

A training manual  
on menstrual health  
for scout leaders



# DIGNITY FOR GIRLS

Engaging faith groups in Uganda on menstrual health

November 2018

## MHM TRAINING MANUAL FOR SCOUT LEADERS

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# INTRODUCTION

This Menstrual Hygiene Management training guide was developed in 2018 by Faith in Water for its Dignity for Girls programme. The programme works with faith groups in Uganda to improve girls' education through good menstrual health.

There is growing understanding that many girls experience difficulties in managing their menstruation, and that these difficulties affect their health, well-being and education. In Uganda, studies show that menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a major challenge for girls. Poor MHM means girls often fail to achieve their full potential at school and causes some to drop out of education altogether. Girls' difficulties include lack of information about menstruation; very poor school toilets; sense of shame and stigma; lack of access to sanitary products or inability to afford them.

## About Dignity for Girls

The Dignity for Girls programme aims to help more girls stay in education by helping them manage their menstruation. It also aims to reduce stigma and ignorance about menstruation in the wider faith community. It works with the Catholic Church, the Church of Uganda and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council on this issue and has partnerships with the Catholic, Anglican and Muslim scout movements in Uganda Scouts Association.

This training guide is aimed at leaders of Catholic, Anglican and Muslim scout groups. It will help them to raise awareness and improve attitudes towards menstruation among both boys and girls. In particular, it should help them guide their members to:

- Acquire correct information about puberty and menstruation.....girls and boys
- Break the silence (and stigma) on menstruation.....girls and boys
- Tackle myths and ignorance about menstruation.....girls and boys
- Feel more confident about managing their periods with dignity.....girls
- Understand they should not tease girls who are menstruating.....boys

## How to use this guide

There are two sections: **Part One** provides an overview of menstruation and puberty, looks at some common myths and includes a fun game to knock down some mistaken beliefs. This section is good for all scout groups, whether girls, boys or mixed, and provides a good foundation for:

- Understanding that menstruation is natural biological function of the female body.
- Understanding the difference between truth and myths concerning periods.
- Improving attitudes towards menstruation as natural and normal.

**Part Two** contains more practical information for girls on how to manage their periods confidently, such as how to use sanitary pads, the importance of cleanliness, how to use the menstrual cycle to work out when their period is due. This may be more suitable for groups of girls, and is to be used as an addition to Part One.

# PART ONE

## 1. ICE BREAKER: OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET GAME

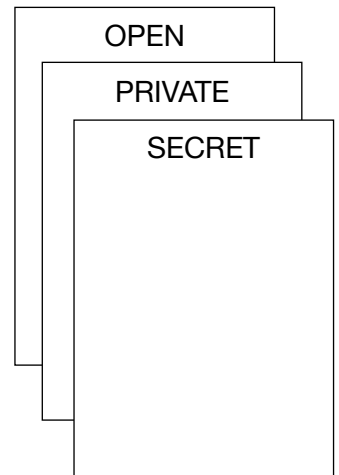
It is not always easy to begin talking about sensitive and personal subjects such as menstruation. This game, called OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET, is a gentle way of introducing the subject and shows how people have very different attitudes towards it.

### What you need:

- Three large papers such as flip chart papers
- Four sets of pink, green, yellow and orange stickers (or dots or stars)

### Before you start:

- Prepare three papers for the game: One says **OPEN** at the top as shown on the right, one says **PRIVATE**, and one says **SECRET**.
- Hand out four coloured stickers or stars – one **GREEN** sticker, one **PINK** sticker, one **YELLOW** and one **ORANGE** sticker.



## HOW TO PLAY THE OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET GAME

Explain that we can think of conversations as either **OPEN**, **PRIVATE** or **SECRET**. For example:

- The weather is a conversation that can be considered **OPEN** - ie, we would happily discuss it with anyone, including strangers.
- A serious health problem might be considered **PRIVATE** - ie, we would not discuss it with everyone but instead with a few close people, such as our family.
- If we had cheated in an exam, or stolen some money, or killed someone, that would be a **SECRET** – ie, we would never tell anyone.

Point out the three flip chart papers on the wall - one labelled **OPEN**, one **PRIVATE** and one **SECRET**. Explain that everyone has three coloured stickers: a green sticker, a pink sticker and an orange sticker. Ask them:

- How do **PEOPLE** in **Uganda** generally feel about discussing menstruation? Take your **GREEN** sticker to the flip chart papers on the wall and choose which paper to put it on – **OPEN**, **PRIVATE** or **SECRET**?

When everyone has returned to their seat, tell them:

- Using your **PINK** stickers, how do **GIRLS** in **Uganda** feel about discussing their menstruation?

