

hur

HOW TO BECOME A PERIOD PROUD PEER



For children and equality for girls

20

IMPORTANT WORDS

Period- is the bleeding that occurs due to the shedding of the womb lining. It happens roughly every month (in the absence of pregnancy) between puberty and menopause.

Girls & young people with periods- We recognise that some people who have periods don't identify as girls, including trans boys and non-binary young people.

Menstruation- the scientific word for a period.

Problem Based Learning- a student centred approach to learning. Students work in groups to find out answers to a problem or question they have identified together in response to a prompt or cue.

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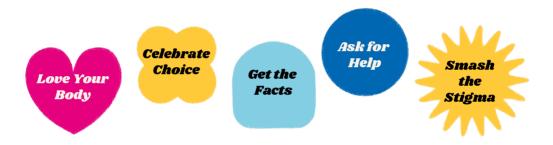
WELCOME

HELLO!

Welcome to How to be a Period Proud Peer.

This guide is for any young person who wants to help their peers feel confident, happy and healthy during their period.

The guide covers five Period Powers:



Each of the five Powers has an introduction explaining why this power is important, information about the power you can share with your peers and a peer-led activity you can deliver.

THE MAKING OF THE GUIDE

This book has been designed by and for young people to help you and your friends feel free and confident during your period and all month long.

Girls and young people with periods were involved in every stage of developing this guide, from identifying the five Period Powers and peer-led activities to the design of the guide and its beautiful illustrations.

Quotes and stories from these Period Proud Peers are included throughout the guide.



HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

1. This guide is designed to be used by you with a group of your friends or wider peer group. It could be in your school, at your youth group or in your community.

2. Read the guide thoroughly before you plan your sessions. Make sure you take some time before you meet with your peers to collect the resources that you need for each peer-led activity. You can find information about the resources or equipment you need listed at the start of each activity.

3. Create a relaxed environment for the session. You could bring snacks, sit somewhere comfortably and put on some background music. If possible, sit in a circle or even on the floor rather than behind desks. You could even encourage your friends and peers to come prepared for a period party by wearing something red and glittery.

4. Before you begin, do some simple introductions and make sure that everyone knows everyone else's name. It can also be helpful to spend a couple of minutes making sure that everyone knows why they are there and what will happen during the time you are spending together. Some groups might want to agree some simple ground rules, such as agreeing to listen carefully to each other and to not gossip about what is discussed in the group.

5. You can then work through the Period Powers outlined in this guide together. You may wish to plan one longer session and cover all the peer-led activities or schedule several sessions and work through the activities over a few days or weeks. This guide is designed to be flexible so you can adapt the ideas to fit the needs of your group.

6. And remember, if things don't go exactly as planned, no worries! The priority is to have a good time, enjoy each other's company, and have open, shame-free chats about periods.

HOW TO BE A PERIOD PROUD PEER



1. Peer-led support is a powerful way for you to develop your own skills and confidence whilst helping your friends and wider peer group.

2. Many young people feel more comfortable opening-up to someone who is a similar age to them and who understands their experiences first hand. Peer-led support can create spaces where everyone feels more comfortable to share and learn together.

3. As a Period Proud Peer, you're not expected to have all the answers or to teach everyone. Instead, you can help others feel more confident to share their concerns and find the help, information and support they need. Just by talking about periods openly and without shame you can help everyone feel more comfortable and confident.

4. There are some qualities and behaviours that you and everyone involved in providing peer-led support can adopt to help make it a success.



Demonstrate the values and behaviours you talk about in your own day to day behaviour. For example, if you are talking about ending period shame try to speak openly about periods with your own friends and family.



OTHERS

Be approachable so that everyone feels comfortable sharing and asking questions. Be a good listener and find lots of ways to get everyone involved in the sessions.



Don't be afraid to be yourself! You can share your own worries and experiences with your peers and always ask for help when you need it.



Be non-judgemental and enable everyone to share their views.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Always remember, as a Period Proud Peer you are not expected or required to have all the knowledge. The Get the Facts section will help you and your peers develop the lifelong skills to find the information you need about your menstrual health when you need it.

