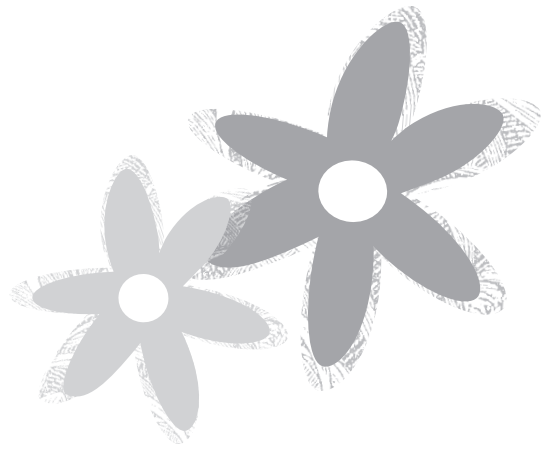


session three



What is Menstruation?

This session deals with a lot of information and may be a lot to take in, particularly for younger participants who may never have heard of periods or menstruation, let alone started menstruating themselves. It is difficult to anticipate all the worries or questions that may arise. The important thing, as always, is to tailor the session to participants, not to rush any stage, and to use clear, direct language as appropriate.

Time 1–1½ hours

You may like to divide it into two sessions as concentration may lapse.

Learning This session aims to enable participants to:

aims

- **Optional:** recap on the position of the uterus inside the body and the fact that a vagina exits to the outside of the body
- understand the concept of menstruation and what happens when a woman has a period.

It is important that the trainer tailors this session to participants' ability and understanding; be careful not to overload participants with too much information in one session. This session may need to be taught twice or to be recapped at a later date. The trainer should read through the session and decide what information/words to use and what to omit; the session is written as a guide.

Materials Recap

- *Worksheet 5: Let's get dressed! (cut-out)*

As used in the previous session.

- *Worksheet 9: Where is the uterus (OHP master)*

If an overhead projector is not available, photocopy enough copies for each participant to have one, or enlarge to A3 size for group display.

New material

- *Worksheet 10: The uterus (diagram)*

Enlarge to A3 size for group display.

- *Worksheet 11: Our private parts*

- *Worksheet 12: The menstrual cycle*

- red/brown marker pen

Photocopy enough copies of the worksheets for each participant to have a copy, or enlarge to A3 size for group display.

recap

Materials ● *Worksheet 5: Let's get dressed! (cut-out)*

...if you have not done this exercise before.

● *Worksheet 9: Where is the uterus? (OHP master)*

If an overhead projector is not available, photocopy enough copies for each participant to have a copy, or enlarge to A3 size for group display. (Depending on the time available, and the age, ability and number of participants, the trainer can **either**:

i) enlarge the worksheet onto A3 card before the session begins, cut out [and colour-in] the clothing and 'dress' the model using the tabs provided for group display

or

ii) photocopy enough copies of the worksheet onto card beforehand for each participant or pair of participants to make a model each themselves).

Look again at *Worksheet 9: Where is the uterus?* and *Worksheet 5: Let's get dressed! (cut-out)* (if desired) to recap the position of uterus in the body.

Ask participants to show you the size of the uterus, and, making a fist, remind them that it is about the same size as the back of the hand. Place your fist (back of hand facing outwards) on the lower abdomen between the hip bones, explaining that this is where it is, but inside our bodies. Encourage participants to do the same exercise, explaining that their uterus will be about the same size as their fist, and that it is inside their bodies.

Explain that most women have a uterus, but that we cannot see it as it is inside our bodies. Mention where the vagina is, and reiterate that it leads from the uterus to the outside of their body.

activity 3.1

What does the uterus do?

Materials ● *Worksheet 10: The uterus (diagram)*

Photocopy enough for each participant, and enlarge to A3 size for group display.

- red/brown marker pen

Guidance notes **1** Introduce participants to this session by telling them that you are going to talk about '**periods**' or '**menstruation**'. Elicit any knowledge that participants have about these two words to assess their learning needs.

- 2** Give a brief explanation of what happens when a girl/woman has a period, using your judgement to decide how much information is necessary, but remembering to use clear, direct and familiar language so as to avoid any confusion – you might explain, for example, to younger participants that a period is the name we use for a kind of **bleeding** that happens for a few days every month. The bleeding only happens to women and it comes from their vagina.

This idea may seem very alarming to some people, and you should use as much relaxed reassurance as necessary to explain that it does not, for example, mean that you have had an accident, or that you are poorly, and it isn't something to worry about. It is important that it happens as it is one of the things that should happen when a girl is growing into a woman.

- 3** Ask participants their age (if appropriate) and explain that girls usually start to have periods between the ages of 9 and 16, and that it is something that happens to most women, and will probably happen to them soon (if appropriate).

activity 3.1 • *What does the uterus do?*

continued

Again, explain that a period is a positive thing, which shows that you are developing into a woman, that it is **part of getting older and growing up**. Explain that their body will go through a lot of changes and this is one of them: try to help them look at the onset of menstruation as a special time and something that happens to all women.

- 4 Distribute copies of, or display (as applicable) **Worksheet 10: The uterus (diagram)**.

Read through the labels together, so that you can ensure that participants are not confused by the words. Using the diagram, show what happens when a woman has a period. Use the marker pen to draw the process that occurs when a period is due:

- a tiny **egg** leaves the **ovary**
- it travels down the **fallopian tubes**
- show/draw the build up of blood on the **wall of the uterus**, explaining through your drawing that the **blood gets thicker** as the egg gets closer.

