

Period Poverty



WaterAid/ Ernest Randriamalala



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This resource is made up of two sessions. There are 3 activities in each. There are also 3 further activities available in the optional pack, should you wish to do more.

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Every day, **800 million women** have their period, yet in most parts of the world it is still considered embarrassing and taboo.

Secrecy makes it more difficult for women and girls to get help and support needed to manage periods hygienically and with dignity – particularly for the **one in three women** who have no access to a decent toilet.

And because **3 in 10 schools** worldwide don't have clean water and **1 in 3 schools** don't have toilets students on their period often stay home and miss out on their education.

WaterAid works to ensure all girls have access to decent toilets, clean water, information and support needed to manage their periods with dignity, so they can stay in school and achieve their dreams and aspirations. When a community gets clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene, it is the girls and women whose lives can change the most.

“Periods shouldn't come in the way of achieving our dreams. I don't think any girl should miss a school day because she is a girl.” – Melal, 15, Ethiopia

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Young people are powerful agents of change and are vital in helping break the taboo and stigma of periods. By giving young people a voice and empowering them to speak out on issues traditionally seen as taboo, they can be the change needed.

Periods are a problem globally. The taboo around periods is still very much alive in the UK which is why we're proud to help break the stigma and taboos of periods, by encouraging everyone, everywhere to talk about periods.

We can help you bring your sessions to life. Request a free WaterAid speaker to help get conversations about periods flowing and find out more about global period poverty.

wateraid.org/uk/speaker-network

Notes to leaders

Do I need to be an expert on all things related to periods to deliver these sessions?

No! These sessions are about giving students the space to explore periods and understand what they can do to challenge period poverty and stigma around periods. Ultimately, you can adapt the resources to best meet the needs of the group.

Privacy vs Challenging Stigma

While you may wish to keep your experiences private, and we believe everyone has the right to, there shouldn't be shame or stigma attached to anyone who chooses to share their experiences. In fact, sharing experiences of periods can be a really useful way to learn tips for dealing with PMS or to hear about different products like menstrual cups!

Session one activities

Stigma and language

Let's get talking!

Time needed:

20 minutes

What you'll need:

- 2 large sheets paper: one labelled 'open', the other 'private' or a white board split in two
- Sticky notes
- blu tac
- Shoe box or container labelled with 'Period Knowledge Box'. (There should be an easy way to post questions into it.)

Aim of the activity:

To get thinking about how we and other people feel about talking about periods.

What students get out of it:

To consider reasons why people feel uncomfortable talking about periods.

To think about why it is a good idea to talk about periods openly.

Let's get talking!

What to do:

1. Stick the two large sheet of paper headed 'Open' and 'Private' onto the wall at opposite ends of the space.
2. This activity aims to differentiate between topics we are happy to talk openly about, such as the weather, and things we might only talk about in private, such as our feelings about people. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers.
3. Split the group into two. One team is thinking of open topics and the other team will think about private topics. Each group stands in a line, their assigned sheet of paper.

Let's get talking!

4. In a 2 minute relay race, students write topics they think are open or private (depending on their group) on to their sheet. The next person can only go once the first person has returned to the back of the line. The aim is to write as many examples on the paper as they can.
5. After, look together at the sheet marked 'open' and ask the group to explain why this is so, thinking about how they feel talking about these topics and why. Follow this with an analysis of the 'private' topics. How would they feel talking about these topics openly? Ask them why they feel this way?

Let's get talking!

7. If periods haven't already come up, write 'periods' onto a sticky note and ask them to place the sticky note under the heading that matches their feeling about periods. Ask them for reasons.
8. Ask what they think these observations tell us about talking about periods? In general, periods aren't talked about openly. People may find talking about periods difficult because of where they are and who they are talking to. Students may prefer to talk about periods privately, or they may find talking to boys about periods awkward.

Let's get talking!

You could suggest student look information up on the NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/>.

9. Can they think of reasons why it might be good to talk about periods openly? If it is not talked about openly, misinformation may be spread affecting health or leading to people not understanding what a period is, or what to do when they start.

