

PUBERTY: Preparing for my period



AIMS:

- To learn all about the physical and emotional changes whilst menstruating.
- To learn how to prepare for your period.
- To learn what a period is.



LEARNING OUTCOME:

- Students will realise how they may feel emotionally and bodily whilst menstruating.
- Students will learn about practical methods to prepare for their period.
- Students will know what a period is.



LESSON LENGTH:

- 60 minutes



RESOURCES:

- "Preparing For My Period" Checklist.
- Sanitary Product Example Pictures.



METHOD:

1. CREATE YOUR OWN RSE RULES: (5 minutes)

Studies show that the majority of students find RSE to be awkward and uncomfortable. One way of abolishing this attitude is to set your own RSE Rules. These can be specific to your class and can be decided at the beginning of the lesson between everyone.

Group rules often work best when the students are involved in creating them alongside the teacher. Encourage the students to express what they feel is important, ask them how they would like to be spoken to.

Write a short, bullet point list of the ground rules that your class creates. Make sure this is displayed clearly throughout this session and any other RSE session that takes place. Make sure these rules are re-visited at the beginning of each session to encourage supportive RSE lessons.

Below are some examples of what your RSE Rules may include:

- **We think before we speak.**
- **We listen carefully when others are speaking.**
- **Discussions we have are kept confidential in the classroom.**
- **We should ask for support or help if we do not understand something.**
- **We respect other people's opinions.**
- **We speak kindly to each other.**

2. INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Some teachers will prefer to teach this session to an all female class, however this is not always a possibility or what is best. Recent research shows how important it is for boys to understand periods to reduce the stigma on the subject. This is something that could be mentioned.

Explain to the students that this lesson will focus on a specific part of adolescent development, having a period, otherwise known as menstruating.



If there is a boy and girl mix in the class, ask the students:

“Why do you think it is important that both boys and girls learn about periods?”

They may need some help in this depending on their ability. Answers may include:

- We want to know how to support girls when they experience a period.
- We want to have a good understanding of what others are going through.
- We want girls to feel comfortable talking about periods with us.

It is important that students know what will happen to their bodies before it happens. Ask the students:

“Why do you think it is good to learn about changes you will experience in your body before they take place?”

Some students may need more guidance on this than others, steer them towards positive answers. These may include:

- We want to know how to look after ourselves.
- We need to know what will happen with our bodies so that we do not worry when changes occur.
- We want to feel confident about growing up.

3. WHAT IS A PERIOD? (5 minutes)

Begin by asking the students:

“Can anyone tell me anything at all about periods?”

The important thing is to get the students talking, encourage them to have a go at speaking about periods even if they are unsure what they are. Ask them what they think it is. Offer high praise to students who try to offer an explanation or an idea that they think is related to having a period. Consistently tell them they are doing a great job by speaking about this topic.

After this, it is important to clarify exactly what a period is:-

- Each month the lining of the uterus builds up so that the body is prepared to take care of a baby if a woman is pregnant. If a baby is not conceived, the lining of the uterus, in the form of blood, comes out through the vagina as it is simply not needed. This is a period.

Then say to the students:

“Put your hand up, if you think this is a natural, normal part of life for girls and women?”

Hopefully most, or all of the students will put their hand up. Some may be unsure. There should be at least a few students who raise their hand even in lower ability classes. Raise your hand with the students and tell them that they are absolutely right. This is a normal part of life for a woman.

It may be necessary to ask this question again at this point if the majority of the students do not raise their hand the first time. Re-iterate what a period is, and then ask the same question and encourage all the students to raise their hand. Praise them for doing so.

Inform the students that periods occur in most young women between the ages of 8-16. Every young woman or girl is different and what will be the case for one person, most certainly won't be the case for another.

Although a period usually occurs once a month, when a girl first begins her period this may not be the case as the body is going through a new change. It can take up to 2 years for a period to become regular and there may initially be gaps for up to 3 months between periods.

A period will appear in the form of blood in your underwear. The colour will be red or sometimes brown. This is nothing to worry about and is a normal thing to experience.

4. PREPARING FOR YOUR PERIOD (10 minutes)

Ask the students:

“Now you are at an age where you are expecting a period to begin, what do you think are some good ways to prepare for this?”

