach Roma youth, youth with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ youth to ensure diverse voices were included. These answers helped us identify key themes and gain real insight into their needs and expectations. Then came the heart of the process: focus groups held over three days, for three hours each. These sessions were all about discussion, co-creation, and connection.

Young participants worked in small groups to explore three major themes they had selected themselves:

→ Puberty and Periods

→ Mental Health and Periods

→ Menstrual Health for All

Each group was supported but given full freedom to express their ideas, challenge one another, and collaborate on practical, creative solutions. From there, we gathered results, reflections, and feedback that shaped the final outputs — and that you’ll find throughout this guide.

From words to action

This guide — along with a dedicated dissemination event — is the final step of the project, but also a starting point for many more initiatives.

It is designed to:

→ Summarise what we’ve learned and created

→ Inspire other actors in the field of menstrual health and youth work

→ Connect those who are committed to changing the narrative around periods in Europe and beyond

We hope it will be a useful and joyful tool for anyone working toward a more informed, inclusive, and equal future — one workshop, one conversation, and one cycle at a time.



03

**How can this guide
be useful to you ?**

We hope it will be a useful and joyful tool for anyone working toward a more informed, inclusive, and equal future — one workshop, one conversation, and one cycle at a time. Either you wonder why and how this guide could be useful to you, or if you want to share the importance of menstrual education with your team, here are some reasons why menstrual education tools are necessary.

Across Europe, educational systems and resources still fall short when it comes to teaching about menstruation in a way that is relevant, inclusive, and empowering. In most countries, menstrual health is briefly mentioned during biology or reproductive health classes. While these lessons may cover the “what” — such as ovulation, the uterus lining, or hormonal cycles — they often miss the “how” and “why” that young people really need. Most students do not walk away with practical answers to questions like: What do I do when I get my first period in school? What products are available and safe to use? Is pain normal? Should I be ashamed if I leak through my pants?

One major reason for this disconnect is the enduring taboo around menstruation. According to a 2025 OpinionWay study for Règles Élémentaires, 51% of Europeans still view menstruation as a taboo subject⁵. That silence translates into missed opportunities — not only in classic educational settings, but also in informal education and at home. Many young people report that their parents, teachers, or caregivers did not feel comfortable talking openly about periods. Some did not get any warning at all before their first period arrived.

⁵ - You can find the survey and more information on : <https://menstrualmatters.eu/>

As one young person shared during interviews with each organisations:

“I did not know what was happening to me when I had my first period and it made me feel I would die.”

Another said:

“All I remember from my first periods is my mother slapping me saying it was a sign of good luck.”

These testimonies all share a sense of loneliness when facing first periods. We believe it also shows that menstrual education should not be reduced to a few dry textbook pages. It should be about equipping young people with the knowledge and confidence to navigate their bodies, emotions, and daily lives — and that means recognising menstruation not just as a biological function, but as a lived experience.

That is why we believe that comprehensive health education must include menstrual education — as a core component, not an afterthought. And while schools are important, they are not the only place learning happens. Menstrual questions and anxieties often come up outside of the classroom: in bathrooms, at sleepovers, in sports clubs, youth centres, or during conversations with an adult you trust. If we want young people to feel truly informed and supported, menstrual education has to extend into all informal educational settings too.

“I got my first period at eleven and a half, during our seaside vacation. And for once, my mom was not going to have her period during the holidays, so she had not brought anything with her. So I went to the little corner shop by myself to buy my first pads.”

The ambition to normalize periods, inform, and empower through education

Let's be honest: starting a conversation about menstruation is not always easy. Our teams, before starting workshops, noticed that, when they entered the room, the first feelings they could get from the youth were curiosity, shyness, and discomfort. So whether you are a teacher, a youth worker, a parent, or a peer, you might worry about saying the wrong thing, not having all the answers, or not knowing what is age-appropriate. That is completely understandable. Many adults today never received proper menstrual education themselves — so how can they be expected to confidently teach it?

But here is the good news: like any conversation that matters, what is most important is simply starting it. You do not need to have a medical degree or a perfect script. You just need openness, kindness, and the willingness to say, "Hey, let's talk about this." Because every time we talk about periods without shame, we chip away at the silence that still surrounds them.

And that silence is real. Too many young people grow up feeling confused, embarrassed, or even afraid when their first period arrives. They turn to friends or the internet, and while peer support is valuable, peers themselves need to get menstrual knowledge from somewhere and/or someone. That is why menstrual education is so powerful — it gives young people not only the practical knowledge they need (like how to use a pad or deal with cramps), but also the sense that their bodies are not "abnormal" as they sometimes think, that their experiences are valid, and their questions are welcome.

Menstrual education empowers. It helps youth feel less alone, more confident, and more in control of their health. It also normalises periods for everyone, not just those who menstruate. Boys, too, need to understand what menstruation is and why it matters — because a more equal and respectful society starts with shared knowledge. We know you might still feel a little unsure — that is okay. This guide is here to support you every step of the way. In the next chapters, you will find age-appropriate tips, real-life examples, discussion tools, and activity ideas to help make menstrual education easier and more engaging for everyone. We've got you covered.

The MEN as a work in progress

The Menstrual Education Network is the result of just one year of collaborative work between passionate organisations based in France, Belgium, and North Macedonia — all of which were simultaneously running other important projects in their communities. From surveys to focus groups, co-creation sessions to workshops, everything you will find in this guide was imagined, tested, and refined in a relatively short period of time. That is why we see this guide not as a final product, but as a starting point — a work in progress that we hope will inspire further exploration, deeper partnerships, and more bold ideas around menstrual education. The need for inclusive, accessible, and stigma-free menstrual education is growing, and so is our commitment to pushing it forward. We hope this first step will pave the way for many more initiatives, help amplify youth voices, and encourage everyone — institutions, educators, activists, and young people — to keep building and evolving this much-needed conversation.

"I'd like to give them essential clues for their own menstrual health ; or give advice for people surrounding them. Also more knowledge and confidence about menstruation and what is considered as normal / not normal."

"In the short term, I wish youth will be more comfortable around menstrual health and about talking about it. In the long term, I hope it becomes a public health and public matter."

“In the short term, I’d like to see less bullying and mockery around menstruation and more open, honest conversations about it. Long term, a future with reduced period poverty, schools better adapted to menstrual needs, the breaking down of taboos, and real political action that goes beyond just words to truly support menstrual justice.”



04

Understanding Menstrual Education & How to Get Started

Starting from our definition of Menstrual Education

To set the stage, let's go back to the definition of menstrual education that we collectively shaped throughout this project.

We believe menstrual education should cover every life phase, from menarche to menopause, and recognise the physical and mental load that can come with it. Its purpose is to empower menstruated people to make informed choices about their bodies and the products they use, and to ensure that no one has to go through their menstrual journey with shame or anxiety.

Beyond the individual experience, menstruation comes with economic, social, and health-related challenges. That is why menstrual education must also address systemic inequalities, break taboos, and highlight menstruation as a public health and social justice issue. In doing so, it contributes to well-being, health, and equality for all.

One of the most common experiences among menstruators who never had menstrual education is to view menstruation as a one-time or short-term experience while it spans roughly 40 years of a person's life. It evolves through puberty, adulthood, and beyond. Teaching menstruation as a recurring function — rather than a single moment — helps normalise it as just one of many biological processes shared by millions of people.

More than biology: historical, social, and cultural components

While menstruation is a biological process, reducing it solely to biology erases the many social, historical, and cultural meanings attached to it. Across the world and throughout time, menstruation has been understood not just as a physical function, but as a powerful symbol — and often, a source of stigma.

In some cultures, menstruation has been seen as sacred, connected to fertility, renewal, and nature. For example, Mayan societies linked menstruation with fertility and prosperity, recognizing its role in the cycle of life. But some religious texts and practices have also been read as associating menstruation with impurity and punishment, establishing a harmful binary of sacred vs. unclean that still affects public discourse today. As in all historical and cultural perspectives, the reality is nuanced and complex, and one could not reduce periods to one interpretation. However, what we can say for sure is that it was always subject to (many) interpretations.

The Western medical tradition has played a significant role in reinforcing stigma and binary representations around menstruation. As medicine professionalised — in often male-dominated spaces — menstruation was patholo-

gised, treated as a problem to manage or hide. From the word hysteria itself (coming from the greek hysterikos) to the lack of research on endometriosis until recently, western medical tradition tended to reinforce stigma by enhancing the conception that any condition related to the womb or the vagina was “mysterious”⁶. This view directly fed into the development of the menstrual hygiene product industry, where marketing strategies often framed periods as shameful or dirty, requiring discretion and sanitisation.

All these contextual, cultural, and historical elements can be used as tools to start the conversation about menstruation. From reading extracts of Pliny the Elder — who claimed that “period blood turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seed in gardens dries up, the fruit of trees falls off” — to showing advertisements that use blue liquid to represent menstrual blood, there are many effective and eye-opening icebreakers to engage people in discussion.



On a social level, menstruation shapes lived experiences in profound ways. It's often seen as a marker of becoming an adult, yet the amalgam between puberty and adulthood, as well of the link between menstruation and reproduction can limit how people understand their own bodies — especially for those who menstruate but are not even thinking of reproduction or are not interested in, or capable of, getting pregnant.

Meanwhile, the impact of menstruation on daily life is real: from school and work absenteeism related to period poverty or severe pain, to exclusion from physical tasks, to the emotional toll of discrimination, period jokes, and lack of proper accommodations. For many, especially those with health conditions like endometriosis or PMDD⁷ periods means pain, fatigue, and social isolation.

This is why we believe that to truly break taboos, menstrual education must go beyond “how it works” to acknowledge these broader dimensions, challenge stigma, and create space for more open, respectful, and inclusive conversations.