LET YOUR PERIOD PROUD PEER JOURNEY BEGIN!

PERIOD POWER 1 - LOVE YOUR BODY

INTRO

"I used to be really negative about my body image [...] like when I started to see how much I talked negatively about my body, and I saw how much periods were tied into that. When you are younger you are quite sensitive to that anyway, and then if people are telling you to hide it, then you think this is clearly something to be shameful about [...] And I won't embrace that, even though the fact it's not talked about it means clearly it is something to be ashamed about. But even at my point now where I'm like: 'Everyone be proud of it!' I'm still kind of a bit like, there's still notions in my head."

Melanie, 15 (Plan International UK. (2018) Break the barriers: Girls' experiences of menstruation in the UK)

Girls and young people with periods tell us they worry about whether they are normal during puberty and have heard negative things about periods that affect their body image and self-esteem.

INFO

As a Period Proud Peer, you can encourage others to be confident, positive and happy with their periods.

Here is some information to share with your peers:

• Periods are a normal part of growing up and a natural process that happens to girls once they reach puberty – usually somewhere between the ages of 8 and 16.

• A period is the bleeding that occurs due to the shedding of the womb lining. During the month, the lining builds up. In the absence of pregnancy, the lining is no longer needed, so the body breaks it down and removes it – that's what a period is. In general, a period will last 2 to 7 days and happens every 23 to 35 days.

• Periods are a healthy part of life, and no one should feel shame or embarrassment in that. So don't hide it, don't feel embarrassed, embrace and celebrate your body! • Everybody is different, and every person experiences their period differently. The age someone starts their first period varies, some periods last longer than others, some periods are heavier than others and some periods are more regular than others. There is a very wide range of healthy experiences. Remind your peers that if they have a question or are worried about periods, it is important to speak to someone. (Go to the Period Power Ask for Help for more information on this).

PEER LED ACTIVITY- PERIOD BRACELET

Equipment- Beads (at least 2 different colours) and thread. Alternatively use the bracelet template at the end of the handbook.

These bracelets are a great activity to do with your peers to help with talking about periods and are a symbol to ending the embarrassment associated with periods!

1. Peers choose one colour of bead and thread a bead for everyday they usually bleed during their cycle. Choose a second colour of bead and thread a bead for every day that they don't bleed.

If using the template to create the bracelet, either photocopy or draw round the bracelet on a separate piece of paper. Peers cut out the bracelet and cut the dotted lines. Your peers then draw and colour a heart for everyday they usually bleed during their cycle. Choose a second colour and then draw and colour a heart for every day that they don't bleed.
Share with your peers that anyone who doesn't have periods or are not sure how frequent they are, can make a bracelet using the average cycle length of 28 days (23 days of no bleeding and 5 days of bleeding).

People all over the world make and wear these bracelets as a symbol of their commitment to ending period stigma. Politicians, charity leaders and celebrities have all worn them in support. Wear your bracelet proudly and keep an eye out for who else might have one.



CAITLIN'S STORY

Caitlin and her friends started Power Over Periods when they were studying their A-levels together to dispel myths and harmful ideas about periods that were holding them and their peers back. They made funny TikTok videos together about their experiences of having their period to help others feel more comfortable seeking help and support. Their body positivity and acceptance of everyone has had a big impact in their own school and across the whole city where they live.

"Our main aim is to try and break that stigma, challenge the stereotypes and the misconceptions. The way that I personally do it is by using my social media platform. We also have been going into schools to actually talk to young people and get them involved and making sure that it doesn't feel like a gender issue or taboo subject and that everyone feels that they can talk about it."

