



A Period Positive National Curriculum for England

This Menstruation Education Programme of Study is a recommended progression of comprehensive skills, knowledge and understanding about menstrual literacy across the menstrual lifetime, aimed at Key Stages 1-4+

Chella Quint, Period Positive Founder

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Foreword:

We were thrilled to do the Period Positive pilot and I can tell this approach is working because it has enabled us to do so much as a school to break taboos around periods even when it has felt risky or challenging to normalise the conversation across the school.

Working with Chella has given us so much confidence as a school to teach our whole school community about periods. This includes students, staff and families. We now have more open and honest conversations about periods, we've changed our school environment to be more inclusive, including putting sinks in the toilet cubicles, have invited Chella in to carry out focus groups with staff on how we could teach about periods across the curriculum, and we've even started working on a menopause policy. It is essential every member of staff feels comfortable and confident to answer questions about periods because they involve everyone.

Chella has done some voluntary training with some staff already and her approach that includes humour really does put people at ease. We look forward to continuing this pilot further. This means covering costs of time and expertise, travel and accommodation, research, publicity, venues, outreach... If the government would provide funding for education, training, teaching materials and workshop supplies that would allow Chella to develop this work beyond the pilot, and for our school to share our experiences by helping other schools.

We have welcomed Chella's support with this and the resources and student-friendly pledges from Period Positive have made this a really time-efficient initiative to implement, contributing positively to work we are carrying out already. The pupils love her books and we have a copy in the staffroom as well. The Period Positive model is fully inclusive and our students have really appreciated the representation shown across all key stages. With the increasing emphasis from Ofsted on empowering our students to leave school equipped to live healthy and safe lives through a fully embedded whole school PSHE curriculum, this cross-curricular approach really couldn't come at a better time.

Frankie Arundel, Head of PSHE and Citizenship, Senior Mental Health Lead, Period Positive Schools Award Staff Champion at Firth Park Academy, Sheffield

Introduction

Menstruation education is an essential part of wider menstrual literacy. As we begin to develop awareness as a society that menstrual stigma and shame can contribute to barriers to learning and agency, there has never been a greater need to integrate menstrual learning within all curriculum areas across school life. A new curriculum model is necessary to support teachers in planning lessons that will grow with young people and meet their learning needs appropriately at each age and stage, because despite more awareness, we do not have a joined up, practical strategy.

The 2021 update of the [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education statutory guidance for England](#) includes very brief mentions of menstruation in the curriculum:

- *Puberty including menstruation should be covered in Health Education and should, as far as possible, be addressed before onset.*
- *Pupils should be taught key facts about the menstrual cycle including what is an average period, range of menstrual products and the implications for emotional and physical health. Schools will need to consider the needs of their cohort of pupils in designing this content.*
- *The facts about reproductive health, including fertility, and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women and menopause.*

...but these are vague points, and take a narrow view of what pupils need to know.

The brand new policy paper on the [Women's Health Strategy for England](#) declares the following aims:

- *girls and boys receive high-quality, evidence-based education on menstrual and gynaecological health from an early age. Across the population, there is increased awareness, and menstrual health and gynaecological conditions are no longer taboo subjects in any aspect of society*
- *women and girls are empowered to stay well throughout their lives, including through self-care. Women and girls have an awareness of the different gynaecological conditions (such as endometriosis and PCOS) and less well-known conditions (such as adenomyosis), and an understanding of what a normal menstrual cycle should look like for them. Women and girls know where, when and how to seek help for menstrual or gynaecological symptoms, and what support and care they can expect*

...but sets these as 10-year ambitions. We can't wait that long.

And our menstruation education *must* be all-genders-inclusive. Every young person needs this information, whether they menstruate or not. Every teacher needs support.