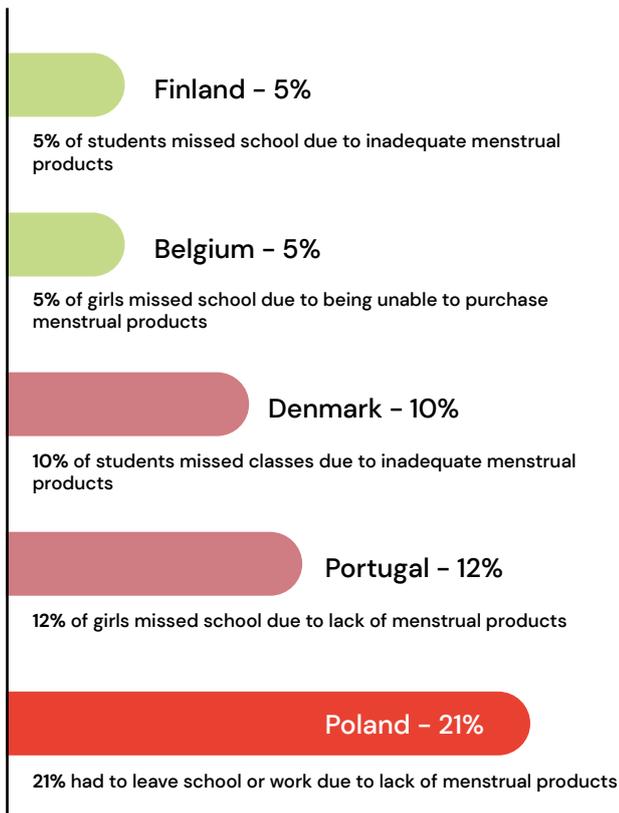
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A tool for equality, inclusion, and empowerment

Menstrual education can be a powerful tool to promote health, equality, and inclusion — no matter the context in which you are working with young people. It can serve as a starting point for broader conversations about equality, a recurring theme to explore diverse perspectives and experiences around menstrual health, or simply a practical workshop to equip youth with the essential knowledge they need about their bodies and periods. For example, period poverty can be a good starting point to talk about equality in youth spaces. Several countries have produced data on the impact of period poverty among girls and/or young menstruators. While surveys were often done in the school context, it can be a good indicator of how menstruation impacts girls when they remain a taboo topic, or when there is no free access to menstrual products. In the EU, it is estimated that between 5% and 20% girls miss school due to period poverty.

School absenteeism linked to period poverty : 8



From our experience as menstrual educators, we've seen that opening space for dialogue, workshops, and creative activities around menstruation truly allows the topic to surface — not as a side note, but as a meaningful conversation that young people are eager (and often relieved) to have.

The importance of mixed-gender discussions in menstrual education cannot be overstated. While the choice of group composition should always consider the cultural, social, and emotional context, our experience has shown that including all genders in the conversation can have a deeper, long-lasting impact — particularly when it comes to challenging stereotypes and reshaping perceptions among boys and people who do not menstruate. Creating shared spaces for learning fosters empathy, reduces stigma, and helps normalise periods as a common part of human life rather than a “women’s issue.” When everyone is included, it sends a powerful message: menstruation is not something to be hidden or whispered about — it is something we can all understand and support.

Here is a little summary of each organisation’s impact through menstrual education in the past year.

For Règles Élémentaires :

- 8 out of 10 students reported being satisfied with the workshops;
- 82% felt they had gained knowledge about menstruation;
- 1 in 2 felt more comfortable talking about periods;
- There is still a divide between those who think periods concern everyone (43.7%) and those who think they do not (44.4%), showing that the taboo around menstruation remains present.

For Tiiiiit! Inc. :

- 88% of participants said that the workshops inspired them to do more for menstrual equality.
- 100% of participants said they felt more informed or confident about their body and mental health after attending the workshops.
- 33% of participants said that something surprised them or changed their thinking.
- 33% of participants said that workshops like these should be part of regular school education.

For BruZelle :

- 83% say they learned something new
- 60% feel more prepared to talk about periods with others

8 - For more informations, you can refer to : https://issuu.com/saskiabricmont/docs/tackling_period_poverty_in_the_eu_current_challe

A few quotes from students after a workshop:

"I learned that girls have pain during their period and that they use things to stop the blood from falling."

"I learned how to take better care of myself, and the names of the things used to stop the blood."

"How much of an impact it can really have — not just mentally or physically, but also at school (for example, on concentration)."

"Why do people make such a big deal when we say we're on our period?"

"I'm a little less scared of tampons than before."

"I learned a lot about a subject considered 'taboo'. I really liked being able to talk about something that is usually seen as awkward. Thank you so much!"

"I really liked this workshop. I feel a bit more comfortable now. I'm not ashamed anymore."

MENSTRUAL
EDUCATION
NETWORK

Contexts and challenges and how to address them

Introducing menstrual health as a topic in youth education can come with varying levels of difficulty depending on the sociopolitical and cultural context. Across our Network, we've observed that these challenges differ significantly between countries.

In North Macedonia, organisations working on menstrual education often face strong societal and institutional resistance. Supporters of the cause are present, but they tend to lack the power or visibility needed to shift public discourse or influence policy, making advocacy efforts especially demanding. In Belgium, although the general environment is more favorable — with support from media and key stakeholders — there are still constraints. A right-leaning government creates uncertainty around funding for associations, and occasional pushback from individuals like teachers or parents can limit the reach of initiatives. France presents a mixed scenario: national-level support is limited and inconsistent, and policies often lack follow-through. Resistance may also stem from trans-exclusionary or ultra-conservative groups, as well as certain individuals. That said, some regional authorities and educators act as valuable allies, and their localised support plays a key role in sustaining momentum.

To navigate these challenges, several strategies have proven helpful. In contexts where opposition is stronger, such as North Macedonia, building solidarity between local actors and strengthening the network of supportive organisations can amplify visibility and credibility. Training individual stakeholders — including teachers, youth workers, and parents — can foster continuity and embed menstrual education more deeply into youth programs. In communities where religious or traditional leaders hold significant influence, engaging them with tailored messaging can open new doors. In environments like Belgium or certain French regions, ensuring access to resources and ongoing engagement is essential.

Across all contexts, it helps to anchor your work in existing frameworks and evidence⁹. Drawing on international guidelines, using research-backed arguments, and participating in peer exchanges with organisations across borders can strengthen your advocacy and programming. Remember, you are not alone — sharing practices, building partnerships, and leaning on the support of a wider movement can help move the conversation forward, even in difficult settings.

Combating misinformation

Talking about periods should not feel like tiptoeing through a minefield of awkward myths, euphemisms, or outdated “facts.” Yet, misinformation around menstruation is still widespread — and it is one of the biggest barriers to building a healthy, inclusive, and empowered relationship with menstrual health. Whether it comes from taboos, media, social media, stereotypes, or even schoolbooks, false ideas around periods can lead to shame, stigma, poor health choices, and exclusion. That is why menstrual education is also a form of myth-busting.

Common myths and misconceptions

You'd be surprised by how many widely believed misconceptions are still circulating — sometimes even among adults! Here are just a few we've encountered in workshops and discussions:

“Periods are dirty or impure.”

→ Not true. Menstrual blood is simply a mix of blood and tissue from the uterus — not waste, not dirty, and definitely not shameful.

“You can not go swimming or take a bath on your period.”

→ Totally false. There is no medical reason to avoid water while menstruating (and no, the ocean does not attract sharks more if you're on your period — yes, we've heard that one too!).

“Only women have periods.”

→ This excludes many people who menstruate, including non-binary and trans individuals. Moreover, lots of women do not have periods, whether it is because they do not have them yet, they will not have them -by choice or not- or have had menopause.

“You can not get pregnant during your period.”

→ While the chances are lower, it is still possible, especially for those with shorter cycles. Fertility is not a switch you can turn on and off.

Fact-checking as a key tool

In a world of livestreams, quick “social media advice,” fact-checking is a very important step. Misinformation can spread fast and sound convincing — especially when it plays on fear or shame. That is why we recommend that menstrual education include:

9 - International guidelines on menstrual health and education can include (but are not limited to) : UNICEF, Guidance for Monitoring Menstrual Health and Hygiene, UNICEF, New York, 2020; Priority List of Indicators for Girls' Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Technical Guidance for National Monitoring. (2022). Global MHH Monitoring Group. Columbia University. New York

→ **Evidence-based information**, explained clearly. To find it, you can refer to websites related to health institutions in your country (in France, Santé Public France, for example), diverse sources that have been cross checked and or documented (you can find links to studies they refer to for examples)

→ **Interactive discussions** that encourage questions and curiosity. Debate tools questioning myths and misconceptions can be useful here for example.

→ **Visual aids** (like anatomy posters, product demos, infographics) to make facts visually accessible. You will be able to find some, that you are allowed to use, at the end of this guide.

→ **Safe spaces** where people can ask “awkward” questions without judgment. Anonymous questions, small groups, roleplay, games...

Here is an example of BruZelle’s approach to menstrual education, that you can replicate.

Our workshops on periods and menstrual poverty are designed to empower young people, value their knowledge, and encourage discussion in a safe and supportive environment. We follow a clear structure based on the “rule of 3” to promote respect and trust. How do we proceed?

1_ We start with clear ground rules. Together, we agree on the following :

- It’s normal to feel awkward – and that’s completely okay.
- Laughing is allowed, mocking is not.
- You can ask any question – there are no silly questions.

2_ We create a safe space.

- Everyone can sit next to someone they trust. This helps them feel comfortable.
- Listening, hesitating, asking questions, or just being present – everything is welcome.

3_ We start with their knowledge

- In the first few minutes, participants write down what they already know about the topic. This helps us assess the group’s level, identify the most talkative and the quieter participants, and show that everyone already holds valuable knowledge.

4_ We encourage reflection and exchange.

- We ask “true or false?” type questions to spark discussion between neighbours. We encourage them to think for themselves, even if they get it wrong.
- They are often invited to discuss in pairs before speaking in front of the group.

5_ We move around the group.

- During the workshop, we walk around the room to stay close to the participants. This makes it easier for them to ask individual questions and creates more direct and discreet contact.

6_ We close gently.

- At the end, each participant comes to the front to drop off their note or card. This is also a chance to ask one last question or share something more personal. It’s a calm and respectful way to end the session.