When everyone has returned to their seat, tell them:

- If you are a girl, using your **ORANGE** sticker, how do **YOU yourself** feel about discussing your own menstruation?
- If you are a **BOY**, using your **YELLOW** sticker, how do you feel about talking about menstruation to your sister or friend?

After everyone has placed their stickers, invite everyone to look at the flip charts. It should be very clear (from the different colours on the **OPEN**, **PRIVATE** or **SECRET** flip chart papers) what the different groups think about menstruation.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

What do the flip charts tell us about feelings about discussing menstruation among

- people generally in Uganda?
  - girls?
  - girls in this room?
- Why is this important to know?  
**NOTE:** It helps us appreciate that different people have different attitudes and we need to respect those different attitudes.
  - When something is considered secret, it is usually deeply shameful. Does it matter if girls feel shameful about menstruation? What do you think?  
**NOTE:** If girls feel shameful, they will be reluctant to talk about menstruation. This means they might have wrong information about periods.
  - Keeping this a secret can lead to misunderstanding, stigma, fear and exclusion. That is why it is important to **break the silence** on menstruation.  
**NOTE:** If no one talks about menstruation, that means boys won't understand what it is all about and why they should not tease girls about it.

## 2. WHAT IS PUBERTY?

- Puberty (also called adolescence) is the stage when girls and boys experience physical changes as they move from childhood into adulthood.
- It is a time of big changes in the body – both inside and outside – and is the stage when a boy or a girl become sexually aware or mature and can have a baby.
- Puberty usually starts between the ages of 8 and 14 in girls and 9 and 15 in boys. Some people start puberty a little earlier or later.
- Each person is different so everyone goes through puberty on his or her body's own schedule. This is one reason why some of your friends might still look like kids whereas others look more like adults.

## GROUP WORK

Divide the scouts into groups of 7-8. Ask them to work together to list all the changes that happen to the body of a girl and a boy during puberty. Give them two minutes to do this. Now invite the scouts to put their hands up to suggest one change until you have all of the changes (see over).



## Changes that happen during puberty

Girls	Boys
Development of breasts	Voices break and deepen
Widening of hips	Shoulders widen, facial hair grows
Growth of pubic hair	Growth of pubic hair
Spots/acne	Spots/acne
Unexplained mood swings	Unexplained mood changes
Sweat glands become more active	Sweat glands become more active
Girls start menstruation	Boys have 'wet dreams' (involuntary ejaculations of semen during sleep)

### Mood swings

- Puberty is a very exciting time but it can also be a time of uncertainty, self consciousness and anxiety. As well as changing physically, you are also changing emotionally and psychologically.
- This means that sometimes you will feel swings of emotion - very happy one minute, very sad the next minute, and sometimes very angry. This is normal!
- If you understand what is happening to you, then you will be better able to cope with the big changes happening in your body and your emotions.

## 3. WHAT IS MENSTRUATION?

Menstruation is a natural biological function of the female body that a girl goes through when she is growing up and is part of the female reproductive system. It is the monthly flow of blood from the uterus (womb) through the vagina in all girls every month, and is NORMAL and NATURAL.

Menstruation is **NOT**:

- A disease
- Something to be ashamed of
- A reason to stop girls and women from going to school, carrying out household activities, doing sports or working

Menstruation **IS**:

- A normal, healthy part of growing up and becoming a woman
- Something that is experienced by ALL women and girls
- A natural process whereby a girl's body sheds the lining of the uterus every month, causing some blood to flow from the vagina.

## How menstruation works

Every month, an egg is released from the ovary and travels to the uterus (womb). This is called **ovulation**.

The walls of the uterus have already prepared to receive the egg by growing a lining made of blood and tissue.

The egg spends a few days in the uterus.

Then, if the egg is not fertilised, your body releases it through the vagina.

At the same time, the lining of the uterus break down and blood flows through the vagina. That is **menstruation**.

## When do periods start?

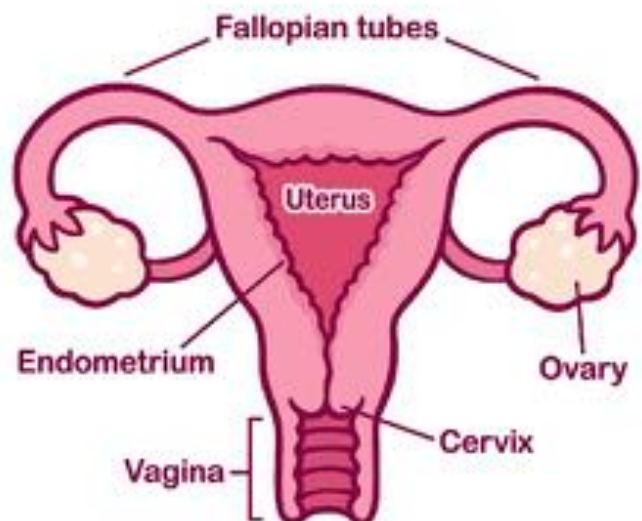
Girls normally start their periods between the age of 9 and 15 years.