Caitlin, 18



PERIOD POWER 2 - CELEBRATE CHOICE

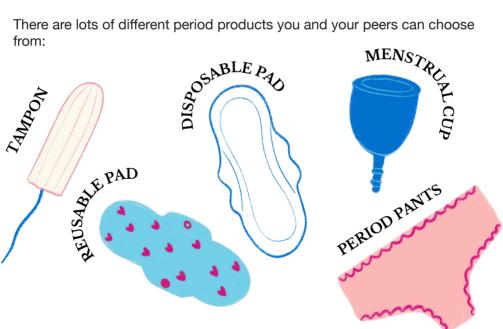
INTRO

"No two periods are the same. And like with all other aspects of life, making an informed choice matters. We should have every right to use the product that best suits our personal period, body and situation." Mollv. 21

Girls and young people say it's important to raise awareness of the range of period products out there to help everyone manage their period comfortably. Everyone's experience is different so different products work for different people.

INFO

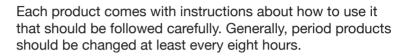
There are lots of different period products you and your peers can choose from:



This Period Power is all about helping your peers make informed choices about how to manage their periods. Emphasise to your peers that each person has the right to choose the products that work for their body without judgement from others.

You can encourage your peers to take time to understand and try the different products that are available. This means that they can choose what makes them feel most comfortable during their period and then they'll be prepared for anything!

Here is some information you can share with your peers to help them consider which products are right for them:



Pads and liners are rectangular pads made of absorbent material which are placed inside underwear. Reusable pad options are also available.

Period pants are reusable pants which have an absorbent and leakproof layer which absorbs the blood. Period Pants can be used by everybody but can be particularly helpful for young people with autism, those with a physical disability or non-binary or trans young people.



A tampon is a small cylinder of cotton wool-like material which is inserted into the vagina. A menstrual cup is a reusable flexible cup which is inserted into the vagina.



Products that you insert into the vagina like tampons and menstrual cups can be worn when you go swimming. You can also buy specially made period swimwear if you want to swim during your period but prefer to use products that don't need to be inserted.



Some period products are considered better for the environment. For example, menstrual cups and period pants can be reused again and again and produce less environmentally damaging waste than some products that are only used once and then disposed of.

PEER LED ACTIVITY- PERIOD KIT

Equipment- bag or pouch, selection of period products including reusable and disposable options (e.g. reusable and disposable period pad, menstrual cup, period pants, tampon), spare underwear, chocolate or sweets, glass of water and a tablespoon.

Your kit should include a variety of different period products that your peers can look at and discuss together. Include other items that you might keep in your bag to help manage periods such as simple pain relief, spare underwear and your favourite chocolate!
Let your peers take a good look at the different period products and discuss what they think of them. Encourage them to fit the pads into the spare underwear so they can see how they fasten in place.
Put a tampon in a glass of water to show how it expands.

4. Pour some water on the Period Pants or on a reusable or disposable pad to show how they absorb fluid. Usually about 1-5 tablespoons of blood leaves your body during your period so you can even bring along a tablespoon and measure it out!

5. Ask your peers to discuss what they would include in the ideal Period Kit to help themselves and others to manage periods.



MELISSA AND CORINN'S STORY

Melissa and Corinn are an autistic mum and daughter trying to navigate periods together. Corinn started her period, age 11, just two days before she started secondary school. Corinn often masks or hides the things she's struggling with in front of strangers. She would never tell anyone at school that she was in pain or needed to change her pad. This led to her having lots of accidents where she leaked blood onto her uniform whilst she was in school. Corinn and her mum began to feel like no matter what they did, they were getting it wrong.

Then they heard about period pants and how helpful they can be for autistic people with sensory issues, like Corinn. They were desperate to find something that could work so they both decided to try period pants together. Corinn found she could wear her period pants throughout the school day without worrying about having to change at school. Mum and daughter finally felt comfortable and secure all month long.

"We feel it's excellent that there's so many options, because we're all so incredibly different and what will work for one person will not work for another. Choice gives us the opportunity to be more empowered and free during our periods."

Melissa (mum) and Corinn, 14



PERIOD POWER 3 - GET THE FACTS

INTRO

"For those who will experience periods, safe, reassuring information is vital to avoid fear, panic, and harm through inappropriate responses (e.g. not knowing how to use period products). For those that don't experience periods, understanding what their peers are experiencing, and how to respect that, is vital. For both, it is also key that they understand the biology and fundamental facts, as it will go on to have a large impact on their lives."