📌 Bonus tip: let young people bring their own “facts” to the session. They often love the chance to debunk myths together and feel empowered by becoming myth-busters themselves.

Strategies for mainstreaming menstrual health knowledge

How do we make sure this knowledge goes beyond the workshop room? Here are a few ideas:

→ Integrate menstrual health into broader health and well-being education, as well as any kind of workshops. Do not keep it as a one-off, “special topic” — it should be part of any inclusive curriculum. If you have several sessions on health, it can be a recurring theme. You can also talk about periods in any situation to be honest. If you are organising a theater performance, there can be a character that have their periods, etc.

→ Train peer educators: young people teaching other young people is incredibly effective and normalises conversations. Find a way to do it that feels fine for the group. Sometimes, it is a formal presentation from a peer, sometimes it is thematic focus groups led by one peer each.

→ Engage parents, teachers, and community leaders, so that menstrual health is supported across all levels of a young person’s environment. If you already organise frequent time with parents to meet up and talk about their challenges, you can dedicate one to “puberty”, “periods” or “talking about bodies”. If you don’t, you can suggest organising a collective event, for example, with some parents and community leaders also sharing their insights to other parents.

→ Use media and arts (videos, podcasts, comics, theatre...) to bring the topic to life in creative and accessible ways. You will also find a list of recommendations in the next part of the guide.

→ Include period product education: what is out there, how to choose, how to use them safely and sustainably. From experience, it is often better to have the products with you, in order to really show what they look like and how to use them.



FAQ – Frequently asked (and avoided) questions

You'll be surprised at how often the same questions pop up — and how many people think they're the only ones who do not know! Here is a selection of real questions we've received to help you navigate questions you might get :

How much blood do you actually lose?

→ Usually around 30–80 ml — that is about 2 to 6 tablespoons.

Is it normal to have irregular periods?

→ Totally. Especially in the first few years after menarche. Stress, diet, and medical conditions can also affect cycles.

Can you pee with a tampon in?

→ Yes, absolutely. Different holes, different functions! (refer to anatomy schema)

Do periods hurt for everyone?

→ Not always, but many people experience cramps, fatigue, or other symptoms. Period pain should be taken seriously, especially if it is severe or disabling.

Do boys/people who do not have periods need to learn this stuff?

→ Yes! Menstrual health affects everyone — through relationships, friendships, education, workplaces, and social equity.

Is it not too early to talk about menstruation to an 8-year-old child?

→ No — starting early helps children understand their bodies before changes happen and reduces stigma.

If I swim in the sea while on my period, will sharks sense my blood and eat me?

→ No — there is no scientific evidence that sharks are attracted to menstrual blood.

Why do I experience mood swings during menstruation?

→ Hormonal changes during the cycle can affect mood, energy, and emotions — and you're not imagining it!

Is it possible that Coca-Cola-like drinks can ease my menstrual pain?

→ No — caffeine and sugar might actually make cramps worse for some people. You might still like to drink it and it might make you feel happy.

Why do I often have diarrhea during my period?

→ Hormones called prostaglandins can affect your intestines and cause digestive changes.

Are my breasts part of my reproductive system, since I notice the menstrual cycle affects them?

→ Breasts are not reproductive organs, but they're hormonally responsive and often affected by the cycle.

The school or youth center does not have to talk about menstruation — it is a private topic between mother and daughter.

→ That might be true for some, but not all families can or do have these conversations — schools and youth center can support everyone.

Actually starting the conversation

Menstrual education often begins not with a formal lesson plan, but with the willingness to open up a space. A space where people can ask questions, share experiences, or simply hear things that perhaps no one has taken the time to say out loud before. While it is easy to focus on biology alone, starting the conversation around menstruation often involves navigating expectations, cultural beliefs, and lived realities that go far beyond anatomy.

Adapting to context

No two groups are exactly the same — and that is part of what makes this work both interesting and challenging. Age, gender identity, cultural background, personal experiences with menstruation (or the absence of them), access to products, and more, all shape how people relate to the topic. In some groups, there may already be curiosity and openness; in others, hesitation, discomfort, or even resistance.

It can help to take time to explore where the group is at. That might mean sharing anonymous surveys before the sessions, previously taking a formal or informal time to listen to what the group is expecting from the session, observing how the topic has already emerged between them, or simply creating space for people to say what they hope to get out of the session. Sometimes people are full of questions. Sometimes they've heard so many conflicting things that they do not know where to begin. And sometimes, just being in a room where periods are named openly already feels like a radical shift. There is not a single story about periods, which is precisely why having a space where diverse views and experiences can be heard matters. It is not so much about telling people what to think, but about creating the conditions where people can think and feel more freely.

Making that space feel safe and inclusive often means paying attention to small details — using language that does not exclude anyone, offering choice about how to participate, and avoiding assumptions about what people do or do not know. Some people will speak up easily, others not at all. And that is okay.

Fitting menstrual education into existing programs

Menstrual education does not always need to stand alone. It can weave into different types of programs — health, well-being, gender equality, youth empowerment, even environmental awareness. Sometimes, the topic of periods comes up naturally in a conversation about bodies or identity or fairness. Other times, it might need a more intentional opening.

What is interesting is how many directions the topic can go : from the cost of period products to the environmental impact of disposables, from stigma to self-esteem, from reproductive rights to everyday logistics like getting through a school day with cramps. Menstruation can be a small entry point into much larger conversations — and, depending on the group, it can grow into something quite wide-ranging.

Rather than trying to do everything at once, it might help to see menstrual education as a thread that can be picked up, dropped, and returned to again. It does not have to be a single, polished session — sometimes, it is just about not skipping the topic when it naturally arises.

Language, age, and feeling confident as an educator

What feels like the right way to talk about periods will depend on who is in the room. With younger children, a descriptive approach centered around body and puberty can work well — explaining that menstruation is a natural part of how some bodies grow and change, and that it is something lots of people experience, just like other body functions. For older children and teens, there might be more curiosity, humour, embarrassment — or all three at once.

At this stage, the conversation might broaden to include not just the “how” but the “why”: why some people feel shame around periods, why it matters to have access to products, why not everyone has the same experience. Even with adults, it can be surprising how many myths and questions still linger — and how much relief there is in being able to talk openly, perhaps for the first time.

For educators and facilitators, it is natural to feel unsure. Many people were not given comprehensive information themselves, and might feel hesitant to “get it wrong.” But the goal is not to be an expert — it is to help create a space where learning can happen together. Having some resources on hand — like guides, videos, visuals or FAQs — can help, but often, it is the tone of the conversation that matters most: curiosity, openness, and a willingness to admit when we do not know.

Ultimately, starting the conversation around menstruation is just that — a start. It does not have to answer every question or fix every problem. But by opening up space, listening closely, and meeting people where they are, it can begin to shift something. And that in itself is valuable.



05

From theory to practice: structuring a Menstrual Education session

Creating an effective menstrual education session begins with one essential question : What do you want learners to take away from this? While it may seem simple, this question leads to a set of complex answers that should guide both the design and the delivery of the session. Effective sessions enable the transfer of factual information and can shift perceptions, challenge stigma, and create space for personal reflection and social transformation.

There are typically three categories of objectives to consider : what learners should understand (knowledge), what they should feel (attitudes), and what they should be able to do (skills, agency) by the end of the session. Ideally, your session design reflects a balance of all three.

→ **Understanding** : do you want learners to grasp how menstruation works biologically — how it is related to puberty? how it connects to the reproductive cycle, how it differs from person to person, or what is fact versus myth? Would it be helpful for them to understand that periods are not only about biology, but also tied to health, identity, and access? Clarifying your knowledge-based objectives can help you structure content and activities in a way that goes beyond memorising body parts, and instead encourages critical thinking around information, sources, and context.

→ **Feeling** : would you like learners to walk away with a little more ease talking about periods? Less shame or awkwardness around the topic? Could they feel a bit more confident, empowered, or simply normal in their own experience? Attitudinal objectives are often less visible, but just as important as what gets said aloud. Consider what kind of emotional environment you're trying to create: one where learners feel safe, curious, or validated? Addressing how people feel about menstruation is often the first step in making space for lasting shifts in awareness and inclusion.

→ **Doing** : do you want youth to be able to name reproductive anatomy? To feel confident asking for menstrual products at school? To support a friend who is feeling unwell during their period? Action-oriented objectives make the learning experience relevant to real life and offer ways for participants to take responsibility and apply their knowledge.

Pedagogical methods

When it comes to menstrual education, how we teach is just as important as what we teach. Engaging young people in meaningful, relatable ways increases their understanding, but also supports confidence, empathy, and openness around a subject that is often treated with embarrassment or secrecy.

→ **Interactive activities** are one of the most effective ways to engage learners. These methods break the ice, make abstract concepts tangible, and shift the dynamic from passive listening to active participation. This could include quizzes, hands-on demonstrations (e.g. exploring different types of period products), or myth-busting games where participants decide if a statement is “true,” “false,” or “it depends.” Humor and creativity can go a long way in making these sessions memorable and accessible.

→ **Youth-centered approaches** put the learners' realities, experiences, and voices at the centre. Discussion circles allow participants to reflect and share their perspectives or questions in a more relaxed, peer-based format. Storytelling — through fictional characters, personal narratives, or media clips — can help surface common feelings and misconceptions around menstruation, making the topic feel more human. Role-play is another great method: learners might act out a conversation between a teen and a pharmacist, or between siblings discussing menstruation for the first time. These methods are especially helpful for unpacking social norms, gender dynamics, or feelings of discomfort in a playful and low-pressure way.

→ **Presentations** still have a place, especially when clarity and structure are needed. A short, well-designed presentation with visuals can provide foundational knowledge and spark questions. That said, even traditional presentations can be made participatory — through questions, pauses for group reflection, or short “think-pair-share” moments. A mix of presentation and interaction often works best. No single method will work for all contexts, so the key is adaptability. Consider the age group, background, time availability, and comfort level of the group — and choose a mix of methods that support your goals.

