

TALKING ABOUT MENSTRUATION IN THE CLASSROOM

A Guide for Teachers

In Canada, the average age for young people to begin menstruating is age 12. However, people can be as young as age 8 or as old as age 16. This means that students might begin menstruating in grades 3 and 4. Talking about menstruation can be an uncomfortable topic, but you can help make students feel safer and better about their bodies by normalizing it for all students and being available if they need help.

People who have uteruses often menstruate. A number of factors can prevent menstruation from happening including: body weight, medications, illnesses, medical conditions etc. It is important to remember that not all of your students who will menstruate will identify as girls. To avoid making generalizations you can use phrases like “people who get periods” or “people with uteruses” or even more fun - “menstruators”!

It is important to frame menstruation in a positive way. For many people, periods are not pleasant experiences, but often for young people, periods become a scary experience even before they begin, due to all the anticipation of pain and discomfort.

One of the most common questions we get from young people who menstruate is what to do if they get their period at school. As a teacher, you can mention that you keep pads and/or tampons in the classroom or office and let the students know they can come to you if they need them or have questions. Having this information can relieve fear and anxiety.

You can also have the discussion with students about helping each other if they notice someone got their period at school. Practise what to do and say to help that student in a way that’s respectful and not embarrassing.

Examples: tell someone quietly that they have a stain on their clothes, offer them a sweater to tie around their waist and menstrual products, help with any cleaning of chairs or equipment so as not to add to embarrassment.

Tips:

- Talk about periods in an upbeat and realistic way that tells students it can be a positive experience and one that is a sign of a healthy body.
- Having a period can be an empowering process and does not have to be dreaded or scary.
- Explain periods to all students in a simple, scientific and practical way, even those who will not menstruate. Treating periods like the normal human process that they are is a great first step in removing the “gross” or “disgusting” stigma about menstruation.
- Students will read your body language and non-verbal cues as much, if not more than, the words you are saying. Remember to treat this topic in a relaxed and normalized way with neutral facial expressions and body language that shows you are comfortable, even excited about menstruation.
- Explain why menstruation happens and how it relates to pregnancy

Helpful Links:

- <http://www.shorecentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/Period-Power.compressed.pdf>
- http://jacketjacques.ca/SITE_sexted-add/Adapting-Sex-Education-Language%20-Guelph-Checklist.pdf