The programme of study offered here is suitable for menstrual literacy curriculum planning across all Key Stages of the National Curriculum in England. It can be mapped across all subject areas and allows teachers to incorporate menstrual learning into their specialist subjects, in order to normalise a culture of menstrual literacy, challenge period taboos, and swiftly upskill staff and pupils together. The model grew out of my Master's Degree in Education dissertation, *Period Positive Schools*, which I researched while head of PSHE at a secondary school in Sheffield. I then developed and evaluated it with the support and feedback of teachers, pupils, parents and young people and in consultation with fellow researchers, period poverty and menstrual wellbeing charities, menstrual activists and medical professionals.

I trained as a drama teacher. Sometimes we learned about theatre, sometimes I helped other teachers learn to use drama skills as a teaching tool in their subjects, and I often used their subjects as stimulus material for my pupils. Which got me thinking... why can't we learn about menstrual cycle stats in maths? Could we make period pants and cloth pads in textiles? What about learning to track periods along with other health data in PE? Advertising messages in Media Studies? Packaging design in Graphics? The information in this curriculum model overlaps with many of the key skills in other subjects.

I invite teachers to try it out, and will be offering my help.

I urge the DfE to adopt this model as a programme of study that is part of the National Curriculum for England.

Chella Quint, Period Positive Founder, author, qualified teacher and former head of PSHE at Firth Park Academy, Sheffield, England July 2022

We've all heard that 'All teachers are teachers of English'. What if we also consider that 'All teachers are teachers of menstrual literacy'?

– Chella Quint

How to use this programme of study:

This guide is offered as a way to map and contextualise the skills, knowledge and understanding that will best support all pupils, whether they menstruate or not, and provide a clear progression from topic to topic as pupils grow. Teachers can find menstruation related facts, stimulus texts, artefacts and situations which can be incorporated into other subjects and act as a real-life application of the concept being taught. When lesson planning, this programme of study works best in tandem with the Period Positive Pledge, a framework for creating ethical resources and learning and working environments that are more inclusive of menstruating pupils, staff, and visitors. A school-friendly version of the pledge is included in this curriculum document.

This programme of study is suitable for menstrual literacy curriculum planning across all Key Stages of the National Curriculum in England.* It can also be applied to curriculum models in other parts of the UK and abroad by adapting the age ranges of the content to suit different schooling models.

**A note on Key Stages in England: Other countries may not use the same stage, year or learning levels. KS1 and 2 cover approximately age 4-11 and KS 3 is approximately age 11-13. KS 4+ ages 14 – 19.*

Inclusion of all genders:

As teachers, we have a duty of care to ensure our pupils feel welcome and see themselves in the teaching materials we choose and use. It was important to all involved in producing and evaluating this model that it represents all genders of pupils who menstruate and who don't, in line with the 2010 Equality Act and the 2012 Local Authority Equality Duty. The Period Positive Pledge recommends that menstrual literacy resources are intersectional in their approach to addressing stigma and shame, and that the gender identities of pupils, staff and of those in the wider school community are respected and reflected in the curriculum, and this is evident throughout the programme of study.

The Period Positive Pledge: Schools Edition

The Period Positive Pledge is for everyone, of every age, whether they menstruate or not. It is a framework that gives a list of suggestions for being fair, respectful and inclusive while we learn and grow our menstrual literacy.