Core information to cover

Menstrual education does not need to be overwhelming — but offering a well-rounded foundation helps learners make sense of their own experiences or those of others. Here are the key knowledge areas often included:

1. Anatomy and physiology

You can start with a clear explanation of anatomy, including the uterus, ovaries, cervix, vagina, and vulva — and do not forget to explain how the bladder and urethra are not part of the menstrual system :) ! Visual aids (diagrams, 3D models, drawings) are especially helpful here. It is also important to talk about hormonal changes, ovulation, and how the menstrual cycle works — including what is common, and what variation looks like. You can reassure learners that cycles do not always follow a neat 28-day pattern and that individual experiences vary widely.

2. Menstrual cycles and variations

Learners often ask: “Is it normal if... ?” This section is the perfect space to answer those questions. Explain how cycles change over time, for example during puberty and perimenopause, how stress or illness can affect them, and what irregularities are common. You might also briefly introduce conditions like dysmenorrhea, PMS, or endometriosis¹⁰ — not to alarm, but to validate those who experience more difficult periods and encourage them to seek care if needed.

3. Period products and how to use them

There are so many options today — from pads and tampons to cups, period underwear, and reusable cloths. Showing these products (physically or via photos) allows learners to understand how they work, how to use them safely, and how to choose what works best for them. Be sure to include tips on hygiene, disposal, and access — especially for reusable products, which require different maintenance. This topic can also open a discussion on affordability, accessibility and sustainability, connecting individual choices to broader issues like the lack of access to adapted period products for people with disabilities or sensibility, period poverty and environmental impact of products.

4. Emotional and social impacts of menstruation

Menstruation is not just physical — it affects emotions, confidence, daily routines, and even school or work attendance. Creating space to talk about mood swings, fatigue, stigma, or social taboos helps normalize these experiences. Depending on your context, this could also include a discussion on cultural beliefs, gender roles, or family attitudes around menstruation. Encouraging empathy — especially in mixed-gender groups — can reduce teasing, shame, and silence. While this part can feel a bit discouraging as there are not so many specialists, treatments or recommendations when it comes to coping with menstrual pain, you can still refer to current research and initiatives being led on this topic.

Including All Menstruators

Menstrual education should be inclusive and sensitive to the diverse identities and experiences of those in the room. While periods are often framed as a “women’s issue,” it’s important to move beyond this binary view. Not all women menstruate, and not all people who menstruate are women. Trans men, non-binary people, intersex individuals, and gender-diverse people may also experience menstruation. Creating an inclusive learning environment means acknowledging that we may not know how everyone in the group identifies, and that people may not feel safe or ready to share personal details about their gender or bodily experiences.

It’s also essential to recognise that menstruation itself is not experienced uniformly. If you’re working with a mixed age group, some participants may not have had their first

period yet, while others might be well into managing their cycles. Additionally, some individuals — including women — may never menstruate due to health conditions, hormonal treatments, or other reasons. Being mindful of these realities helps avoid alienating participants and fosters a more respectful and supportive environment.

Addressing Specific Needs Related to Menstruation

When facilitating menstrual education, we all bring our own assumptions — often without realising it. We may assume that participants have seen or used pads before, that their families have discussed periods with them, or that all products are equally accessible or comfortable to use. However, this is rarely the case.

Some people may have never been shown how to use a menstrual product. Others may find internal products like tampons or menstrual cups distressing due to past trauma, body dysphoria, disability, or simply personal discomfort. The sound of a disposable pad’s wrapper might be overwhelming for someone with sensory sensitivities. And for many, particularly those living in precarious conditions, reusable products like menstrual panties may be impractical due to lack of access to clean, hot water and private washing facilities.

To ensure accessibility, it’s important to present a wide range of menstrual products — ideally verified, safe options — and clearly explain how each one works without implying that one is “better” than another. Neutral, fact-based information allows individuals to assess what might suit their bodies, needs, and contexts best. Refraining from judgment and offering choice usually empowers people to make informed decisions.

Moreover, using inclusive language like “people who menstruate” rather than “women” by default, and asking for preferred pronouns where appropriate, helps cultivate a space where everyone feels seen. Providing visual aids, product demonstrations, and alternative learning formats (videos, tactile tools, written guides, etc.) supports diverse learning styles and needs. Lastly, always prioritise creating a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere where curiosity is welcomed and no one feels left behind.

In short, inclusive and accessible menstrual education is not just about covering the basics — it’s about respecting the full spectrum of human experience and ensuring everyone feels they belong in the conversation.

¹⁰ - Refer to the index of useful concepts

Recommendations for pedagogical sequences by age group

There are only recommendations based on previous experiences and common knowledge by organisations, feel free to pick elements and arrange them to your needs.

Ages 7–9: Preparation and Prevention

Session 1: Understanding Our Changing Bodies (Puberty Introduction)

1. Welcome Circle & Ground Rules

- Brief introduction and name round if needed
- Set group agreements (respect, no judgment, everyone can say “I don’t know”)

2. Body Awareness & Autonomy

- Discuss the concept and apprehension of “body” and “our body belongs to us”
- Talk about how everyone’s body is unique suggested
- Activity: “My body...” – kids draw or name something their body helps them do

3. What Is Puberty?

- Use yes/no or true/false questions to open discussion: examples :
 - “Can puberty start at different ages?”
 - “Do only girls go through puberty?”
 - “Can your voice change during puberty?”
- Use visuals to explain changes: height, hair, voice, sweat, emotions, and menstruation
- Emphasise that it’s a shared part of growing up and, as we saw before, every body is different so experiences and physical manifestations vary.

4. Questions & Feelings Game

- Show “emotion cards” (happy, nervous, confused, etc.) and ask: “How might someone feel about puberty?”
- Let kids pick a card and talk if they want

5. Wrap-Up & Preview of Next Session

- Recap key ideas: Puberty = change, and that’s okay!
- Let them know next time we’ll talk more about periods and cycles

Session 2: What Are Periods? (Menstruation Introduction)

1. Welcome Back & Warm-Up

- Quick reminder of what was learned in session 1
- Ask: “What do you remember from last time?”

2. Why Do Periods Happen?

- Gentle and simple explanation: “Just like we learn why our hearts beat, we can learn what periods are.”
- Use visuals to explain: the uterus, blood as part of a body process, not because of an injury

3. What Is the Menstrual Cycle?

- Use a basic circular diagram or drawing
- Explain that periods come part of a cycle. Here you can try to think about other kind of cycles that they know (seasons, time, etc)
- Activity: Color and name the 4 phases

4. What Are Menstrual Products?

- Show different products
- Activity: Matching game — what product goes with what need? (for example : I need to go to the swimming pool, what can I use ? or I don’t want to feel my product’s contact)
- Emphasise that people use what’s comfortable for them, and there’s no “one right way”

5. Normalising and Empathy

- Use a simple role-play: “How would you help a friend who got their period?”
- Discuss being kind and respectful if someone has their period at school

6. Wrap-Up

- Recap: “What did we learn today?”
- Invite anonymous questions in a “curiosity box” that you can answer another time when talking about a similar topic
- Offer take-home resource or sheet with key facts and a drawing activity

Ages 10–11: Comprehensive explanations

For ages 10-11, you can reuse materials from 7-9 but we added extra activities and suggestions as a majority of youth might be getting their periods soon and have maybe already heard misconceptions or myths about periods.

1. What Do You Know?

- Start with a short true/false or yes/no quiz to explore common misconceptions:
 - “Everyone gets their first period at 12.”
 - “Boys go through puberty too.”
 - “You can’t go swimming during your period.”
 - “Periods are dirty.”

2. Puberty 101: What’s Going On in My Body?

- Explain the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty for all genders.
- Activity: “Puberty Timeline” – youth, divided in groups, place events (e.g. voice changes, breast development, growth spurts, first periods) along a simplified timeline to understand that puberty can happen at different paces.

3. What Are Periods and Why Do They Happen?

- Go back to the basics – how menstruation works, and why it's a normal function. Normalise it with relatable comparisons (e.g., "just like how we breathe or digest food").
- Activity: Label a simple diagram of the uterus and ovaries with terms like "lining", "egg", and "blood" to connect the explanation to visuals.

4. The Menstrual Cycle

- Introduce the concept of the menstrual cycle (simplified). Emphasise it's a recurring process, not a one-time event.
- Activity: Use coloured strings or beads to represent phases of the cycle. Students can build their own "cycle bracelet" or "timeline" to visualise the different stages (e.g., menstruation, ovulation).

5. First Periods: What to Expect

- Address practical concerns—what a first period can feel like, what to do, who to talk to.
- Activity: "Period Planning" role-play – small groups brainstorm what they would do if they got their period at school, at home, or while out. Share strategies and tips.

6. Period Products

- Show different types of products (pads, tampons, period underwear, reusable pads, cups). Explain how to use them and respect all preferences.
- Activity: "Product Station" – if possible, have real or sample products to touch, observe, and understand their purpose. Include visuals and instructions.

7. Busting Period Myths

- Debunk common period myths (e.g., "You can't do sports on your period," "People can smell it," etc.).
- Activity: "Myth or Fact?" card game – students draw cards and vote on whether the statement is true or false, followed by a discussion.

8. Wrap-Up: What Did You Learn?

- Activity: Students write or draw one thing they learned or found surprising. Collect anonymous questions in a question box for the next session.

Ages 12–14: Specific needs and empowerment

This session plan for ages 12–14 is focused on specific needs and empowerment, building upon previous content while introducing topics that are especially relevant for early teens. You can of course reuse previous elements, especially when explaining the cycle, the anatomy or menstrual products.

1. Warm-up Activity: "What's True, What's Taboo?"

- Open up conversation around periods, uncover taboos, and set a respectful tone.
- Activity: Display statements on the board (e.g., "Periods are dirty", "Only girls have periods", "You can't do sports on your period"). Students move to a corner of the room

labeled Agree, Disagree, or Not Sure. Discuss each position as a group to unpack misconceptions and introduce inclusive, fact-based language.