10. Period knowledge box - explain to the group that throughout these sessions, they can post questions about periods into the 'period box'. After each activity open the box, read aloud the question and see if they can be answered. If there is uncertainty on the answer, they could look it up. The box could be left out for a while to allow anonymous questions and sporadically opened to see if the group can answer the questions.

Guess what it is

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

Large sheet of paper stuck to the wall or a whiteboard

Pens – enough for one each

Period Knowledge Box

Aim of the activity:

Discover how the language and words used when talking about periods make it a taboo subject.

To pledge to tackle the stigma surrounding periods

What students get out of it:

To think about people talk about periods and whether this is helpful in making it an easy topic to talk about.

Pledge to break the stigma attached to periods.

Guess what it is

What to do:

1. Explain that periods are often seen as a 'taboo' subject. When people consider something to be a taboo or private, they often name it using different words and avoid mentioning the topic or word directly.
2. In small groups (of 4 or 5) ask students to spend 2 minutes thinking of words or phrases they have heard of, or used, for periods (e.g. Aunty Flo, red lights, menstruation, time of the month, rag week etc.)
3. Ask someone from each group to write the words and phrases discussed on the paper/board at the front of the room.

Guess what it is

4. Ask students to read out some of the words. Ask if they seem serious? Funny? Is it clear what is being referred to?
5. Explain that by having different words for periods, it makes them seem like something that should be secret, hidden away and never mentioned.

“Because of the stigma around periods, shops selling products don’t even use the word ‘period! Instead they use sanitary or hygiene – as if periods are something that’s dirty!” - Emma

It can also be very confusing to know which word to use when you need to talk about periods.

Guess what it is

6. Ask how using words such as 'sanitary or hygiene' might make it difficult to find period products or talk about them? Can they think of different phrases that could be used to help find the products they need and help them talk about periods?
7. Explain that because language around periods is important in making them less taboo, we want there to be a change in the way we talk about periods! Such as calling for the language to change from hygiene or sanitary products, to period or menstrual products. This will help stop embarrassment about periods as the words are being used openly.
8. Tell students that together you will be working to help make periods more of an open topic - to encourage period pride and to tackle some of the issues surrounding periods.
9. If they want to take this further, they could think of ways that they could encourage others Who could they tell? How could they do it?

Is that a fact?

Time needed:
15 minutes

What you'll need:
The 'true or false' quiz

Aim of the activity

To introduce facts about periods that the group may not have thought of before.

What students get out of it:

To check period knowledge to ensure that they are well informed without feeling embarrassed

Is that a fact?

What to do:

1. Students complete a true or false quiz about periods to make sure that they have correct understandings.
2. One side of the room is true, the other is false, the middle is neutral (not sure). For each statement students move to the side they believe is the answer.
3. Read the statements. Once they have chosen their answer, give the correct answer and accompanying information.
4. Once the quiz is complete, ask students if any facts were surprising or shocking and why.

Is that a fact?

True or False quiz

1. Usually periods last for around two weeks.

FALSE – A period usually lasts between 2-7 days.

2. Some people bleed more than others.

TRUE – Everyone's body is different, which means that the amount of bleeding varies between people.

3. Periods occur every month, at around the same date.

TRUE – The menstrual cycle (time between periods) is usually 21–35 days. It varies between people. This means periods arrive around the same time every month.

4. Every girl starts their first period at the age of 12.

FALSE – People can start their periods at 8 to around 16. Everyone is different and starts at different ages.

5. You will have periods for the rest of your life.

FALSE – Periods last until around 40-60 years of age.

Is that a fact?

6. You can only buy period products from a chemist.
FALSE – Products such as pads, cups and tampons are available from many places (newsagents, chemists, supermarkets, even vending machines!)
You could ask where period products should be available from and who should be able to access these.
7. You should flush pads and tampons down the toilet.
FALSE – Never flush period products as they cause blockages in pipes leading to flooding and pollution. It can even cause sewage overflowing up through your toilet! Products should be wrapped and put in a bin.
8. The flow (how much blood there is) of your period can change.
TRUE – The flow of periods change. The first few days may be heavier than the last.. You can adjust which products you use to help you deal with the flow.

