

DIGNITY FOR GIRLS

Engaging faith groups in Uganda on menstrual health



**MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT
MANUAL FOR ENGAGING PARENTS IN
CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES**

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For more information, and to download a copy of this manual, visit www.faithinwater.org or email info@faithinwater.org.

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MENSTRUAL AWARENESS TRAINING MANUAL FOR PARENTS

This Menstrual Awareness training guide was developed by UK-based NGO Faith in Water for its Dignity for Girls programme. The Dignity for Girls programme works with faith groups in Uganda to improve girls' education through good menstrual health. The manual is intended for use by facilitators to train parents of girls at Christian and Muslim primary schools in the importance of menstrual hygiene management. The session should take just over 2 hours to deliver.

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1. OPENING PRAYER AND WELCOME

5 mins

2. ICE BREAKER

10 mins

Tell us your name and answer ONE of these questions:

- Who is the woman who has most influence on your life?
- Who is the woman you admire most?

3. INTRODUCTION: WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE ARE DOING

10 mins

Keep this brief but cover the following topics:

- Introduce yourself and your organisation
- Introduce the Dignity for Girls project
 - Explain that this project is working with three faith groups – the Church of Uganda, Catholic Church and Uganda Muslim Supreme Council – to improve girls' education through better menstrual hygiene management; that is, helping girls to manage their monthly periods with confidence and dignity.
 - The reason why this is important is that there is growing evidence that girls are missing school because of difficulties managing their periods. The Ministry of Education has highlighted this as an important issue for girls' education.
 - The school drop out rate among girls is very high – less than two thirds of girls currently complete primary school, and far fewer complete secondary school.
 - Girls who drop out of school early are at high risk of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Why we are here is because your school has been chosen to be part of the project. As well as training the girls, we are also improving the latrine/washing facilities. We will set up girls' clubs and teach girls to make reusable sanitary pads.
 - The purpose of today is to:
 - (a) let you know what we are doing
 - (b) ask for your support
- First, let's explore what our attitudes are towards menstruation.

4. GAME: OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET

15 mins

- Explain that talking about menstruation in public is not always easy. This game, called OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET, shows how different people have different attitudes.
- Explain that we can think of topics of conversation as either **OPEN**, **PRIVATE** or **SECRET**. For example:
 - The weather is a topic of conversation that can be considered **OPEN** - ie, we would 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 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.

PLAYING THE OPEN-PRIVATE-SECRET GAME

Point out the three flip chart papers on the wall - one labelled **OPEN**, one **PRIVATE** and one **SECRET**. Explain that everyone has four coloured stickers: a **GREEN** sticker, a **PINK** sticker, a **YELLOW** sticker and an **ORANGE** sticker.

- Tell them: Using your **GREEN** sticker, how do **PEOPLE** in Uganda generally feel about discussing menstruation? Take your **GREEN** sticker to the **OPEN**, **PRIVATE** or **SECRET** flip chart papers on the wall and choose which paper to put it on.
- When everyone has returned to their seat, tell them: Using your **PINK** stickers, how do **GIRLS** in Uganda feel about discussing their menstruation?
- Then tell them: **Ladies**, using your **ORANGE** sticker, how do **YOU yourself** feel about discussing your own menstruation? **Gentlemen**, using your **YELLOW** sticker, how do **YOU yourself** feel about discussing menstruation?

Discussion: What does this tell us about how open your community is to discussing issues menstruation?

- 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
- Look at the results for the girls. When we have done this exercise with girls, most girls usually say their menstruation is **SECRET**, with a few saying **PRIVATE**.
NOTE: When something is considered secret, it is usually deeply shameful. Does it matter if girls feel shameful about menstruation?
If girls feel shameful, they will be reluctant to talk about menstruation. Keeping this a secret can lead to misinformation, stigma, fear and exclusion.

5. MENSTRUATION FACTS

10 mins

- Before we go further, let us look at what menstruation is. Explain that this is what we are teaching the girls:

What is menstruation?

- Menstruation is a natural biological change of the body that a girl goes through when she is growing up.
- 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 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 bleeding from the vagina
- It is part of the human reproductive system

Facts about menstruation

- Girls normally start their periods between the age of 9 and 15 years and menstruation then takes place every month until it stops between the ages of 45 and 55.
- 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. But the total amount lost during a period is no more than a few teaspoons.
- Most girls find that their periods come every 28 days – that is called the menstrual cycle. For some girls, the menstrual cycle is a bit longer or shorter.

- Ask if there are any questions or comments.

6. CHALLENGES OF MENSTRUATION

10 mins

The challenges facing girls fall into three categories: information, facilities and attitudes.