2. PMS & Pain Management

- Explain what PMS (premenstrual syndrome) is, including common emotional and physical symptoms (cramps, mood swings, fatigue, etc.). Normalise a range of experiences and explain what's "normal" vs. when to seek help.
- Activity: "Cramps Coping Kit" – Students brainstorm in groups tools and methods for period pain relief (e.g., warm packs, movement, rest, breathing techniques, over-the-counter meds, hydration, etc.). Share and compile a "collective toolkit" poster.

3. Periods at School

- Discuss practical tips for managing periods in school settings — what to bring, who to talk to, and where to go if you need help. Discuss feelings of embarrassment or fear and how to address them.
- Activity: "What If?" Scenarios – Groups receive fictional but relatable situations (e.g., "You get your period during class and don't have a pad," "A classmate makes a joke about periods"). They act out or talk through possible solutions, building confidence in handling real-life moments.

4. Menstrual Products Refresher

- Go beyond basic introductions — discuss pros/cons of each product, cost, environmental impact, and cultural factors. Acknowledge that preferences may evolve and that not all options suit everyone.
- Activity: "Product Match-Up" – Provide cards with images and descriptions of products (tampons, pads, cups, period underwear, reusable pads, etc.). Students match them, share what they've seen or used, and ask questions.

5. Peer Dynamics & Building Confidence

- Content: Address how peers can influence how we feel about our bodies and periods — positively or negatively. Emphasise respect, empathy, and allyship (for all genders).
- Activity: "Period Positivity Roleplay" – Practice supportive responses to negative comments, teasing, or awkward questions. Discuss how to be a good peer — whether you menstruate or not — and how to advocate for yourself or others.

6. Creative Expression & Empowerment

- Activity: "Red Flags & Power Statements" – Students design small posters or cards with a period myth or stigma ("Periods are gross") and flip it into a truth and empowerment statement ("Periods are natural and powerful"). Option to display or keep privately.

7. Closing Circle: What Do You Take With You?

- Activity: Invite each student to anonymously write:
 - One thing they learned
 - One thing they still wonder about
 - One piece of advice they'd give to someone getting their first period

Collect these to inform future sessions.

Ages 14–18: Deepening the social and interconnected dimension of periods

1. Introduction Circle: "What Shapes Our Views?"

- Set the tone for a reflective and participatory session.
- Activity: In a talking circle, invite students to briefly share:
 - Where they first heard about periods
 - A feeling or word they associate with menstruationThis helps identify cultural, social, or media influences and opens space for diverse experiences.

2. Menstrual Health and Mental Health

- Explore the link between the menstrual cycle and mental well-being (PMS, PMDD, emotional shifts, shame, anxiety).
- Normalise conversations about these experiences and discuss access to support.
- Activity: "Mapping the Mind & Body" – In pairs or small groups, students create a cycle chart that includes physical and emotional/mental changes. Encourage them to discuss coping strategies or mental health resources that can help during menstruation.

3. Menstruation and Gender Inequality

- Unpack how periods intersect with gender norms and power structures — e.g., lack of inclusive education, stigma in public life, impact on school/work attendance, trans and non-binary exclusion, silence in male-dominated spaces.
- Activity: "Invisible Impact" Brainstorm – What do menstruators do to hide or manage their periods in school, public, or sports settings? (e.g., hiding a pad, asking discreetly, planning around pain).
- Discuss what this reveals about gender expectations and inequality.

4. Period Poverty and Public Policies

- Define period poverty and give real-world examples from their own country and others. Cover access to products, education, hygiene infrastructure, and the role of public policies (e.g., free products in schools, tax on menstrual items).
- Activity: "Global Policy Comparison" – Students research in groups or are given briefs on how different countries approach period equity (Scotland, France, Kenya, etc.).
- Discussion: What changes would they suggest for their own country or school?

5. Body Autonomy and Activism

- Emphasise body literacy and the right to make informed decisions about one's body. Show how periods can be a political topic and how activism can challenge stigma and injustice.
- Activity: "Design Your Campaign" – In groups, students design a mini awareness campaign:
 - Choose a topic (e.g., free products, period education, stigma, inclusion)
 - Define their key message
 - Create a slogan, poster, or social media post
 - They can present and discuss their campaigns with the class.

6. Closing Reflection: "What Power Do We Have?"

- Activity: Invite each student to respond anonymously on a sticky note or postcard:
 - Something they learned that changed how they see periods
 - One thing they could do to make periods easier for someone else
 - One action they wish their school or community would take

These reflections can be displayed, saved, or used to spark further conversation.

This age group can also benefit from guest speakers (activists, health professionals), short films, or debate-style activities.

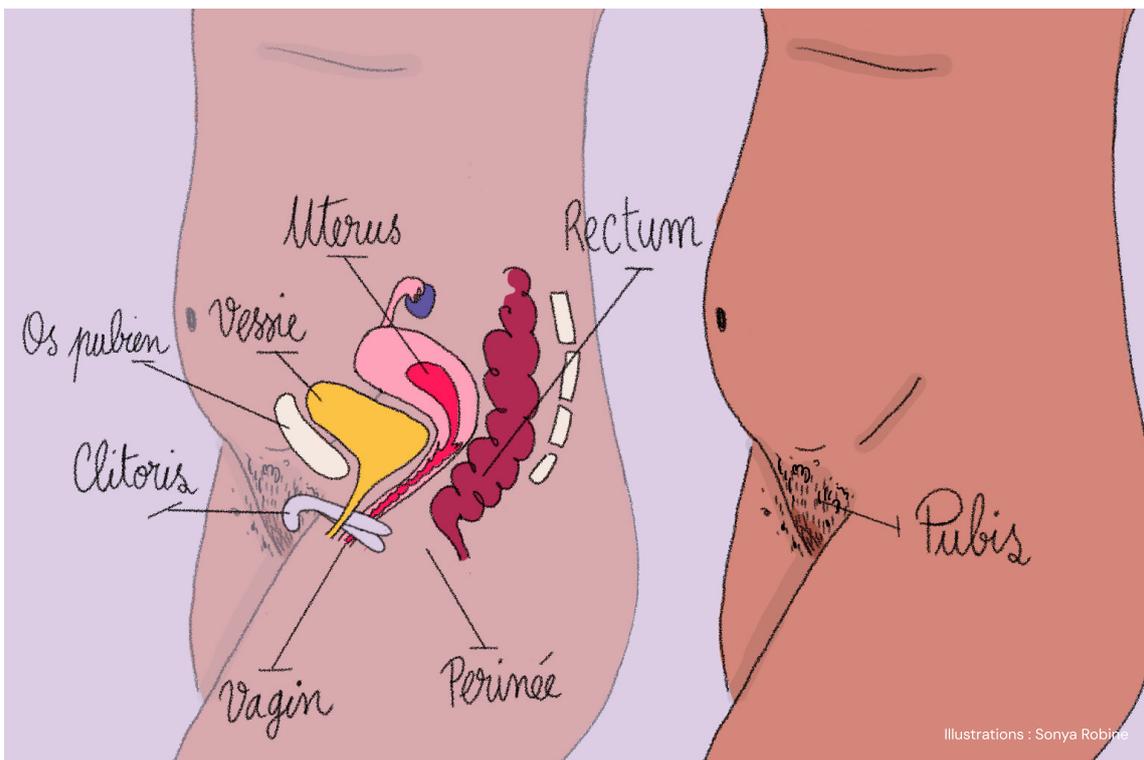
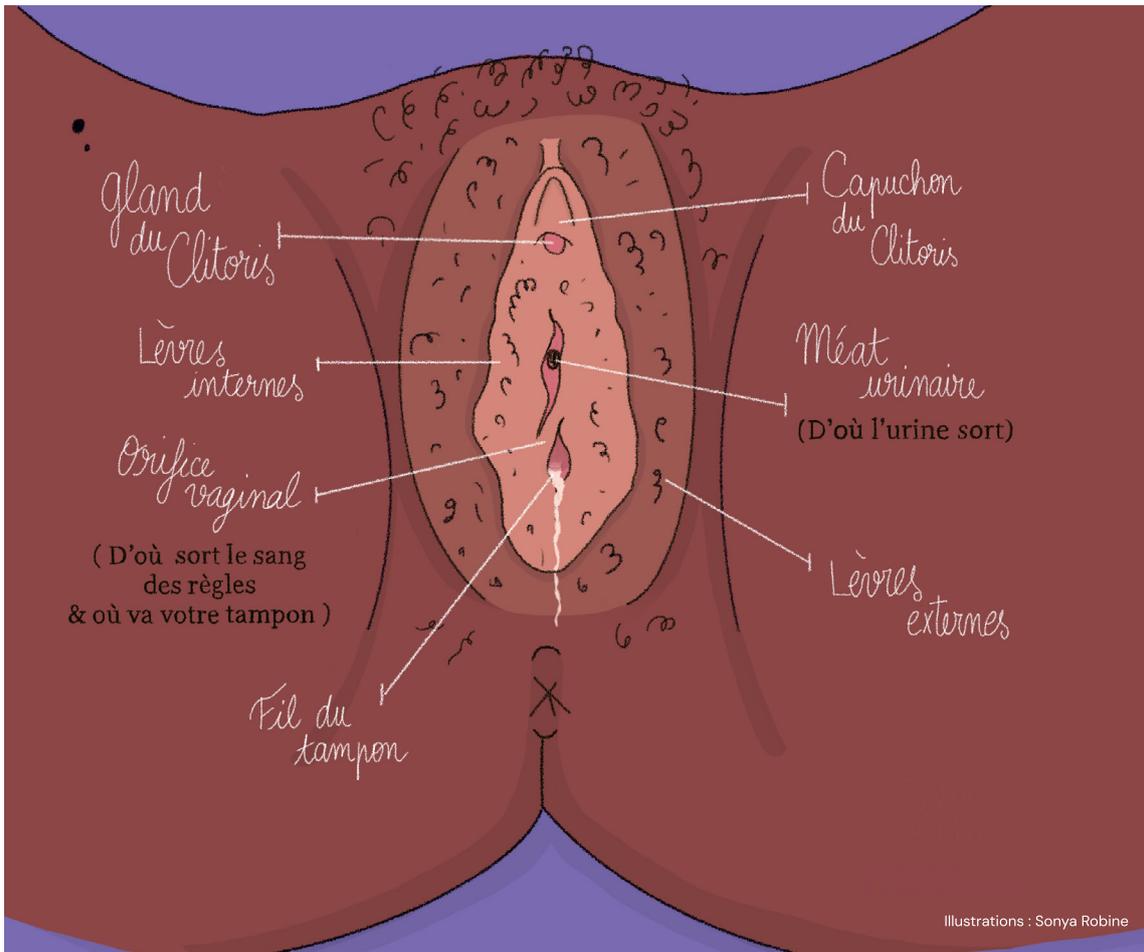