1. Use the phrase ‘menstrual products’ instead of ‘sanitary products’, ‘feminine hygiene’ or ‘femcare’. It’s time to move on from phrases that make periods (and people who menstruate) sound dirty or bad – because that’s definitely not true.
2. Include people who don’t menstruate in your period conversations, because everyone deserves to learn. Remember that you can’t tell if someone menstruates just by looking at them.
3. Find out how to use sustainable menstrual products like period pants, menstrual cups and cloth pads or plastic-free disposables, and aim to cut single-use plastics out of your menstruation management. Tell people why you’re doing that.
4. Remind yourself of details about the whole menstrual timeline – from before menarche to menopause and beyond. Remind others, too.
5. Check out your home or school or any other place you regularly visit (and re-check every so often) to make sure it has everything and every place someone who menstruates would need. If it doesn’t, ask for help to make changes.
6. Study up on the biology of menstruation and reproductive health so that you understand how hormones and glands help the organs in your body to function healthily and so you can recognise if things are going wrong.
7. Fight for the rights of people whose menstruation causes extra problems because they are facing unfairness or discrimination in another part of their lives.
8. Remember that no one thing will make it easier for people to manage menstruation. It’s a combination of education about biology, understanding negative messages, awareness of different products, choice, availability and taboo breaking – all working together.
9. Challenge companies who still use stereotypes, fear or taboos in advertising for their products, or use their influence on kids. They need to become better role models!
10. If you like some work you’ve seen that a menstrual activist or researcher or company is doing, or find something you read funny or interesting, make sure that when you share it you give credit to the person who created it. People are working hard to break menstrual taboos and they all deserve credit.
11. If you find out something about periods that you want to share, make sure it is true and comes from a trustworthy source. There are a lot of myths out there!

12. When you see companies working with schools or charities, try to figure out whether they are doing it so they can advertise to you and other new customers and make money, or because they really want to help people first of all.
13. If a person or organisation makes a mistake when they're talking about periods, first try to correct them in private so they don't keep making the same mistake or telling people the wrong information. Telling them off in public may embarrass them or it may backfire and make them want to ignore you.
14. There is lots of information about periods still being discovered and there is always more to learn, so as you grow up, keep learning and reading about it.
15. You do not ever have to feel ashamed or embarrassed about your body, puberty or periods. Feeling that way can make you feel worse about other things in your life so it's healthier to get rid of menstrual shame.
16. It's good to question and challenge the messages you see in adverts, films, online, in books, on television and in other media if they show periods in a negative or embarrassing way. This way of presenting menstruation is inaccurate, out of date, and doesn't help anyone anyway.
17. Be proud to call menstruation what it is instead of whispering, using negative euphemisms or secret gestures to keep it hidden from the people around you. There are lots of ways to choose to be private about bodily functions, but you never have to keep periods a secret.
18. Comparing notes with friends and relatives who menstruate really helps you work out what is healthy for your body, and it will support you and others to recognise and see a doctor about any menstrual problems if they happen.
19. Anyone of any age, class, gender, sexuality, ability, race or culture can talk about menstruation. When you talk about menstruation, especially if you are fighting taboos or unfairness, make sure the people affected the most have space to speak for themselves. If this is you, be proud and take up space!
20. Be open and welcoming of new ways of looking at menstruation as more people start to become Period Positive!

Key Stage 1:

At Key Stage 1, pupils should be able to name their external genitalia as is recommended for safeguarding, but also as a foundation for learning about their internal reproductive organs in KS2. Also included at this age is the sort of information very young children may ask about if they have anyone in their family who is pregnant or who menstruates. Likewise, young children may have a trans or nonbinary sibling or parent who has periods, and so some information is included here as it may be part of a pupil's lived experience. This level of basic information is helpful for preventing a child from believing their questions or curiosity are bad, or that periods or reproductive health are something embarrassing or that will get them in trouble if they ask questions.

Skills

- S1 able to name external sex organs using correct terms (alongside or instead of colloquial words) –eg. vulva, clitoris

Knowledge

- K1 sometimes blood comes out of someone's vagina and it is called a period or menstruation
- K2 menstruation can be managed with cloth or disposable pads, tampons, period pants or menstrual cups, and you may see these items in your house or in someone else's bathroom

Understanding

- U1 this blood is not an illness or injury and shouldn't usually cause worry
- U2 it is something that most growing or grown up girl's and women's bodies, and some trans or non-binary people's bodies can do
- U3 periods are usually a way to know the body is healthy
- U4 periods usually stop during pregnancy because the blood helps protect the growing baby
- U5 periods come out of the vagina, but wee comes out of a different opening

