

What you need to know. Period.



Talking to youth about getting a first period



* The *What you need to know. Period.* program is all about getting people talking. It's not a secret that some of us get a period, but there is a lot of misinformation out there about **menstruation**. Let's work together to demystify periods for everyone, not just for people who get a period.

Words you need to know. Period.



Menstruation is often called a period because it's the period of time each month when a person with a uterus bleeds. The uterus is a triangle-shaped area inside the body (below the belly button). This is where a baby can grow during pregnancy. Most periods last anywhere from 3-8 days and happen once a month.

Periods are a part of life for many people. Even so, many people aren't comfortable talking about periods, whether they get one or not. Getting a first period is part of puberty for some people. You might remember what it was like to get your first period or go through puberty. The young people in your life (your students, your children, youth in your care) might come to you with period-related questions.

It's okay to be private about some things, but periods don't need to be a secret. We want to encourage young people to ask questions, talk, and learn about their changing bodies. And, we can lead by example, even if we're not totally comfortable talking about periods and puberty, yet. It's important to bring periods into everyday conversations to ditch the unnecessary shame and embarrassment many people feel around having a period. This discussion guide can help you get more comfortable talking to the young people in your life about menstrual health.

Best practices for having healthy conversations about periods with young people

Model comfort by speaking plainly

We want young people to feel comfortable talking about periods and asking their questions. We can lead by example: Use the words 'period' and 'menstruation' to help break down taboos and reduce shame and embarrassment.

Validate feelings

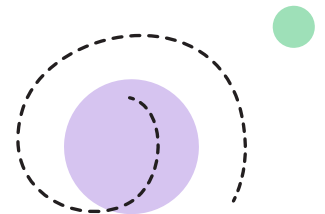
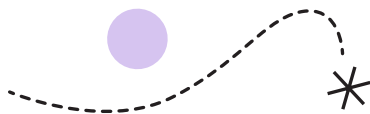
Let youth have their own unique experiences without trying to change or put a positive spin on them. Let them know they were heard and that you empathize. You might say things like, that must be very difficult, confusing, uncomfortable, painful, scary etc.

Say "I don't know"

You don't need to have all the answers. When a young person asks a period-related question you don't know the answer to, this is an opportunity to find the answer together. Admitting when you don't know something can build trust.

Take a strengths-based approach

Each of us is an expert on our own experience. There are no rights or wrongs when we're talking about our own body. The range of experiences of having a period can be drastically different from person-to-person. Take a strengths-based approach and help youth build confidence in their ability to be aware of their body, to understand and articulate their own experience, and to advocate for help when they need it.



Facts about first periods

A young person's first-ever period marks an important milestone in a young person's life. A menstrual cycle doesn't last forever. Having a period means that a person may be **fertile** and could become pregnant from sex or sexual contact. This fertile phase in life can last around 40 years before a person becomes less fertile and their period stops. This is called menopause.

Words you need to know. Period.



When a person is **fertile** it means that they can grow a baby inside their body.

Who can get a period?

- Only a person with a uterus and ovaries can get a period
- You can't tell if someone gets a period just by looking at them

When can a person get their first period?

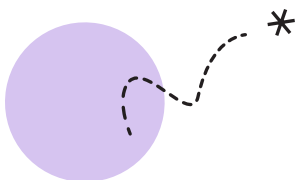
- Between ages 8-16
- You can't predict when a first period will come, but it usually happens around 2 years after the first signs of puberty (like breast development and growing pubic hair)
- Everybody is different, some people will start to bleed earlier and some later, just like some people will start puberty earlier and others later

What if a young person never gets their period?

- Some young people with a uterus don't menstruate. They might have a hormone imbalance, an illness, eating disorder, or they might be very athletic.
- People with a uterus who haven't had their first period within 3 years of developing breasts may want to speak to a doctor, nurse, or trusted adult

What will the first few years of a period be like?

- During the first year of menstruating, periods can be unpredictable and can vary in duration, but this will usually calm down and become more regular over time
- A person's first-ever period may not look like what we think of as a regular period. The blood might appear very dark (almost brown) and it might be thick, rather than liquid.
- A person's first period might be short (2-3 days) and it might be light (not much blood), but everybody's different





Continue your learning

This discussion guide focuses on best practices for talking to youth about menstrual health. For more information about menstruation, including activities and ways to continue your learning, check out our additional resources, including:

- The *What you need to know. Period.* workbook - available online and in PDF format
- Menarche: The first few years having a period - a bite-sized lesson plan
- Period products: There's a lot to choose from - a bite-sized lesson plan
- What is a "normal" period? - a bite-sized lesson plan



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