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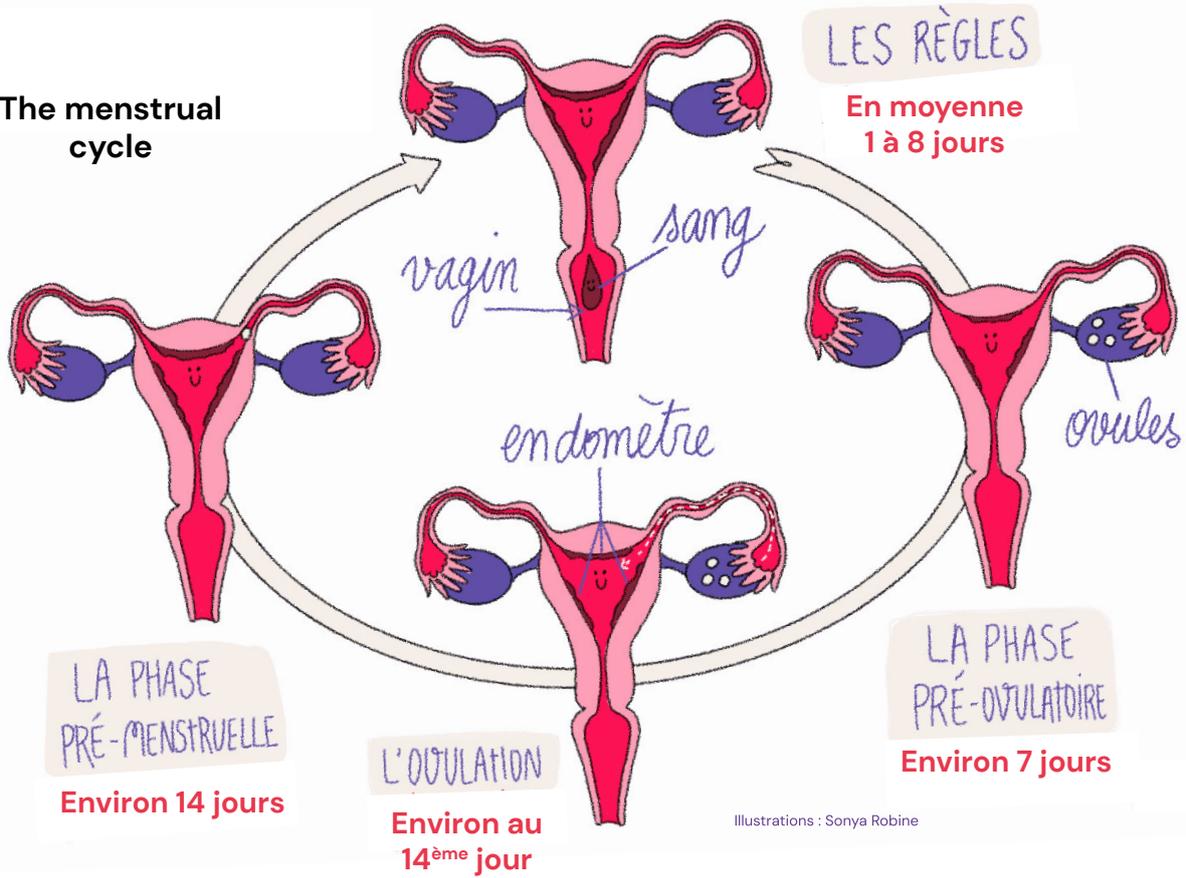
Resources & Tools

Complementary visual resources

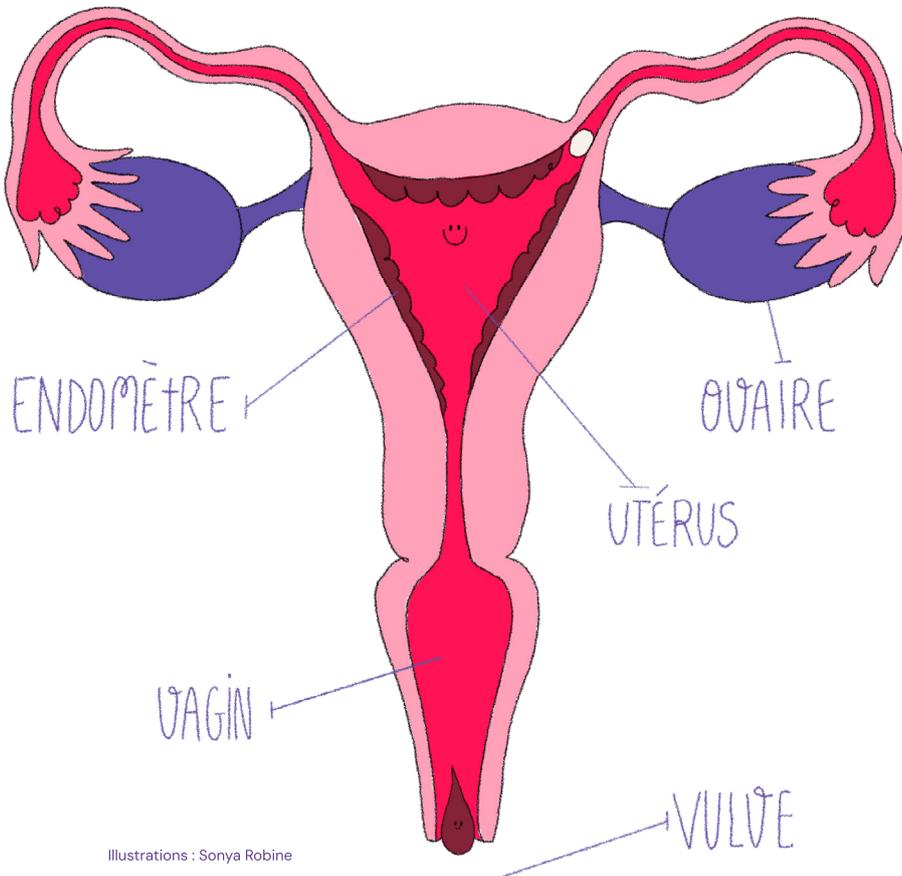
The vulva



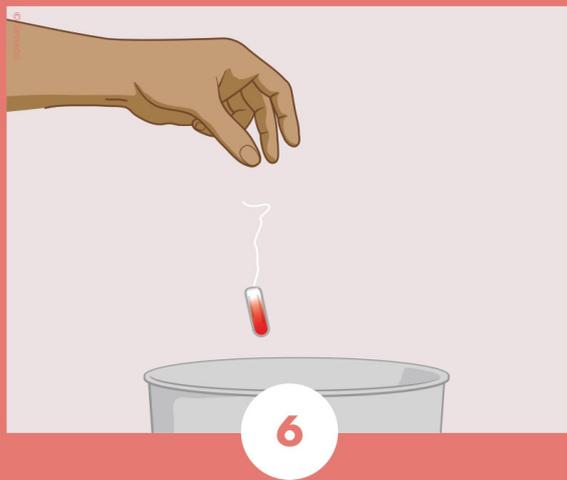
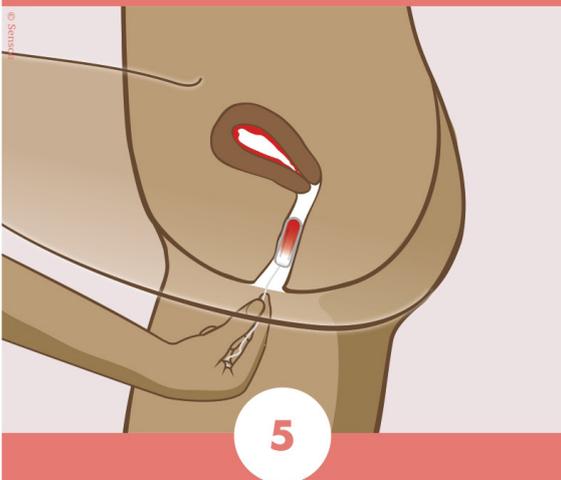
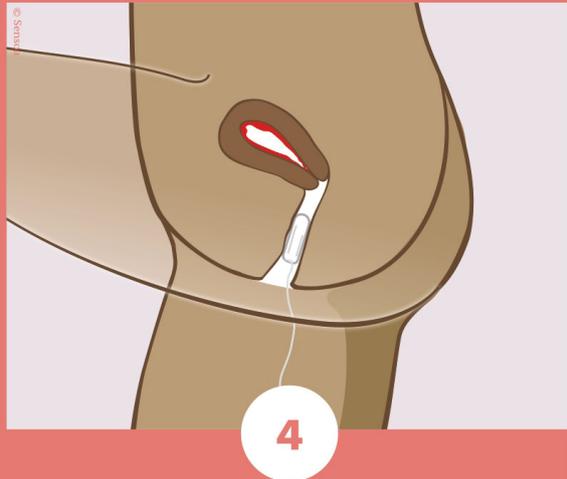
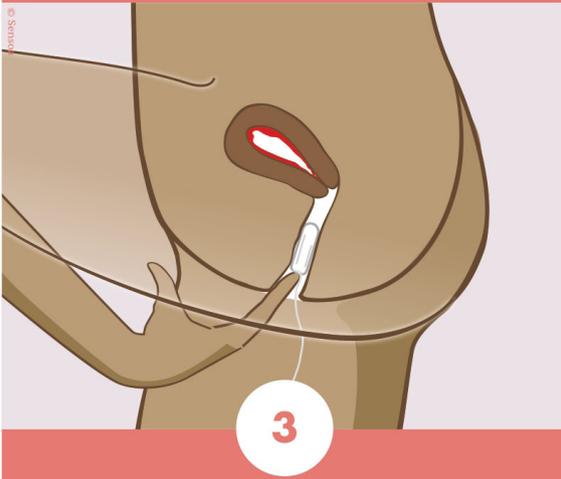
The menstrual cycle



What causes a period?