Menstruation then takes place every month until it stops between the ages of 45 and 55. This is called menopause.

## How long do periods last?

Periods can last for between 3 and 7 days at a time. The average is 5 days.

The amount of blood flow varies and sometimes is heavier than at others. Different people also have different blood flows. But the total amount lost during a period is no more than a few teaspoons of blood.



## 4. THE FAITH VIEW

*Notes for trainer: Adapt this section according to your audience, whether Christian or Muslim, or mixed.*

Both the Christian and Muslim faiths believe menstruation is a normal, bodily function created by God. The Bible (Christianity's holy text) and the Qur'an (Islam's holy text) both tell us that God created everything on Earth, as these verses show.

**Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made**

– John 1:3

**It is He who created for you all that is in the Earth.'**

– Surah al Baquarah 29

If God created everything, this also includes menstruation. The Bible and the Qur'an also tell us that what God created was 'very good' and 'perfect':

**God saw all that He had made, and it was very good**

– Genesis 1:31

Allah **'perfected everything which He created'**

– Surah As-Sajdah 32:7

## DISCUSSION

- If we are taught that God created everything, including menstruation, and that all He created was 'very good' and 'perfect', how should this affect our attitude to menstruation?
- Is it right to feel ashamed of it? Are other people right to use menstruation to mock us and shame us?

**NOTE:** No, instead of being ashamed of menstruation, we should remember that this normal bodily function has been created by God and so we should not disdain it. And we should tell people who try to shame us, that there is no shame in a natural bodily function that has been created by God for the benefit of all people.



## 5. TRUTHS AND MYTHS

Because menstruation is not talked about, a lot of myths and misunderstandings can arise. Some of these statements are true, some are false. Tick ✓ the correct answer.

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Big girls are the only ones who menstruate		
2	You can get pregnant if you have sex during your period.		
3	Men with AIDS are cured if they have sex with young girls.		
4	Getting your first period means you are ready for marriage.		
5	Sex cures painful menstruation.		
6	Girls can take part in exercise or sport during their period.		
7	If you go into the garden or climb a tree during your period, crops or fruit will die.		
8	If girls and boys do not have sex when still young, their private parts will block up		
9	If your menstrual cloth is burned, you will become barren.		
10	Used menstrual cloths will attract evil spirits.		

## 6. BOWLING OUT MYTHS

Here is a fun game to help you learn about ~ and knock down ~ some common myths about menstruation.

### BOWLING OUT MYTHS GAME

The game is based on ten pin bowling in which players score points by knocking down 'pins' which are shaped like bottles. In this game, water bottles are your 'pins'. Each bottle has a label listing a myth about menstruation which players try to knock down with a ball. Players score points for each 'pin' they knock down.