Chris, 17

Girls and young people have lots of different questions about their periods and menstrual health. They feel that knowledge is power and that understanding their body and menstrual cycle helps them know what is healthy. Knowledge also helps reduce anxiety and empower them to make informed choices about everything from what period product to use to when to ask for help.

However, they feel it can often be difficult to get accurate information about periods. People can be embarrassed to speak openly about puberty and menstruation and often they won't have all the answers.

INFO

The questions your peers have will change as their menstrual health experiences and needs change- in fact they're likely to have questions about their menstrual cycles throughout their lives. Plus, information sometimes changes with time. Doctors may update their advice or research might give new insights. The most up to date answer to a particular question can change from one month to the next!

As a Period Proud Peer you can help your peers learn how to get the information they need about menstrual health from trusted and reliable sources. Instead of trying to answer all your peers' questions yourself, you can help them learn how to get the facts when they need them and check that their information is up to date. This is an essential lifelong skill that you can all develop together.



HERE ARE A FEW KEY POINTS TO SHARE WITH YOUR PEERS ABOUT HOW TO FIND ACCURATE INFORMATION:

TRUSTED SOURCES

Although social media can be a great way to learn about other people's experiences, it's important to get the facts from reliable and trusted sources.

EXPERT VOICES

Get information from sources created by experts who deal with these subjects every day.

CROSSCHECK INFORMATION

Check more than one trusted source so you get as much information as possible. Explore any differences you notice between sources. One may be more up to date than the other or less credible and reliable than you thought.

CHECK THE DATE

Use up-to-date sources to answer your questions- websites and books will often list the date that they were published on the first page of the book or the footer of a website.

DOUBLE CHECK!

Check for up-to-date information if it's been a little while since you last researched a particular topic or question. If in doubt- double check!

Below is a list of some very reliable sources of information about puberty and periods you can encourage your peers to use to find answers to their questions:

Websites:

- The National Health Service website: www.nhs.uk

- Brook's Section on periods: www.brook.org.uk/your-life/periods/ This includes an LGBT+ section.

- Bloody Brilliant: https://bloodybrilliant.wales/ This resource uses gender neutral language.

- The Clue App Encyclopaedia (available on Clue's website): https://helloclue. com/articles

- The Oky App Encyclopaedia (you need to download the app to access the encyclopaedia): https://okyapp.info/ This is focused on girls aged 10-19.

Books:

- Own Your Period by Period Educator Chella Quint

- We Need to Talk About Vaginas: An important book about vulvas, periods, puberty and sex! By gynaecologist Dr Allison K Rogers

PEER LED ACTIVITY- PERIOD AGONY AUNT

Equipment- Shoe Box, slips of paper, pens, large sheets of paper, trusted period resources (print offs) or access to trusted period resources on phones or tablets.

This activity will help you and your peers answer some of your current questions through a problem-based learning approach. A problembased learning approach is when a group of students work together to find the answer to a question they have agreed together. This approach helps to develop lifelong learning skills- rather than being given an answer to one question you and your peers learn how to find good answers to all your questions.



1. Use a shoe box to create an anonymous period question box.

2. Create a slit in the lid where you and your peers can post anonymous questions.

3. You can either give your peers a piece of paper when they first arrive and ask them to write a question they have about periods and post it in the box whilst they are waiting for the session to begin or do this at the start of the activity.

4. Your peers can either write questions based on their own experience, the experiences of people they know or make up a question they think it's important all young people know the answer to.

5. Once everyone has put a question into the box open it up and look at them. You might find that some of the questions are very similar and can be grouped together.

6. You and your peers are going to work as a team to answer one or more of the questions. Imagine you are the Agony Aunt team for a magazine and you need to research an answer to one of your subscribers questions!

7. Discuss as a group which question or group of questions you are going to answer and why you have chosen them.

8. Now it's time for some research. In preparation you can print off some period resources for your group to use or use your phones to research the answer using our recommended websites.

9. Spend some time looking for answers to the question you have chosen following the guidance on the previous page. You can do this individually or in pairs.