Key Stage 2 (everything from KS1 plus the following):

At Key Stage 2, it's time for what many people will recognise as the first 'period talk' (which should be the first of many!). Although it may seem early to some adults – especially those who started periods later themselves or who are particularly wary about the idea that preadolescents seem more mature than in the past – it is essential that young people learn about puberty before it starts. The average age range for menarche (the first period) is 9-16, and some children experience early periods as a part of precocious puberty, so from a wellbeing point of view, the time is right at the early part of KS2, rather than at the end, which had been the norm up until very recently. All genders of pupils learning together prevents stigmas around this being a 'girls only' topic, and also ensures male staff plus trans and non-binary menstruators are included in the conversation.

Skills

- S1 can label simple internal reproductive organs on a diagram – ovary, fallopian tube, uterus, cervix, vagina
- S2 can place the steps of the menstrual cycle in the correct sequence
- S3 can name the 4 types of menstrual products – internal, external, disposable and reusable (or 'inside the body', 'outside the body', 'products you can throw away', and 'products you can keep using') and use correct terms rather than euphemisms
- S4 can choose or recommend different menstrual products for different purposes (eg. for swimming, on holiday, sustainable options, comfort, cost, convenience, materials, flow)

Knowledge

- K1 menstruation happens about once a month and can start from around age 9 -12, or earlier for those who start puberty early, and a few girls may never menstruate, for various reasons
- K2 the start of menstruation is called menarche (pronounced MEN-ar-kee)
- K3 it happens around 2 weeks after ovulation, when an egg is released from the ovary
- K4 after around age 50 or so for those who menstruate, their body will slowly begin the process of no longer having periods which is called the menopause transition, and – the time when periods stop is called the menopause

Understanding

- U1 menstruation is one of the signs of puberty for most girls and some non-binary and trans people
- U2 it is part of the reproductive cycle, which is how the growing body gets ready to have babies

- U3 physical maturity is not a sign of emotional maturity, and people can choose to have a baby when they grow up, but periods don't mean they need to have babies straight away. Not everyone chooses to have a baby when they grow up, and sometimes it's not possible even if they want to
- U4 menstruation is something people may choose to keep private, but it does not need to be kept secret – it is usually a healthy and typical part of everyday life
- U5 if periods are very painful, heavy, or last a long time, or someone has any other worries about it, they should ask for help from a parent, teacher or doctor
- U6 mocking or teasing someone for menstruating is bullying

“I think learning about periods in other classes is important because some students don't care about PSHE lessons and might not take it seriously. But maybe they might take it seriously in other lessons.”
– a 14-year-old focus group participant

Key Stage 3 (build on KS 1 and 2):

At Key Stage 3, pupils can retain more complex information about menstrual cycles, and will be most likely to have periods or have close friends and classmates who do. An important element of navigating the early menstruating years – for both those with periods and their friends and teachers – is normalising talking about it. Knowing what’s typical, what’s not, how to recognise medical symptoms, and how to get help or offer help to someone whose periods are causing discomfort are key tools for a KS3 period talk toolkit. Managing menstruation is now something pupils should be able to articulate preferences around, with an awareness of environmental, financial, comfort and health impacts of different products. Using media studies skills to unpick issues of menstrual shame and stigma is an important transferable skill that equips pupils to be more informed consumers, assertive healthcare self-advocates and better at self care as they navigate puberty.