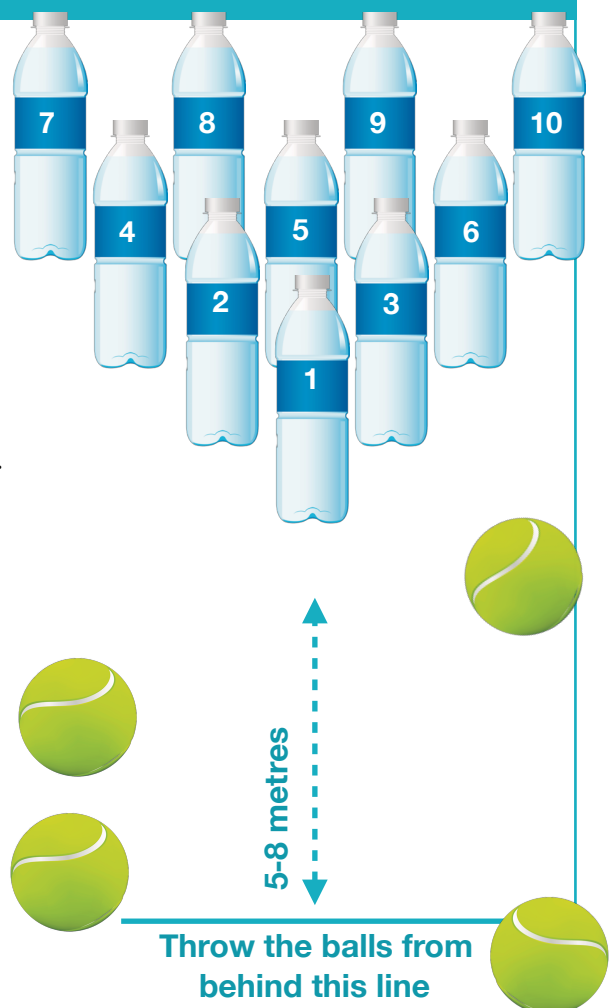
#### What you need

- 10 empty small water bottles
- 10 labels, each with a myth and a truth about menstruation
- Some sand or water to fill the bottom of the bottles for stability
- A ball (tennis ball size or slightly bigger)
- A way to keep the score



#### How to prepare the game

1. Put the sand or water into the water bottles, filling each bottle only about one third full.
2. Stick the labels on the bottles. The myth should be on the front and the truth on the back.
3. Set up the bottles in a triangular shape with a row of four bottles at the back, then a row of three bottles, then two bottles, then one bottle at the front, as shown right.
4. Make sure there is some space between the bottles – about a hand width. Too much space will make it too difficult to knock down bottles. Too little space will make it too easy.
5. You can put the bottles anywhere, as long as the ground is flat. If you put them against a wall, the players will not need to run after the ball so much.
6. Draw a line on the ground about 5-8 metres away from the bottles.



## How to play the game

The aim is to knock down as many 'pins' as possible by throwing the ball at the triangle of water bottles. Players score points for each bottle they knock down. The player with the most points score is the winner.

1. Each player takes a turn (or perhaps two or three turns) in throwing the ball.
2. If the player knocks down a bottle, he or she reads out the myth, then turns the bottle around to read the truth.
3. Add up the points written on each bottle he or she has knocked down.
4. If the player manages to knock down all 10 bottles, add 10 points to their score.
5. Set up the bottles again in exactly the same place for the next player's turn.
6. After all the rounds have been played, the winner is the player with most points.

## Myth and Truth labels for the bottles

Write these myths onto sticky labels or paper. Tape the myths to the bottles.

**MYTH:** Menstruation is a sickness or disease.

**TRUTH:** Menstruation is a natural biological function of the female body.

**3**  
points

**MYTH:** Crops will die if menstruating girls go into vegetable gardens.

**TRUTH:** No, menstruating girls cannot make crops die.

**2**  
points

**MYTH:** Periods are a sign that girls have done something bad.

**TRUTH:** No, periods are natural, normal and a sign of good health.

**3**  
points

**MYTH:** It is okay to laugh at girls and tease them about periods.

**TRUTH:** No, it is not okay, it is mean to laugh at girls about periods.

**1**  
point

**MYTH:** Don't talk about periods, it is better to keep silent.

**TRUTH:** No, let us break the silence on periods to end stigma and shame.

**2**  
points

**MYTH:** Starting periods means a girl is ready for marriage.

**TRUTH:** No, she is still a child and should finish her education.

**1**  
point



**MYTH:** If a girl burns her menstrual pad/cloth, she will become barren.

**TRUTH:** No, burning pads or cloths will not make a girl barren,

**3**

points

**MYTH:** Used sanitary pads will attract evil spirits.

**TRUTH:** No, used sanitary pads attract flies, not evil spirits, if you don't dispose of them properly.

**3**

points

**MYTH:** Menstrual blood contains harmful substances.

**TRUTH:** No, there is nothing harmful about menstrual blood.

**1**

point

**MYTH:** Having sex will prevent painful periods.

**TRUTH:** No, sex does not prevent menstrual pains. It puts you at risk of pregnancy.

**2**

points

## PART TWO

### 1. MANAGING YOUR PERIODS

**Managing menstruation** is about dealing with your menstrual flow while you continue regular activities such as going to school, working, bathing, taking part in sports, etc.

- **Don't be afraid of having your period:** it is normal and means you are healthy.
- **Tell a parent/guardian** when your period arrives so they can tell you what to do. Remember that all girls go through this, it's nothing to be ashamed about.

#### Managing blood flow

- You can use clean cloths or sanitary pads to absorb the blood and prevent clothes from being soiled.

#### Disposable sanitary pads

- Disposable pads are made from absorbent material and are meant to be worn once, then thrown away. They are sold in shops and supermarkets.
- Some have wrap-around 'wings' to wrap under your panties to keep the pad from moving.
- Others have sticky strips that help the pad stick to your panties. You pull off the covering over the sticky strip before putting in your pants.