10. When the group is ready, each person or pair can feedback what they have learnt and discuss a strong answer to the chosen question.11. If you are delivering peer education with support from a youth worker, teacher or other adult, you could also review your question, fact finding process and suggested answer with them.

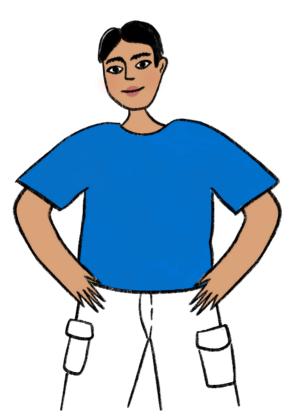
CHRIS'S STORY

When Chris started their period, they felt scared and uncomfortable.

"A lot of information is overly gendered. I'm lucky enough to be able to have comfortable and useful conversations with my mum, but when talking to others or looking things up online, I often feel misgendered by female terms, and (until recently) felt left out by some of the more sex-based things."

Chris got the information and support they needed through talking to their mum and using websites recommended by trusted people. They talked to their mum about most things but also found specific factual information very helpful, like a diagram of a labelled vulva they found on a trusted website.

"I felt a lot more knowledgeable, panicked less as I knew what was happening was normal, and felt safer in my body. Periods feel alien and scary to begin with, but with time and conversation, have become a natural sensation and part of my body." Chris. 17



PERIOD POWER 4 - ASK FOR HELP

INTRO

"It's really important to understand that every single person has a different experience that varies on your age, sexual orientation, religion and the society you're part of. We only understand those when we ask about them, when we talk about them openly." Sabiha, 15

Girls and young people with periods feel the shame and stigma surrounding periods can sometimes make it really hard for them to ask for help or get the support they need. This can lead to them being embarrassed to ask for period products, not seeking the information they need and suffering with period pain in silence.

The gender pain gap refers to the difference in how pain is understood and treated based on gender, with women and girl's pain often being taken less seriously than men's. As a result, women and girls may not receive the right care or attention for their pain. It is important to recognise that everyone's pain is valid, and all individuals deserve equal treatment and care.



INFO

As a Period Proud Peer, you can help make everyone's right to experience their period with dignity a reality and give your peers confidence to seek help if they need it.

Information to share with your peers:

Remind your peers that they should have access to period products, a clean and safe toilet and the information they need to manage their period and period pain.

Share with your peers that many girls and young people who have periods get period pain but also some don't experience it at all. Period pains are different depending on the person.

Let your peers know that Period Pain is not something that should be dismissed or made fun of. If your peers are finding the pain is stopping them from doing the things they would usually do, like going to school or spending time with friends, they should speak to a trusted adult, doctor or nurse.

You can share these simple steps with your peers to help them be confident to ask for help:

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Reframe asking for help as a strength. Facing our fears about asking for help takes courage.

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Think about who is the best person to talk to, perhaps a parent or carer, a friend, a nurse or doctor.



You could prepare by writing down your thoughts, questions or symptoms.



You might want to speak to someone face to face, send a message or call.



If you feel like you haven't been listened to properly, have the confidence to know you can speak up. Find someone else to talk to and keep seeking the help and support you need.

PEER LED ACTIVITY- THE CONFIDENCE CHALLENGE



Equipment- slips of paper, pens, a cloth bag or hat, a large bottle.

This activity helps your peers build their confidence to talk about periods, making it easier for them to ask for help when they need it. Together, you will complete a series of period related challenges to build everyone's confidence.

Prepare for this activity by finding a hat or cloth bag and a large plastic bottle. Write down the challenges below on slips of paper and place them in the hat or cloth bag.