TAMPON

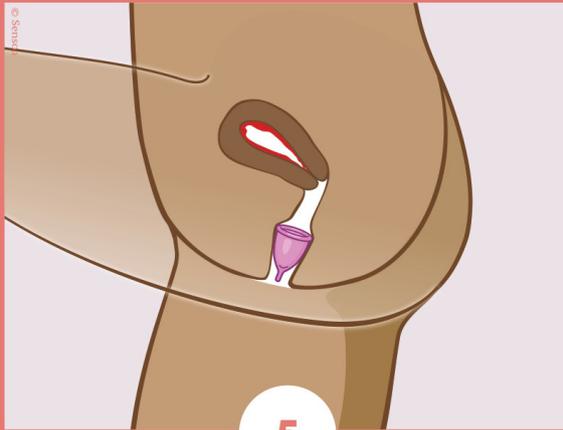
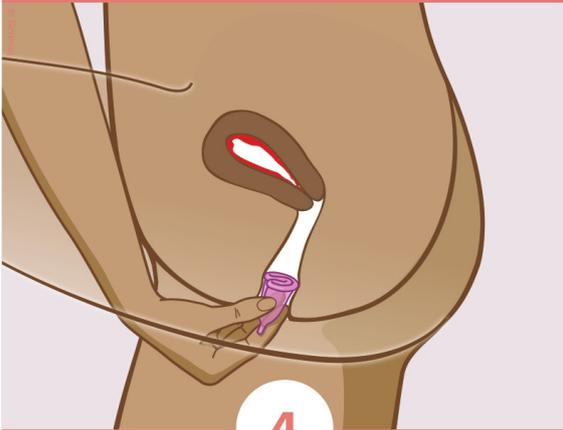


rebelle

BruZelle

Bron: www.zanzu.be

MENSTRUATIECUP

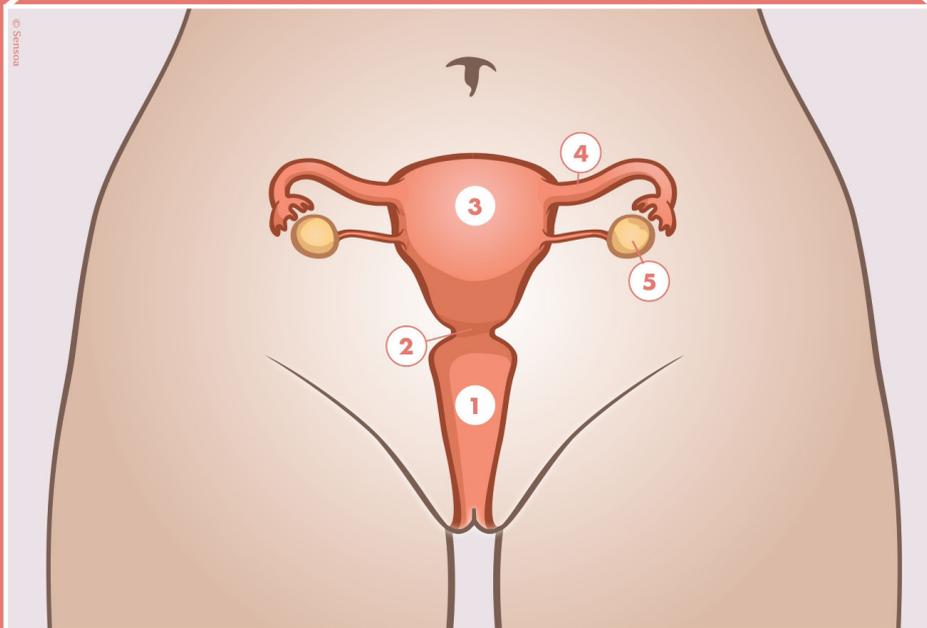
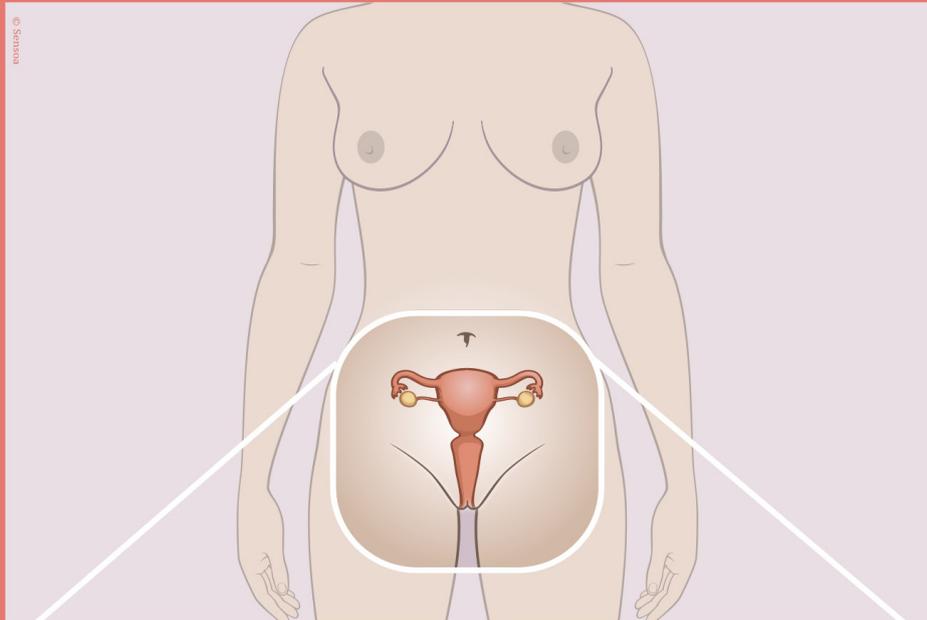


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ANATOMIE



- 1 VAGINA - VAGIN - VAGINA
- 2 BAARMOEDERHALS - COL DE L'UTÉRUS - CERVIX
- 3 BAARMOEDER - UTÉRUS - UTERUS
- 4 EILEIDERS - TROMPES DE FALLOPE - FALLOPIAN TUBES
- 5 EIERSTOKKEN - OVAIRES - OVARIES

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Bron: www.zanzu.be

Resources and studies about period poverty and menstrual health

• Always. (26.01.2023) **Always s'engage pour lutter contre la précarité menstruelle en Belgique.** Enviedeplus.
Link : <https://www.enviedeplus.be/bien-etre/femme-sante/always-contre-la-precarite-menstruelle>

• Belges et culottées, Belgisch en Regelvrij (n.d.) **La taxe tampon ?!**
Link : <https://belgesetculottees.jimdofree.com/>

• Mars, Veronica. (17.05.2024). « **Je mange ou je saigne ?** », **le tabou de la précarité menstruelle.** Revue Politique.
Link : <https://www.revuepolitique.be/je-mange-ou-je-saigne/>

• Menstruositées. (n.d.). **Une exposition qui raconte et met en scène les histoires, les choses et les pratiques liées aux menstruations.**
Link : <https://menstruositees.com/>

• Règles Élémentaires. (2022, mai). **Baromètre 2022 : Règles Élémentaires x OpinionWay.**
Link : https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/Barometre_2022_Regles_Elementaires_Opinion_Way.pdf

• Règles Élémentaires. (2023, février). **Les protections périodiques, un luxe pour 4 millions de femmes en France : Enquête exclusive sur la précarité menstruelle. OpinionWay.**
Link : <https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/enquete%20precarite%20menstruelle%202023.pdf>

• Règles Élémentaires. (2023, octobre). **Règles Élémentaires – Étude auprès des filles âgées de 11 à 18 ans. OpinionWay.**
Link : <https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/11-octobre/Règles%20élémentaires%20-%20Etude%20auprès%20des%20filles%20âgées%20de%2011-18%20ans.pptx.pdf>

• Règles Élémentaires & Fondation du Football. (2024). **« J'ai mes règles, je fais du foot » : Enquête auprès de joueuses de football âgées de 11 à 18 ans.**
Link : https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/enquete_regles_et_sport.pdf

• Règles Élémentaires. (2025, février). **Le poids des règles en Europe : Baromètre européen Règles Élémentaires [Rapport PDF].**
Link : https://doccollectes.blob.core.windows.net/statics/Etude_2025_Le_poids_des_regles_en_Europe.pdf

• Règles Élémentaires. **Parlons Règles.**
<https://www.parlonsregles.fr/>

• Smeyers, Thijs (2020). **Dubbel Taboe Menstruatie-armoede in Vlaanderen.** Caritas Vlaanderen.
Link : https://caritasvlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/inline-files/Caritas_rapport_Menstruatiearmoede_0.pdf

• Wallonie-Bruxelles Enseignement. (n.d.) **Sang Stress.** Wbe.
Link : <https://www.wbe.be/sangstress/>

List of recommended books, videos, and websites

_ In English Books

• Barnett, Emma (2019). **It's About Bloody Time.** HQ.

• Bobel, Chris (2010). **New Blood: Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation.** Rutgers University Press.

• Clancy, Kate (2023). **Period : The Real Story of Menstruation.** Princeton University Press.

• Dahlqvist, Anna & E. Olsson, Alice (2018). **It's Only Blood : Shattering the Taboo of Menstruation.** Zed Books.

• Hill, Maisie (2019). **Period Power.** Green Tree.

• Quint, Chella (2021). **Be Period Positive.** DK.

• Okamoto, Nadya (2018). **Period Power : A Manifesto for the Menstrual Movement.** Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

• Weiss-Wolf, Jennifer (2017). **Periods Gone Public : Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity.** Arcade.

Films

• Fremon Craig, Kelly (2023). **Are You There God ? It's Me Margaret.** Gracie Films.