Is that a fact?

9. Sometimes periods can give you tummy aches and cramps.
TRUE – Many people experience cramps and pain before and during their period. Medicine or tablets can be used to help with pain and a hot water bottle can help.
10. Some girls miss school because they can't afford to buy period products or cannot access them.
TRUE – Unfortunately some girls are unable to afford period products. They have to use whatever they have available instead (e.g. tissue or even socks). Many end up not going to school because they worry blood may soak through their clothes. This is called 'period poverty' and it happens around the world including the UK when girls don't have access to what they need.

Ask students how they feel about this fact? What do they think could or should be done?

Session two activities

Dealing with periods

What do we know about periods?

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

Images of period products (or the actual products)

Copies of the questions

Blu tac

Pens and paper for small groups

Aim of the activity:

To ensure that everyone in the group has a shared understanding of periods.

To build up knowledge about periods and how to manage them.

What students get out of it:

The opportunity to share knowledge about periods and period products and learn from others about things they may not already know.

Is that a fact?

What to do:

1. Remind students that throughout this session, they can post questions into the 'period box'
2. Split students into small groups. Each group has one period products. Give groups 5mins to create a short 1min presentation explaining the period product to an alien who wouldn't know a thing about it.
3. The following questions can inspire what they'll need to cover:
What is the item? Where can it be found? What might it be used for? How is it used? Have they seen it before?
Where have they seen it before?

Is that a fact?

3. Give the groups one minute each to present their presentation to the group.
4. Ask students if they have any questions they can ask them or put them in the period box.
5. Explain that by having as much knowledge as possible about period products, people can be prepared for their own periods, but also be able to help others who may have questions.

Act it out: be prepared

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

“What would you do if...?”
statements printed or written
onto separate pieces of paper.

A letter to parents/carers of
asking them to donate period
products

Aim of the activity:

To allow girls to discuss and consider how to deal with emergency period situations which may arise.

To help girls think about how they can always be prepared for their period.

To explain that not everyone has access to the products they need to deal with their period and what can be done to help.

What students get out of it:

Be able to ensure that students are always ready for unexpected periods.

Ensure that everyone is prepared for their period and have access to what is needed.

Find out what you can do to help those that don't have access to the products they need.

Act it out: be prepared

What to do:

1. Students will be thinking about what they would do in certain period scenarios. Split the group into five groups.
2. Give each group a problem statement. Groups have 2 minutes to think of a solution. They should then devise a short sketch to act out their problem and solution.
3. In turns groups act out their solution to the rest of the group.
4. Explain to students that as a group they could start a collection of period products. Anyone will be able access these if needed even if you start your period unexpectedly, or don't have money to buy period products you can get them.

Act it out: be prepared

5. Students could organise a collection to donate period products to local foodbanks to tackle period poverty locally. If they would like to do this remind them to bring products in.
6. Co-ordinate with parents/carers. You may wish to send a letter home about this, asking for donations of products to be brought in.

Act it out: be prepared

“What would you do if...?” statements

- Your period leaks onto your underwear or clothes and you are not at home?
- You start your period when you're at camp and don't have any period products?
- You start your period when you are out?
- One of your friends unexpectedly starts their period and does not have the money to buy period products?
- You have questions about periods that you don't know the answer to?

Period poverty in the UK and across the world

Time needed:
15 minutes

What you'll need:
A printed copy of the stories from the UK and the rest of the world

Aim of the activity:

To help girls understand that period poverty is something that affects both the UK and abroad.

What students get out of it:

Understand that people all over the UK and the whole world have periods in common.

Think about how period poverty prevents people living a fulfilled life.

Period poverty in the UK and across the world

What to do

1. Split students into smaller groups (3 or 4) and give each a period poverty story. Once stories have been read, bring the group back together and ask how the stories made them feel.
2. Discuss that people around the world have periods with the same questions and symptoms, and have to overcome taboos and myths. To do this, it is important to talk openly about periods and ensure everyone has access to period products, decent toilets and understands how to stay clean and healthy during their period. They are able to continue with their everyday life as normal, wherever they live in the world.