Lack of information about menstruation	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers not trained properly to teach this subject• Some teachers are too embarrassed to teach it• Some parents don't discuss it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Girls do not know how to manage their menstruation properly.• Some think they have a disease.• Ignorance leads to harmful ideas or risky behaviour.
Poor toilet/washing facilities	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• lack of separate latrines from boys• no privacy (eg, no doors)• toilets very dirty• no water for washing• nowhere to clean themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Girls stay away from school when they have their period• High absenteeism rates for girls.• Negative impact on girls' education• Girls fail to achieve their potential
Negative attitude, stigma and shame	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of support and understanding from the adults in their lives• Fear of being mocked by boys• Fear of standing in class in case they have stained their skirt• Taboos on what girls can or can't do during their menstruation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People are unwilling to talk about menstruation• This silence = more stigma = more ignorance and misunderstanding• Girls' lives are restricted by taboos• Girls' self confidence and self esteem is damaged

BREAK WITH REFRESHMENTS

20 mins

7. DOT GAME: GIRLS' CHALLENGES

5 mins

- What do YOU think are the biggest challenges for your daughters?
- Point out the Dot Game flip chart papers on the wall, with the statements (see below). Read the statements, then tell them they must choose the THREE challenges they think are the biggest for girls.
- They have THREE sticky dots: they should come up to the papers and place one dot next to the three statements they consider to be girls' biggest challenges in managing their periods.

QUESTIONS FOR DOT GAME: CHALLENGES

1. The toilets at school are too crowded
2. No separate toilets for girls
3. Lack of water at school for washing
4. Nowhere to dispose of menstrual cloths at school
5. Lack of menstrual health education / knowledge
6. Don't have sanitary products / materials
7. Don't know which teacher to talk to about menstrual health problems
8. Can't discuss these issues because of social stigma
9. Embarrassment/shame: Worry that boys will make fun of me

Discussion: Do your ideas about girls' biggest challenges match what the girls told us in our 2016 workshops (see below)?

NOTE: Adults underestimate how much girls are worried about being teased.

NOTE: When all the questions on school toilets were added up, 62% of girls said poor school toilets were their biggest challenges.

What the girls told us

56% – Cannot afford sanitary products

46% – Worry boys will make fun of them

42% – Lack of education on menstruation

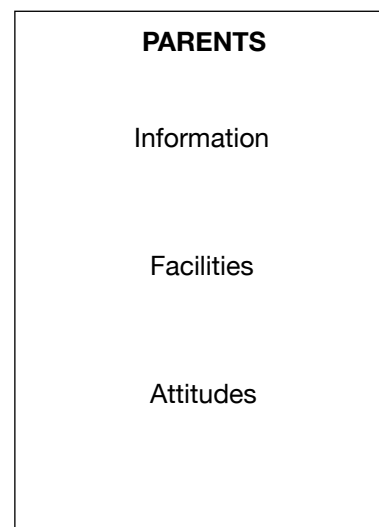
24% – Lack of water for washing

8. WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT GIRLS BETTER?

15 mins

GROUP WORK: We all have a role to play in helping girls manage their menstruation better: parents, schools and the wider faith community.

- Divide into three groups and give each group six statements, taken randomly from the Statements of Responsibility table below. The statements are all actions we can take to address the challenges of lack of information, poor facilities and poor attitudes.
- Pin three flip chart papers on the wall, one labelled Parents, one labelled Schools and one labelled Faith Community. They should look like the diagram on the right.
- Ask the groups to decide whether each action is a responsibility of **parents, schools** or the **faith community** – or perhaps **all three** (if the same statement appears more than once).
- They should pin or stick each statement on the flip chart papers in the section where they think it belongs. There should be two statements for each category for parents, schools and faith community.



- **NB: Depending on the literacy levels of the group, facilitators may need to adapt this session. For example, the facilitator could read each statement and ask where the responsibility lies. The facilitator then places the statement on the flip charts. At the end, the facilitator reads the results for each section, asking participants if they agree with the final allocation of responsibilities.**

Statements of responsibility

	Parents	Schools	Faith community
Information	Teach your girls (and boys) that menstruation is natural and normal and a sign of good health	Teach girls and boys about puberty and menstruation	Support schools in teaching girls and boys appropriate information about puberty menstruation
	Be approachable so that children feel they can ask questions	Be approachable so that children feel they can ask questions	Remind people that our faith teaches us that God created everything - and that includes menstruation
Facilities	Support the school in improving its latrine and washing facilities	Improve WASH facilities at school so they are private, safe, clean	Support the school in improving its latrine and washing facilities
	Provide pads or menstrual cloths for girls	Cultivate an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all	Teach boys to respect girls and not to tease them
Attitudes	Break the silence on menstruation	Break the silence on menstruation	Break the silence on menstruation
	Protect girls from sexual abuse, child marriage and teenage pregnancy	Teach boys to respect girls and not to tease them	Teach how faith values – such as dignity, respect, caring for the vulnerable – should guide us in supporting girls on MHM

9. TRUTH AND MYTHS

5 mins

- Because menstruation is not talked about, a lot of myths and misunderstandings can arise. Some of these statements are true, some are myths. Do you know which?
- The facilitator should read the questions (below) and ask them to say true or false.