Encourage answers such as:

- **I can carry around Sanitary Products.**
- **I can speak to my parent or carer about how to take care of myself during this time.**

Ask the students:

“Put your hand up if you have spoken to your parent or carer about periods?”

Research shows that the majority of young people do not talk to their parents or carers about growing up. The likelihood is that not many, if any, students will put their hands up.

Ask the students:

“Why do we think it is important to speak to our parents or carers about changes we are experiencing, including periods?”

Some of the students may find this awkward or uncomfortable. Explain that this is okay. Try to encourage them to think about what is positive about seeking support from people who are close to us.

Positive answers may include:

- **They can offer us support and advice as they have already experienced changes themselves.**
- **We can ask them about anything that is worrying us.**
- **They will be able to offer us better support if they are aware of what is going on.**

Encourage the idea that speaking to parents or carers is positive. The more open we are about periods, the more they can support us. This goes for the boys too. Boys may be concerned about how to speak to girls about periods and how they can support a girl while they are on their period. Speaking to parents and carers about periods is a good idea for both boys and girls.

Ask the students:

“Can anybody tell me what a Sanitary Product is?”

At this point there should be students willing to put their hands up and offer explanations. Be encouraging and consistently tell them they are handling the topic in a mature and respectful manner.

If you feel as though this could be better, refer back to the RSE Rules created at the beginning of the session.

After this discussion, explain what a Sanitary Product is:

- There are various different types of Sanitary Products, such as tampons, sanitary pads and menstrual cups. These are designed to either absorb or collect the blood from a woman’s period.

It would be a good idea to use the provided visual aids of Sanitary Products here. You can find these at the end of this lesson plan.

Some of the main options are:

- Tampon: A product made of soft material that absorbs blood whilst a woman is on her period. A Tampon is inserted into the vagina with a piece of string that hangs down on the outside of the vaginal opening. The Tampon is removed by pulling this string. Tampons must be changed ideally every 4-6 hours and must not be left in for longer than 8 hours.**
- Sanitary Pad: A cotton pad that is used to catch and absorb blood whilst on a period. Worn in the underwear, the sanitary pad sticks to the underwear and come in different sizes depending on how heavy or light your period is.**
- Menstrual Cup: A flexible cup usually made of silicone or rubber to be inserted into the vagina during your period. The cup collects blood rather than absorbs it. The cup can be kept in for up to 12 hours but the recommended change time is every 4-6 hours.**

Explain that because there are so many different types of sanitary products, you will go into options in detail in a follow up lesson. Explain that the girls should speak with their parents or carers before making a decision about Sanitary Products.

5. HOW MIGHT I FEEL EMOTIONALLY? (5 minutes)

Having a period is a new experience that can sometimes feel daunting. With a period may come new emotions and feelings.

Ask the students:

“How do you think someone might feel before, or during their period?”

Explain to the students that there is no right or wrong answer here, you are just trying to see how much they know, or what they have heard. It is important to ask this question as sometimes students have heard extreme things about periods. Find out a general attitude towards periods from the group. If the attitude is negative or suggestions are made that are inaccurate, make sure you correct this.

- PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome)

You will need to inform the students about PMS. (Premenstrual Syndrome.) This is important, PMS often has very negative connotations but in fact it can be a normal part of experiencing a period.

Ask the students:

“Does anyone know what premenstrual syndrome, otherwise known as PMS is?”

Keep the students on the right track. You will need to tell them if they are unsure.

Answers along the right lines will include:

- Sometimes a girl may feel upset before her period.
- Sometimes a woman may be irritable before her period.

After the discussion, tell the students the correct definition of PMS:

- PMS usually occurs in the two weeks leading up to your period, and can still be present within the first few days of a period. Girls and women may experience heightened and fluctuating emotions during this time, such as moodiness and irritability. PMS is caused by the rise and fall of hormones on the lead up to a period. Some women may experience PMS more than others, and some not at all. PMS is a normal part of having a period, but if you have any concerns, you should speak to a parent, carer or trusted adult.

Ask the students:

“Based on what we have just talked about, put your hand up if you feel that a girl or a woman experiencing PMS can be a normal part of having a period?”

Most, if not all of the students should now put their hands up. Raise your hand with them, and encourage them that they are doing a great job.

After this discussion, if the students are still unsure, revisit this explanation again and re-iterate that it is a normal part of having a period.