Skills

- S1 can label complex diagrams of the reproductive organs and sequence the reproductive cycle
- S2 can name hormones responsible for ovulation and menstruation and chart a sample cycle
- S3 can choose or recommend different menstrual products for different purposes (eg. for swimming, on holiday, green options, comfort) and confidently manage own menstruation (if they menstruate) or help others (if not), i.e. where and how to manage menstruation in different situations and how to use or advise others on products and self-care

Knowledge

- K1 the menstrual cycle is about 28 days long but a wider average range of 21 – 35 days is still normal
- K2 signs of healthy and unhealthy menstruation (average cycle length and flow amount, spotting or bleeding mid cycle, variations on menstrual blood and tissue, PMT, ranges of pain)
- K3 awareness of symptoms of fibroids, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis, PMDD, womb/reproductive-related cancers.
- K4 awareness of signs of ovulation and healthy vs potentially unhealthy discharge
- K5 awareness of range of physical and emotional responses to menstruation and advice for self care at different stages of the cycle
- K6 examples and history of menstrual taboos
- K7 how to recognise and challenge negative messages about menstruation
- K8 the environmental and economic impact of disposable menstrual products

Understanding

- U1 not everyone menstruates, even if you expect them to – some people do not menstruate if they are trans, intersex, have physiological differences, hormonal issues or have experienced illnesses or trauma that could stop menstruation
- U2 most people who menstruate were assigned female at birth and identify as female, and some identify as non-binary or as trans men
- U3 some people feel shame or anger about menstruation, some are very proud, some feel neutral about it, and some people may feel these feelings at different times and to varying degrees
- U4 some of the language and images used to describe menstruation contribute to feelings of menstrual shame
- U5 adverts for menstrual products can use shaming language to manipulate consumers; menstrual taboos in advertising can be challenged/avoided
- U6 some of the history of menstrual taboos comes from cultural and medical beliefs and myths about menstruation
- U7 Menstrual shame can have negative consequences for diagnosing illnesses, asking for menstrual products, and feeling confident in public. This shame can be challenged through knowledge about where it came from, getting more facts about periods and the menstrual cycle, and building confidence to talk more openly about menstruation

**”I think it's important for all teachers to teach about periods, because some people might not feel comfortable with a specific teacher. So if everyone teaches then everyone will be comfortable.”
– a 12-year-old focus group participant**

Key Stage 4 and beyond (build on KS 1, 2 and 3):

At Key Stages 4 and 5 and even into higher education, young adults should be equipped with more nuanced issues around menstruation than most received in that typical primary school period talk. Dovetailing with contraception and consent lessons, sexual health topics should also include fertility awareness and knowledge of infertility, how to recognise symptoms of womb related illnesses, and signs of and stigmas around the menopause transition. Wider issues around reproductive justice and global health inequalities where they intersect with menstruation knowledge and cultural lore will be of interest to those unpicking menstrual shame or seeking to know more about this fascinating topic at the academic or policy level.

Skills

- S1 can identify signs of ovulation and list methods of hormonal contraception, how they work, and potential side effects and considerations for different types
- S2 can identify aspects of menopause and perimenopause
- S3 can navigate and troubleshoot unexpected menstruation management situations for self or others – e.g. leaks, caught short of supplies, menstruation during an exam, advocating for diagnosis of troubling symptoms
- S4 can suggest or role-play what to say to healthcare practitioners when given scenarios with symptoms or worries

Knowledge

- K1 menstruation can be interrupted by hormonal contraception
- K2 a detailed overview of fertility, infertility and assisted conception
- K3 links between historic and current cultural menstrual taboos
- K4 links between historic and current menstrual product advertising messages
- K5 current campaigns challenging menstrual taboos and current issues to do with reproductive justice worldwide

Understanding

- U1 menstruation can be interrupted by hormonal contraception, but not by using barrier methods alone
- U2 contraception and reproduction are issues of consent and access, and choice is a human right
- U3 menstruation is not a definite sign that you cannot get pregnant – on rare occasions ovulation occurs more than once a cycle
- U4 some people feel good during their cycles, some bad, some neutral, and this changes throughout the menovulatory lifetime
- U5 some people feel more sexually aroused at ovulation, premenstrually or during menstruation

- U6 some people enjoy penetrative and oral sex during menstruation and readily consent to this, some people do not, and it is a choice
- U7 the media discourse around menstruation mostly upholds taboos, which can lead to embodied shame for those who menstruate; this can be challenged and these challenges and changes are starting to happen
- U8 menstrual taboos can contribute to barriers to reproductive health access – you can assert the right to this access on your own behalf and on behalf of others

“It is important for periods to be taught in various lessons as it makes it a natural thing that people can be accustomed to and comfortable to talk about. It would reduce period shame whilst educating others about things they or their peers may be feeling, and the Period Positive pledge and curriculum model are there to support them.”