Challenges:

- Say the word vagina
- Shout the word period
- Say the word tampon
- Say one thing positive or good about periods
- Share the first word that comes into your head when you think about periods

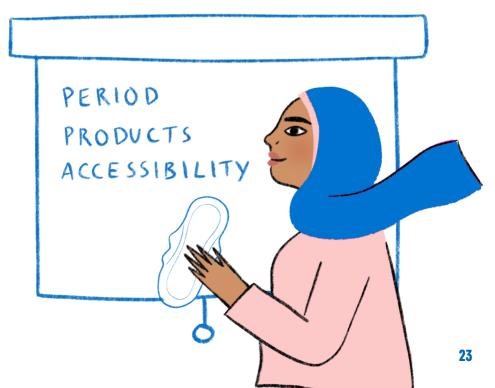
Sit in a circle and spin the bottle. Whoever the bottle points to picks out and completes a challenge from the cloth bag or hat. Players replace the challenge in the hat or cloth bag once they have completed it. Carry on until everyone has completed at least one challenge. It's ok if someone doesn't want to have a go or would like to try a different challenge. Acknowledge some challenges may not be easy and keep encouraging and supporting everyone.

SABIHA'S STORY

Sabiha experienced challenges trying to get pads in her school when she needed them, even though period products were available for free. She was able to speak to her mum and the leader at a local community youth project about her experiences. Talking about her period with trusted people made her feel more confident to get the support she needed in school. She also realised that her friends and peers were experiencing the same issues.

"In our school, the period products are kept in the library. Some of my friends feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about going to get period products from the library, but I know it's nothing to be embarrassed about so I just fetch the pads for other pupils when they need them."

Sabiha was asked to do a presentation at school on any topic of her choosing and she decided to talk about periods and the challenges accessing period products, as well as suggesting changes the school could make. Sabiha's presentation was well received by her teacher and she was later invited to share her experiences and ideas with the UK government's Department for Education to help improve the free period product scheme for schools and colleges across England!



PERIOD POWER 5 - SMASH THE STIGMA

INTRO

"It's important to smash period stigma because it's one of the biggest challenges that menstruators face. Period poverty starts with the mind, when something is highly stigmatised, it also contributes to the absence or availability of products on the market because it's not considered something serious... It's also important because this is something natural that should be normalised because if we can't love the functions of our bodies how does society expect us to love our bodies or ourselves." Sharitah, 25

Girls and young people with periods know that period stigma is the biggest barrier that they face to being confident and comfortable during their periods. Most of the other challenges young people face are rooted in stigma, from challenges asking for help, to encountering negative ideas and myths about periods.

INFO

One of the most important parts of your role as a Period Proud Peer is smashing period stigma so that everyone can talk about periods and the menstrual cycle without feeling embarrassed or ashamed. Periods are taboo in almost every country and community in the world. The stigma surrounding this healthy biological process creates so much unnecessary stress and suffering for everyone. Luckily the best way to smash stigma is to have fun, make jokes and be creative! This is where you turn up the music, get out the snacks and have a period party.

PEER LED ACTIVITIES- CRAFTIVISM AND PERIOD PARTY

All over the world, young people are holding period parties in their communities to help start important conversations about periods. Lots of them are using art and craft to build solidarity and share their messages. You and your peers can join the global movement to end period shame through completing these two craftivism activities:

PERIOD POWER POSTER

Equipment- glitter, paint, pens, paper, card.

Period stigma affects our schools, communities and society in different ways. Take some time to discuss the following questions with your peers. You can even jot down everyone's thoughts on a big piece of paper using colourful pens to create an illustration all about period stigma.

- What beliefs or ideas do people have about periods?
- How does this affect their behaviour?
- What are the effects or impacts of this behaviour?

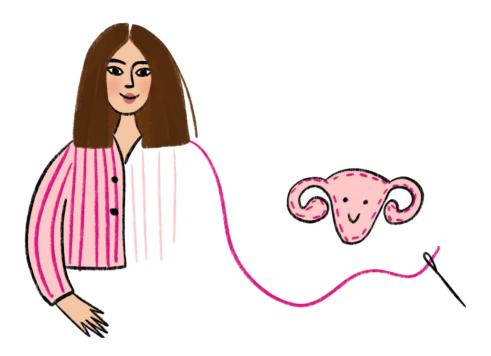
- What would your school, community or country be like if period stigma didn't exist?

Ask your peers to use the illustration as inspiration for a sign or poster with a slogan or message about why we should end period stigma. Encourage each person to use the pens, glitter and card to design their own Period Power Poster.