6. HOW MIGHT MY BODY FEEL? (5 minutes)

When a girl or a woman is on their period, or often shortly before, their body may feel different.

Ask the students:

“Does anyone know the changes that happen to a girl’s body before and during her period?”

It is a good idea to keep students actively involved in this discussion. Correct any negative or extreme ideas about a woman’s body on her period.

After this discussion, explain to the students what can happen:

- During a period, or shortly before a period, a girl or woman may experience bloating or weight gain. This is temporary and is caused by the body retaining water at this time of the month. A woman's breasts might also feel tender or sore around this time which is again temporary.

Around this time a woman may crave junk food and salt. To reduce these symptoms ensure you eat a healthy and balanced diet and try to cut down on salt and caffeine, this can help.

7. PERIOD PAIN (5 minutes)

The idea of period pain can often be scary and a worry for girls who have not yet experienced this. It is important to explain that this can also be another normal part of having a period.

Ask the students:

"Put your hand up, if you think it is normal to experience some cramps or discomfort on your period?"

Most of the students should have heard of period pain perhaps from their Mum or carer, or an older sister. Most of them should raise their hand at this point. Raise your hand with them and tell them that they are correct.

Explain Period Pain to the students:

- Some of the girls in this room may experience period pain, this is common and a lot of women may experience the discomfort of menstrual cramps before, or during their period. These cramps should not stop you from living a normal life. When you get your period, if you feel your cramps are particularly bad, ensure you seek medical advice and speak to your parent or carer.

Ask the students:

"What do you think a girl or woman could do to help with their period pain?"

Here, the students may come forward with some ideas such as:

- **They should rest and not do anything.**

Try and steer them away from this idea, and encourage them to think of a period as a normal part of life. If your period is stopping you from doing certain things it is important to seek medical advice.

Good answers for this could include:

- **They should apply heat to the area that is hurting.**
- **They should exercise, but not excessively.**

Explain to the students:

- **Moderate exercise can help period pain and cramps. A hot water bottle or a heated pad can also aid in reducing discomfort or period pain.**

8. "MY PERIOD" CHECKLIST - HANDOUT. (10 minutes)

At this point the students should feel more confident in speaking about periods. This will differ in each class but they will certainly know more at this point. Hand out the period checklist and give the students a few minutes to fill it in. Tell them they can work quietly with the person next to them and ask for help if they need it.

After they have filled in the checklist, review the questions out loud and discuss them as a class. Encourage an open discussion and praise them for their work. If the students have an incorrect answer on their checklist, ask them to correct their answer in a different colour and come to you if they have any questions.

9. RECAP THE LESSON. (10 minutes)

At the end of the lesson it is a good chance to do an information recap.

- **Ask the Students if they feel as though the RSE Rules were followed. Could they be improved?**

After discussing the RSE Rules, ask the students a few questions to recap the lesson:

“What can a girl do to prepare if they are of an age where they might get their first period?”

Good answers include:

- They should carry Sanitary Products.
- They should speak to their parent, carer, or trusted adult if they have any worries.

“Is it a possibility that a girl or woman may experience feelings of moodiness or upset around the time of their period? Does this have a particular name?”

Good answers include:

- Yes this is normal.
- It is called PMS. (Premenstrual syndrome)
- A girl or woman may experience this shortly before, or during the first few days of their period.

“Why is it a good idea for us to express any worries to our parents, carers or trusted adults?”

Good answers include:

- They will be able to offer us better support if they are aware of how we are feeling.
- They want to be included in our lives and care about how we are.
- They will be able to offer us guidance and advice that we may not have thought about.

This is also a good opportunity to ask any other questions you feel are important, and to address any specific issues that came up in your particular group.



Ask the students:

“Put your hand up, if after this discussion, you feel more confident talking about periods, or you feel as though you know more about periods?”

This will be an excellent gauge to see how effective the lesson has been. Most of the students should raise their hands at this point.

- Ask the students if they have any questions, and tell them that if they want to ask them anonymously, they can write them down on a piece of paper and leave them on your desk, these can be re-visited next lesson.

Tell the students they did a great job discussing periods. Explain to them that although a period comes from a private part on the body and we shouldn't show this to anybody, it is okay to discuss periods with people that we trust, if we need help or support. This applies for boys and girls.