– a 14-year-old focus group participant

In praise of a Period Positive National Curriculum for England:

“I strongly urge adoption of the Period Positive National Curriculum developed by Chella Quint, a respected innovator and leader in the transnational menstrual health movement. Evidence-based, comprehensive, inclusive and frank, this curriculum model will build the menstrual literacy foundational to lifelong health and well-being. With its adoption, England can be at the vanguard of a new global era where young people are equipped with the practical tools to take charge of their lives.” – **Dr. Chris Bobel, Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, editor of the Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies, and former President of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research**

“Eve is a charity focused on the prevention and early diagnosis of the five gynaecological cancers – womb, ovarian, cervical, vulval and vaginal. Knowing your body and knowing what is normal for you is essential for spotting signs and symptoms of these five cancers and seeking medical help. High quality, timely and taboo-free menstrual education is vital. A Period Positive National Curriculum would start to build the foundations of knowledge in this important area of health.” – **Athena Lamnisos, CEO of The Eve Appeal, The UK's Gynaecological Cancer Research Charity**

“We hope that the programme being delivered by Period Positive will be replicated across the country, so that all young people can benefit from the high quality, age-appropriate relationships and sex education they deserve.” – **Natika Halil, FPA Chief Executive**

About Chella Quint:

Chella Quint is a Sheffield-based author, teacher, performer and menstruation education consultant. She coined the phrase 'period positive' in 2006 and started the Period Positive movement to improve menstrual literacy.

Chella is a qualified teacher and former head of PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economics Education) at Firth Park Academy, where she completed a Master's Degree in Education with her dissertation *Period Positive Schools*. A former drama teacher, she started using humour and joy to challenge attitudes to periods in advertising, the media, schools, and then in society as a whole. She became a leading expert on menstruation education and public engagement in the UK, advising on regional and national policy on menstruation education and period poverty, and is a founding member of the Menstruation Research Network.

The Period Positive Pledge, her menstrual literacy framework and award for organisations, was piloted through Learn Sheffield in 2017. It was the subject of Early Day Motion 2661 tabled on 24 July 2019, receiving cross-party support, and her research was also acknowledged during the Parliamentary Debate on Endometriosis Workplace Support on Tuesday 29 October 2019.

She has since served as script advisor on the CBBC Newsround Special: *Let's Talk About Periods*, designed BBC Bitesize resources on Menstruation and Reproduction, and has written two books about periods, *Own Your Period (Quarto)*, for young people, and *Be Period Positive (DK)*, for adults, which were both published last year.

Chella's education research has been recognised by the Sex Education Forum, The Family Planning Association (FPA), Brook Sexual Health Education, Girlguiding UK, Plan International, Wateraid UK, Development Education Centre South Yorkshire (DECSY), the APPG on Women's Health, the The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) of the United Nations, the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, and recently featured in the BBC Radio 4 Series 28ish Days Later. www.chellaquint.com

About Period Positive:

The Period Positive campaign and the concept of period positivity started as a phrase coined by Chella Quint, grew into a campaign, a trademark, a charter programme and a movement. Period Positive is committed to challenging and pushing the menstrual discourse forward so that it is in line with reproductive justice, social justice, and human rights values of equity, inclusivity and sustainability. We are a queer- and disability-led organisation. If you'd like to earn the Period Positive Places or Schools Award or mark apply for a licence to use 'period positive', promote period positivity or display the logo, please get in touch via the contact form at www.periodpositive.com.

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