Types of sanitary pad

#### Throwing away disposable pads

- Never throw sanitary pads down the latrine or toilet – this causes blockages.
- Throw used sanitary pads in the bin or in the incinerator for burning or wrap them in newspaper or waste paper and burn in a private place at home.

#### Reusable pads

- Reusable pads are made from washable fabric and are not thrown away but instead washed, dried properly, then used again.
- Used properly, reusable pads will last for at least a year and sometimes up to three years. This means they are much cheaper than buying disposable pads.
- Some are made in a factory and others are homemade from cloth and cotton.

#### Using sanitary pads

- Change your cloth or pad every few hours for normal flow, more often for heavy flow (flow means the amount of blood).
- Check your pad regularly to see if it needs changing. This will help you to avoid blood leaking onto your clothes.
- Wash your hands with soap afterwards.



## Personal hygiene

- It is very important to stay healthy and hygienic during your period.
- You should wash your private parts with soap and water at least twice a day. This reduces the risk of smells and infections.
- For the same reason, keep your clothes clean too. Wash your panties regularly and as soon as they become dirty.



## Looking after reusable pads and cloths

If you have reusable pads or cloths, it is very important to keep them clean to avoid infection.

- Wash your reusable pads every time you use them.
- Soak them in cold water, then wash them using clean water and soap.
- Never dry your reusable pads and panties under your bed. Always dry them in the sun on the line.
- If you are embarrassed, you can always put them under another cloth or T shirt: the important thing is to make sure they dry properly. If they don't dry properly, they might give you an infection in your private parts.
- Avoid drying them on the grass in case of insect infestation.
- Dispose of your old worn-out reusable pads by burning them.

## Understand your menstrual cycle

Periods come in a regular pattern known as a **menstrual cycle**. The menstrual cycle is the length of time between one period and the next, usually around 28 days but sometimes a bit longer or shorter – every girl is unique! Understanding how *your* menstrual cycle works will help you know when to expect your next period.

The menstrual cycle diagram begins with the first day of your period (**day 1**).

**Days 1–7:** This is when menstruation happens (periods usually last for between 3 and 7 days).

**Days 8–11:** Body tissues and blood build up in the walls of the uterus in preparation for fertilisation.

**Days 12–16:** Ovulation takes place from (ie, your body releases an egg).

**Days 17–28:** If the egg is not fertilised, the lining of uterus breaks down from. This is discharged through the vagina along with some blood – and this is when the cycle starts all over again with menstruation.





- This menstrual cycle happens every month and only stops at menopause.
- Don't worry if your periods don't follow a regular pattern at first, ie, sometimes they come quickly, sometimes they take longer to come. This is normal and your periods will settle down over time.

## Other tips for managing periods

- **Be prepared:** It's a good idea to take an extra cloth/sanitary pad in a plastic bag to school so that you can change. (Then you are always prepared.)
- If you get a bloodstain on your uniform, tie a cloth or sweater around your waist and ask a friend or teacher for help.
- **Keep active:** Carry out normal activities: Just because you have your period is no reason to stop any of your normal activities. You can go to school, play sports, meet your friends, help with housework – anything.
- **Exercise:** Exercise is healthy and you should stay active.
- **Eat a healthy diet:** There is no reason to stop eating a particular food. Drink plenty of water and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Bananas, citrus foods and avocados might help prevent cramps because they increase potassium levels. Foods rich in iron are needed to make new blood so eat plenty of beans and green leafy vegetables such as spinach; try to include some red meat and chicken.

## Period problems

Sometimes periods are painful or uncomfortable. This is normal for some girls.

### Painful menstruation

- Plenty of girls have no problem with menstruation but some experience back pain, sore breasts, stomach ache or headaches. Others feel tired, or low in spirits, develop pimples, or have a bloated stomach.
- The pain/discomfort is usually caused by the muscles of the uterus cramping to shed the uterus lining.

### Dealing with painful periods

- Simple painkillers can help with pain.
- A hot water bottle held on your stomach can help. This is a rubber bottle that you fill with hot water. Wrap it in a towel if it is too hot.



### Health issues

- After puberty some girls see a white or yellowish vaginal discharge in their pants. This is NORMAL and nothing to worry about. Vaginal discharge is a fluid or mucus that keeps the vagina clean and moist, and protects it from infection.
- However, if you have vaginal discharge that is: itchy, irritating, discoloured or smells bad, this may be a sign of infection and you should see a doctor or the school nurse.
- Also see a doctor if you get pain when urinating, or if you produce more discharge than usual, or if you get a lot more menstrual bleeding than usual.
- Using dirty cloths can cause irritation to your skin or may introduce bacteria to your private parts which could lead to infections.