• Plioplyte, Lina (2023). **Periodical.** MSNBC Films.

• Shi, Domee (2022). **Turning Red.** Walt Disney Picture and Pixar.

Podcast

- Gupta, Sweta (2023-Present). 7-2-1. **The Foundation For Women and Girls With Blood Disorders.**

Link : <https://open.spotify.com/show/1Vdwp9HaPpPSkNiDkl3e88>

- Rakusen, India (2022). **28ish Days Later.** BBC.
Link : <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0bvg9nm/episodes/player>

- Rix, Andrea & Henderson, Yasi (2021). **That's on Period. Period Poverty Project.**

Link : <https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/thatsonperiod-ppp/>

- Weiss, Jessica & Kleinburd, Stefanie (2018-2020). **The Flow Down.**

Link : <https://flowdownpod.com/episodes>

_ In French Books

- Aumont-Carnel, Camille (2022). **#Adosexo.** Albin Michel.

- Brochmann, Nina & Stokken Dahl, Ellen (2018). **Les joies d'en bas.** Actes Sud.

- Boeuf, Aline (2023). **Briser le tabou des règles.** Éditions 41.

- Dancourt, Sophie (2022). **La ménopause en entreprise. La place de l'intime dans le management.**

Pour, 242(1), 131–133.

Link : <https://doi.org/10.3917/pour.242.0131>

- Delanoë, Daniel (2001). **La ménopause comme phénomène culturel. Champ psychosomatique,** 24(4), 57–67.

- Emmanuelle, Camille (2017). **Sang tabou. Essai intime, social et culturel sur les règles.** La Musardine.

- Froidevaux-Metterie, Camille (2018). **Le corps des femmes : La bataille de l'intime.** Paris : Points.

- Guien, Jeanne (2023). **Une histoire des produits menstruels.** Editions Divergences.

- Hanafi, Nahema & Polle, Caroline (2021). **Fluides corporels.** Dans J. Rennes (Éd.), *Encyclopédie critique du genre* (pp. 298–308). Paris : La Découverte.

- Kune, Sophie (2021). **Ménopausée et libre !** Marabout.

- Parker, Jack (2017). **Le grand mystère des règles.** Flammarion.

- Stein, Miriam (2023). **Bouffées de chaleur. Briser le tabou de la ménopause.** Paris : Zones.

- Thiébaud, Elise (2017). **Ceci est mon sang. Petite histoire des règles, de celles qui les ont et de ceux qui les font.** Paris : La Découverte.

- Thiébaud, Elise & Malle, Mirion (2019). **Les règles... Quelle aventure !** Remue-ménage.

- Vella, Fanny (2023). **Coquelicot.** Editions Leduc.

Films

- Cutaia, Anne (2023). **Ménopositive.** Compagnie des Phares et Balises (CPB Films).

- Llewellyn, Evelina (2021). **Jeyetna.** Evelina Llewellyn. (Sur la précarité menstruelle au Liban).

- Marrey, Angèle (2018). **28 jours.** Justine Courtot.

- Ovidie & Ronse, J. (Directeurices et scénaristes) (2019). **Libres "Cachez ce sang"** (Saison 1, Episode 4) [Episode d'une série TV]. Dans Ovidie & Sophie Marie Larrouy (Productrices) Libres. ARTE France, 2 Minutes, Magn, o.

- Zehtabchi, Rakya (2018). **Period. End of sentence.** Melissa Berton & Netflix. (Oscar du meilleur court-métrage documentaire)

- N'guessan Forget, Aude (2022). **Anansi.** La Fémis. (Sur l'endométriose).

Podcast

- Boutillier, Juliette (2017). **Rouge comme les règles** [Série documentaire en 4 épisodes]. Dans LSD, la série documentaire. France Culture.
Link : <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-rouge-comme-les-regles>

- Fanny, Julie, Karen, Lisa & Selma (2018-2024). **La Menstruelle.** Ausha.
Link : <https://podcast.ausha.co/la-menstruelle> (Available on all platforms)

- Fourneau, Jeanne et al. (2021). **Les menstruations, celles dont on ne doit pas prononcer le nom.** Courrier International, Acast.

Link : <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/podcast-les-menstruations-celles-dont-il-ne-faut-pas-prononcer-le-nom-1-5>

Instagram account

@regleselementaires

On Sexual Health:

@_anna.roy_
@charline.sagefemme
@doctogouine
@la.sage.femme
@planningfamilial

On Endometriosis:

@endomind_fr
@infoendometriose
@sororifemme_endometriose
@superendogirl

On PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome):

@asso_sopk

On Fibroids:

@fibromeinfofrance
@fibrometamere

On Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder:

@tdpm.france

On Vulvar Conditions:

@hellovulvae

_ In Flemish

Books

- Hammenecker, Klaar (2023). **Laat Maar**. Lannoo.
- Peeters, Sofie (2024). **Vrouwenlijf en wat we er niet over weten**. Acco
- Roy, Anna & Mademoiselle, Caroline (2022). **Joepie, ik ben ongesteld!** Standaard Uitgeverij
- Torrón Villalta, Cristina & Silva, Anna (2023). **De Menstruatiesituatie**. Uitgeverij Houtekiet.

Films

- VRT. (2024). **Bloedserieus** [Web-série]. VRT MAX.

Podcasts

- Audio Collectief SCHIK, & Peeters, Sofie (producteurs). (2021). **Geen kleine man** [Podcast]. Slowpony & VPRO/ NPO Radio 1.
Link : <https://open.spotify.com/show/4g0St3pwiofwsZ5xD4ZFS7>
- Gerritsen, Lotte & Marieke, Anne. (28.05.2024). **Hoe de cyclus je hersenen continu verandert** (622). Bloody Science. Universiteit van Nederland

- Gijssel, Lisbeth. (2021). **Ongesteld**. VPR Radio 1.
Link : <https://open.spotify.com/show/6em0m20NtDTUn4QQtum9dH>

- Honorata & Lieke (2020-2023). **Menstruatiemeisjes**.
Lien : <https://open.spotify.com/show/OtBycixhis4fsz4NLpVkkKm>

- Judith & Mitchi (21.09.2023). **Elke maand opnieuw en opnieuw...** (6). LUL de Podcast.
Link : <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3NlzLLs871Gk45FzR59Yim>

- Nina, Iris & Sophie (5.05.2023). **Ben je ongesteld ofzo ?** (38). Vrouwmibo. Spotify.
Link : <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6lmnjBb2QX94rcw260Ak1Q>

Instagram account

@Behindendostories
@isala_uantwerp
@luldepodcast
@an.ti_con.cept
@gheplab_ugent
@femina_libera
@ella_vzw
@period.nl
@bruzelle.vzw.asbl

_ In Macedonian

Books

- Реактор – истражување во акција & Тиийит! Инк. (2021). Менструална правда: Сеопфатна студија за пристапот до менструална хигиена во Република Северна Македонија, проценка на состојбите со менструалната сиромаштија и препораки за унапредување на политиките.
- PERIOD Skorje, Публикација #прваменструација

Podcasts

- Red Talks (Црвени Муабети)

Instagram account

@tiiiit.inc
@period.skopje

Recommendations by Youth groups

Educate early and for everyone: Integrate puberty and menstruation into school curricula.

Include boys: Provide them with accurate information so they can better understand and offer support.

Talk about emotions: Normalise the feelings and changes linked to puberty.

Train adults: Teachers, parents, coaches, school staff, they should be equipped to answer questions. They should also be considerate toward people who menstruate and show kindness, for example, by allowing them to go to the bathroom when needed or adapt training.

Make menstrual products accessible: Provide them for free in schools and public spaces, provide financial support for young people in need, and ensure quality is not a privilege.

Create safe and supportive spaces: Offer small group workshops, listening spaces, and non-judgmental discussions. Making room for people to openly share their menstrual discomfort.

Adapt physical spaces: Clean toilets with bins, the option to leave class if needed, access to heating pads.

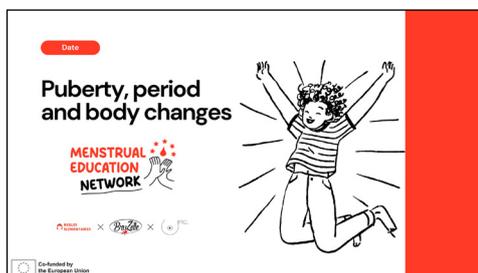
Communicate differently: Use playful campaigns, influencers, games, and events (for example a race or a march) to break taboos.

Focus group led during the project

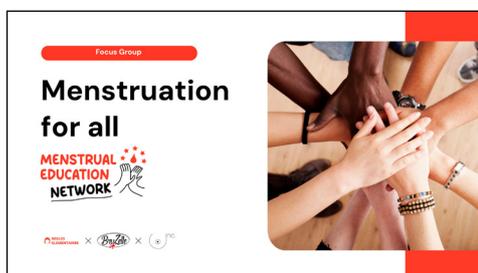
Here are the three presentations we used during the focus groups. You can reuse them if they can be useful to you.



[Link](#)



[Link](#)



[Link](#)



Conclusion

As it was said several times in this guide: menstruation isn't just a biological reality, but a powerful entry point for talking about bodies, health, equality and dignity. When you talk about it as an educator, while listening to the fears, misconceptions and ideas of young people; you are not only breaking taboos; you are building a culture of openness, respect, and inclusion.

Whether you have led classroom discussions, facilitated co-creation workshops, or simply made your learning environment a little more period-friendly or you are planning to, you are already part of the change.

As menstrual education can not rest on individual effort alone and as we need systems that support it — from school policies and public funding, to inclusive curricula and accessible period products, we also invite you to reach out to us anytime you need.

So what's next? If you are an association dedicated to periods, you can join our European Network (contacts at the end) and if you are an educator in a youth centre, social centre, informal group, collective, in a school, etc and you would like to be part of new projects, you can also get in touch so that we can imagine the future of menstrual education together ! Our growing community of educators, youth workers, advocates, and institutions is here to keep the conversation going, share new tools and best practices, and support each other in creating lasting change.

Let's keep moving forward — together.

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