The students should leave feeling confident about knowing what a period is, how to prepare for a period, and how they might feel whilst experiencing a period.

"MY PERIOD" CHECKLIST

Please take your time to read the following questions thoroughly. If you believe a statement to be correct, put a tick in the "Yes" column. If you believe a statement to be incorrect, please put a tick in the "No" column.

You may work quietly with the person next to you or ask for help if you are unsure.

STATEMENT	YES	NO
Girls who are old enough to begin menstruating should carry Sanitary Products with them in case they get their period.		
Both boys and girls should speak to their parents, carers or trusted adult if they have a question about periods.		
PMS, also known as Premenstrual Syndrome, is not something that a girl should experience at any point.		
A girl should avoid exercise of any kind when she is on her period.		
Heating pads and hot water bottles work well at helping with period pain.		
A girl should eat a lot of junk food on the lead up to her period.		
A period is a normal part of a woman or girl's life.		
When on her period, a girl should remove her tampon every 4-6 hours.		
Boys should not talk about periods.		

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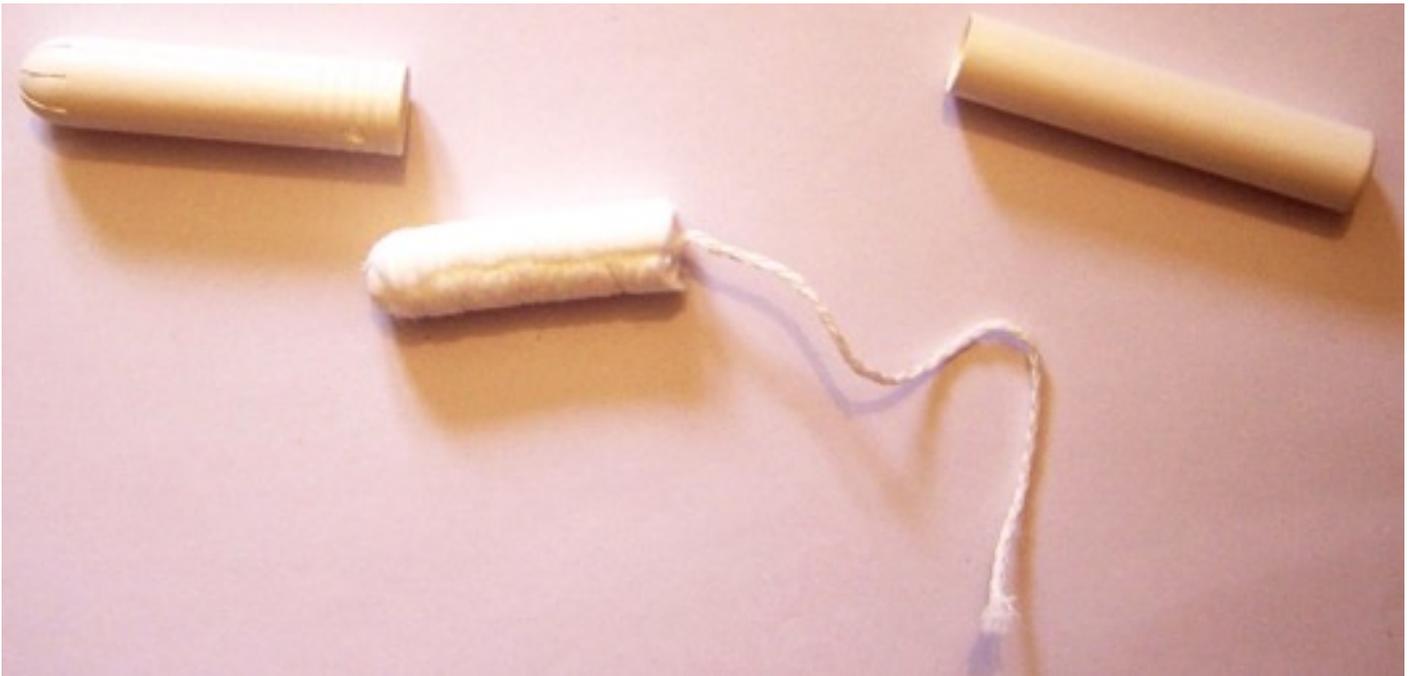
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TAMPON



MENSTRUAL CUP



SANITARY PAD