You can explain that the blood is acting as a '**bed**' for the egg, somewhere soft for the egg to sit in – draw this on the sheet.

In the end you will have a thickened **uterine lining** and an egg sitting in one side.

You may like to use more than one copy of the worksheet to explain. Do whatever you think necessary to convey the message.

- 5 You may think it is worth asking participants to come and draw the path of the egg to the **uterus/womb** on another copy of the diagram to make sure that they have understood. It may help some participants to remember if they have their own copy of the worksheet to draw on.

activity 3.2

Periods: What is happening to me?

- Materials**
- **Worksheet 10: The uterus (diagram)**
Photocopy several A3 copies for illustrative purposes.
 - **Worksheet 11: Our private parts**
Photocopy enough for each participant and enlarge to A3 size for group display. Make about six large copies.
 - red/brown marker pen
- Guidance notes**
- 1** Explain clearly that it takes a few days for an egg to travel to the uterus. At certain times of the month the body does not want the egg or blood in the uterus, therefore it gets rid of it. You could explain that after the egg has got to the uterus and had a little rest, the body does not want it and gets rid of it. This is called a period.
The body gets rid of the blood through the vagina.
 - 2** Ask participants if they can remember where the vagina is. Use **Worksheet 11: Our private parts** to clarify if necessary, saying the vagina is in the 'private areas' (use language appropriate to participants) between the legs.
It is important that you emphasise that:
 - it is a **different kind of blood** and bleeding to that experienced when, for example, you cut your finger. To reiterate this, point out that the blood is more reddish brown than normal blood and that it may be thicker, have a different texture, feel different
 - it is a healthy thing happening; this blood is not wanted by the body, and it will not hurt participants – they will not die, it is not bad.

activity 3.2 • *Periods: What is happening to me?*

continued

- 3** Using the marker pen and further photocopies of **Worksheet 10: The uterus (a diagram)**, illustrate the body getting rid of the blood: on the first sheet draw a full lining of the uterus and some blood leaving the vagina; repeat on the next picture, this time with less blood lining the uterus and some coming from the vagina; continue showing less blood lining the uterus and some leaving the vagina, until there is no blood lining the uterus.
- 4** Explain that participants will see the blood in their pants, it will leave a brownish stain. They will have started their period or started to menstruate.

activity 3.3

How often and for how long?

Materials ● *Worksheet 12: The menstrual cycle*

Photocopy enough for each participant and enlarge to A3 size for group display.

- red/brown marker pen

- Guidance notes**
- 1** Display your A3 copy of *Worksheet 12: The menstrual cycle*, which shows a calendar, one month drawn as a circle to show the continuous process of menstruating for a woman. Explain to participants what it is, that each segment represents a day, each dividing line a night's sleep. You may think it appropriate to remind participants that there are 7 days in each week, and usually about 30 or 31 days (about 4 weeks) in a month. A woman's body has a calendar of about 28 days, and bleeding will occur during that time.
 - 2** On the A3 copy, shade five days in red and explain that out of all of the days in the month they will only have a period for about five of them. Explain that the 'blood' comes out gradually, and that's why it usually takes about five days.
 - 3** It can be reassuring to any participants who are worried, to emphasise, using the worksheet, that there are many days when participants will not have a period.
 - 4** Explain to participants that once the period has finished, the process repeats itself, that another egg leaves the ovary and the uterus produces a lining for the egg to rest in – after 28 days they will have another period.

activity 3.3 • *How often and for how long?*

continued

- 5** Distribute a copy of the worksheet to each participant. Together, or individually, count 28 days, colouring in the five days of each month when they are likely to get bleeding.

Explain that usually, *but not always*, women have a period **about every 28 days** until they are much older.

You could represent a five day period by drawing five sun and moons on a sheet of paper, explaining that it would last for five sleeps. Stress that there are many sleeps when they will not have a period.

- 6** It is important to remember and to point out that **all women are different**. Trainers need to pre-empt the possibility of irregular periods, and mention that often, when girls start to have their periods they may not come as regularly as this. Girls, with or without learning difficulties, having accepted the idea of having a period, may be concerned if they do not have them in just the way they were told. Try to 'cover your bases' and theirs by warning them that it may not always be regular, particularly when they start their periods.

- 7** Finish the session by eliciting the information about periods that you have just looked at, from the students. This will enable you to assess how successful the teaching has been, and may throw up any confusion and give you a chance to address it.

Ensure the main points are highlighted:

- **the natural physical process:**
 - an egg is released by the ovaries
 - the uterus makes a build up of blood inside the body
 - the egg rests in the thickened wall of the uterus
 - the blood is not wanted, so the body gets rid of it through the vagina
- this **blood is not harmful**, and is not going to hurt you
- the blood will be a reddish brown colour
- the blood will come out between the legs
- you may see the blood in your pants

activity 3.3 • *How often and for how long?*

continued

- the name of the bleeding is a **period**
- a period **lasts for about five days**/sleeps and the blood comes out gradually
- it will happen **about once a month**
- reassure participants that it is **not the same as wetting themselves**, for example, and they have not done anything wrong
- **periods are a good sign** as they show that you are changing naturally from a girl to a woman.