Period poverty in the UK and across the world

5. Ask for a show of hands if students think that period poverty is a problem here in the UK?.
6. Ask students to sit with their eyes closed.
7. As you read the UK statistics, after each fact, ask students to put their thumbs up if they think the statement is true, and thumbs down if they think it's false. Tell students the proportions of the class with their thumbs up, or thumbs down.
8. After reading all the statements, explain that they in fact true all true.

Period poverty in the UK and across the world

9. Explain that their voices matter and they can take action to improve the situation for people in the UK and abroad, this is called social action. Social action is taking practical action in the service of others.
10. Explain that if they want to take social action to tackle period poverty in the UK, they could do a collection of period products for local foodbanks. They could also help tackle period stigma by trying to break the taboo and stigma of periods.

Period poverty in the UK and across the world

Period poverty in the UK – the facts (Plan International UK, 2017)

- One in ten girls (10%) are unable to afford period products.
- One in seven girls (15%) struggle to afford period products.
- One in seven girls (14%) had to ask a friend to borrow period products as they don't have the money to buy any.
- More than one in ten girls (12%) have used alternatives to period products as they didn't have money to buy regular products.
- One in five (19%) girls have changed to a less suitable period product due to the cost.



Period poverty is not just about having the money to buy period products. For some girls across the world, they don't have some of the basic facilities such as clean water and toilets to enable them to manage their periods hygienically and take part in everyday activities.

Bina (far left) is 15 years old and lives in a village in Mozambique. Her school doesn't have access to clean water and decent toilets which makes it difficult for her to manage her period. Due to this, she ends up having to stay at home when she is on her period so she misses out on lessons every month. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to manage your period if you didn't have clean water or a toilet? Here she talks about how having a decent toilet at home (a latrine) has made life much easier when she has her period, but not having toilets at school means she has to miss out on her education which could affect her chances of achieving her ambition.

"I leave home at 6 and I arrive at school at around 7. Maths is my favourite subject - I like doing sums. I'd like to be a teacher when I'm older. I now have a latrine at home. Before we built the latrine I had to go to the toilet under a tree. I like my new latrine because it helps us to stay healthy and avoid diseases. When we used to go to the toilet under the tree, chickens would walk through all the waste and it would spread germs everywhere making us sick. I learnt about washing my hands at home - my mum taught me. They also teach us about hygiene at school. I have to go home when it is my period. I end up missing class. I have to stay home four days every month. I feel bad staying at home but I don't have a choice as there is no water at school, so I can't change my cloths or wash my hands. It is the same for my friends. I'll be so happy when there is a new school toilet block. The new block will have everything girls need to manage their period. I will no longer have to miss lessons. I am really looking forward to it."

Ritah



At this school in a village in Uganda, an inspiring group of students are working with the charity WaterAid to help transform people's lives. WaterAid helped to build a latrine block at the school and taught the students about good hygiene as well as how to make reusable period pads and how to manage their periods. The students formed a hygiene club, and shared the lessons with their families and community so that everyone could benefit from improvements in health, education and wellbeing. Ritah, pictured in the middle, is a hygiene leader and works at the school. She is also a former pupil of the school.

“When I went to this school, we didn't have a hygiene club and girls missing school due to their periods was a problem. There would be up to five girls absent from school each day. Before the new latrine block was built, we would have to go to the toilet outside in the open. This made it very to deal with our periods.

Now we have the hygiene club, things have changed. We talk about periods openly, and I have taught students how to make pads. Parents no longer have to worry about not being able to buy period towels, so this has really helped them. We teach boys and girls together, so they learn more. If you separate them, then boys don't have the chance to learn about periods.

Another change the hygiene club has brought to their community has been washing hands. The children have taught their parents how to wash their hands properly, and how to use and build latrines. As well as the toilet block, we also have taps to keep the children clean and healthy, and help girls who are on their period deal with it comfortably. The changes have been amazing. Parents really wish for their children to go and stay at school, instead of not being able to finish their education.”



In support of