PERIOD PARTY

Holding a Period Party will help you and your peers smash period stigma. You can choose to invite siblings, other friends, parents, teachers or community leaders to your party if you want to.

Remember you can make your Period Party as extravagant as you want. Some people have organised period parties where guests come in period themed costume with a prize for the best costume. Others have baked period themed snacks including period product themed cupcakes. Some have designed a Period Pub Quiz or organised henna and nail painting for everyone. This is your chance to take everything you and your peers have learned together and share it with your wider community.



AMY'S STORY

Amy organised a crafting event where people could make a felt uterus (or cuterus!). One member of the group led a tutorial and talked everyone through the activity, step by step. Many of young people taking part had never crafted before. The aim of the event was to have fun chatting and sewing.

The craft activity created a safe space for open discussion. The conversation ranged from the lack of education around the female anatomy to how to thread a needle. Participants began to share their own experiences and speak openly about menstruation.

"For me, tackling period stigma is crucial to breaking a menstrual silence. Menstruation should not be a shameful subject however people, including myself, live with the tension of opposing menstrual stigma yet continuing to conceal menstruation. This creates the notion that menstruation is a shameful process, which in turn prevents people from articulating their needs."

SHARITAH'S STORY

Sharitah decided to start organising period parties in her town in Uganda to involve her community in smashing period stigma. Over the last few years Sharitah and her friends have organised an annual celebration. The parties help young people celebrate their bodies and have started to change harmful attitudes towards periods.

"At period parties we have a red-carpet moment where different people showcase their period costumes. We have different period performances like poetry, choreography, music, spoken words, live painting and different period games."

Because of the parties, the community is more aware of challenges girls have managing their periods in local schools and have been able to offer more support.

"Period stigma has shattered so many big dreams in Uganda and contributed to the high rates of anxiety, stress, depression, school dropouts and teenage pregnancies. These [young people] could be future policymakers but because of the period stigma we are missing out on these wonderful skills as a country, that's why it's very important to smash the stigma!"



THE PLEDGE

SUPERHERO PLEDGE

Period Proud Peers empower their friends and other young people through the 5 Period Powers- Love Your Body, Celebrate Choice, Get The Facts, Ask For Help and Smash the Stigma.

YOU are helping to end period shame and ensure everyone who has a period feels comfortable and confident.

You can print and complete this pledge, then stick it up in your bedroom, classroom or youth club to remind everyone that they have the power to end period stigma once and for all.

I/We _____ pledge to;



Love my body and help others to love theirs

Celebrate and encourage everyone's right to choose and use the period products that work for them



Get the facts about periods from trusted and reliable sources and help others to do the same



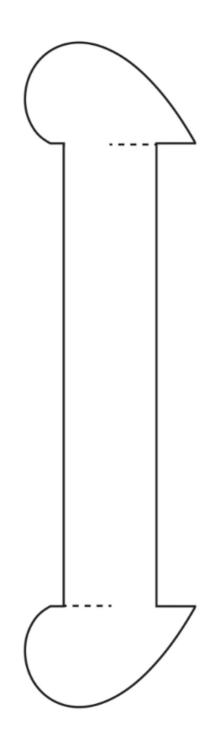
Build mine and other young people's confidence in talking about periods so that they can ask for help and support when they need it



Smash the stigma through talking openly about periods and making learning about them fun

Signed _____ Date _____

Bracelet template: Cut around the border and then cut the dotted lines. Slot the two halves of the heart together to join the bracelet.



NOTES & THOUGHTS

NOTES & THOUGHTS



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Thank you to all the young people and professionals, including Irise International, who generously contributed their time, knowledge and experiences to co-produce this resource.





The three-year Period Peers programme has been generously funded by an educational grant from Nurofen. In partnership with Nurofen's See My Pain campaign, which aims to address the gender pain gap – where women's and girls' pain is often misunderstood and taken less seriously – we are breaking the stigma surrounding periods, fostering supportive environments, and empowering young people to manage their menstrual health with confidence.



For children and equality for girls



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