Truth and Myths questions

1	Big girls are the only ones who menstruate	FALSE: Girls can start their periods at 9 years of age.
2	You can get pregnant if you have sex during your period.	TRUE: You can get pregnant while you are on your period.
3	Men with AIDS are cured if they have sex with young girls.	FALSE: Sex cannot cure HIV/AIDS. Unprotected sex is one of the ways the HIV infection spreads to other people.
4	Getting your first period means you are ready for marriage.	FALSE: No, you are not ready for marriage, you are still a child. If you are under 18 years, Ugandan law forbids you from marrying. You should continue your education.
5	Sex cures painful menstruation.	FALSE: Sex does not prevent menstrual pains. Exercise, drinking plenty of water and eating a healthy diet may help reduce pains. If too painful, seek medical help.
6	Girls can take part in exercise or sport during their period.	TRUE: Girls who are menstruating should lead a normal life - taking part in sport, going to school, socialising with friends
7	If you go into the garden or climb a tree during your period, crops or fruit will die.	FALSE: Girls are exactly the same while they are menstruating as when they are not. Menstruation has no relationship with crops drying or fruits rotting.
8	If your menstrual cloth is burned, you will become barren.	FALSE: Burning your menstrual cloth will have no impact on your ability to have children. Burning menstrual cloths is a hygienic way of disposing of them.
9	Used menstrual cloths will attract evil spirits.	FALSE: Used menstrual cloths attract flies and germs, not evil spirits. Dispose of them properly.

You cannot have good menstrual hygiene management without good water, sanitation and hygiene. Clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are essential for health and life.

- Diseases caused by dirty drinking water and poor sanitation and hygiene kill hundreds of thousands of people every year including:
 - 88 per cent of deaths among young children worldwide
 - More than 20% of deaths of under-14-year-olds
- Children who survive often suffer from malnutrition and stunted growth.

In Uganda one third of all young children suffer from malnutrition and are stunted. That is 2.4 million children.

Three key hygiene practices

These three practices are at the heart of good WASH

- Using a toilet or latrine
- Washing hands with soap at critical times: For example:
 - **AFTER** using the toilet
 - **BEFORE** eating or preparing food
 - **AFTER** cleaning babies' bottoms
- Drinking safe water that has been treated and stored properly

The Germ Game

- Explain that even if we think our hands are clean, there is often invisible germs and dirt on them.
- Using the kit you have been supplied with, take one of the balls, which you have already coated with powder, and throw to different people in the room. Then ask people to hold out their hands. Do they look clean?
- Using the torch, show how an invisible layer of powder is on their hands. This shows how dirt lies invisible.
- Reassure them that the powder on their hands is not harmful, it is a special kit used to demonstrate hygiene in schools and hospitals.

- This is what we are teaching the girls about managing their menstruation.

Managing your periods

- **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.
- These should be changed every few hours for normal flow, more often for heavy flow (flow refers the amount of blood: some girls have heavier flows – ie, more blood – than others).
- 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.

Maintaining 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.

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.)

Keep active

- Carry out normal activities: You can go to school, play sports, meet your friends, help with housework – anything.
- Exercise is healthy and you should stay active.
- Eat a healthy diet, with plenty of water, beans, green leafy vegetables and fruit.

- Ask if there are any questions or comments.

Reusable sanitary pads

- We are also providing girls with reusable sanitary pads - these will last for two to three years if they are looked after properly. These are pads made from washable fabric that are washed, dried properly, then used again.

- **DEMONSTRATION: The facilitator should show an example of the reusable pads and demonstrate how to wear them in panties.**
- It is very important to keep reusable cloths clean to minimise infection.

Looking after reusable pads

- 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.
- You can iron your cloths or reusable pads to kill germs.
- Dispose of your old worn-out reusable pads by burning them.

- We have a pack of reusable sanitary pads for each of you (gentlemen, I am sure you know of a girl or lady who will appreciate them).

12. DISTRIBUTION OF KITS AND FINAL PRAYER

10 mins

- One pack of So Sure pads per participant
- Final prayer
- Depart at leisure

ENDS