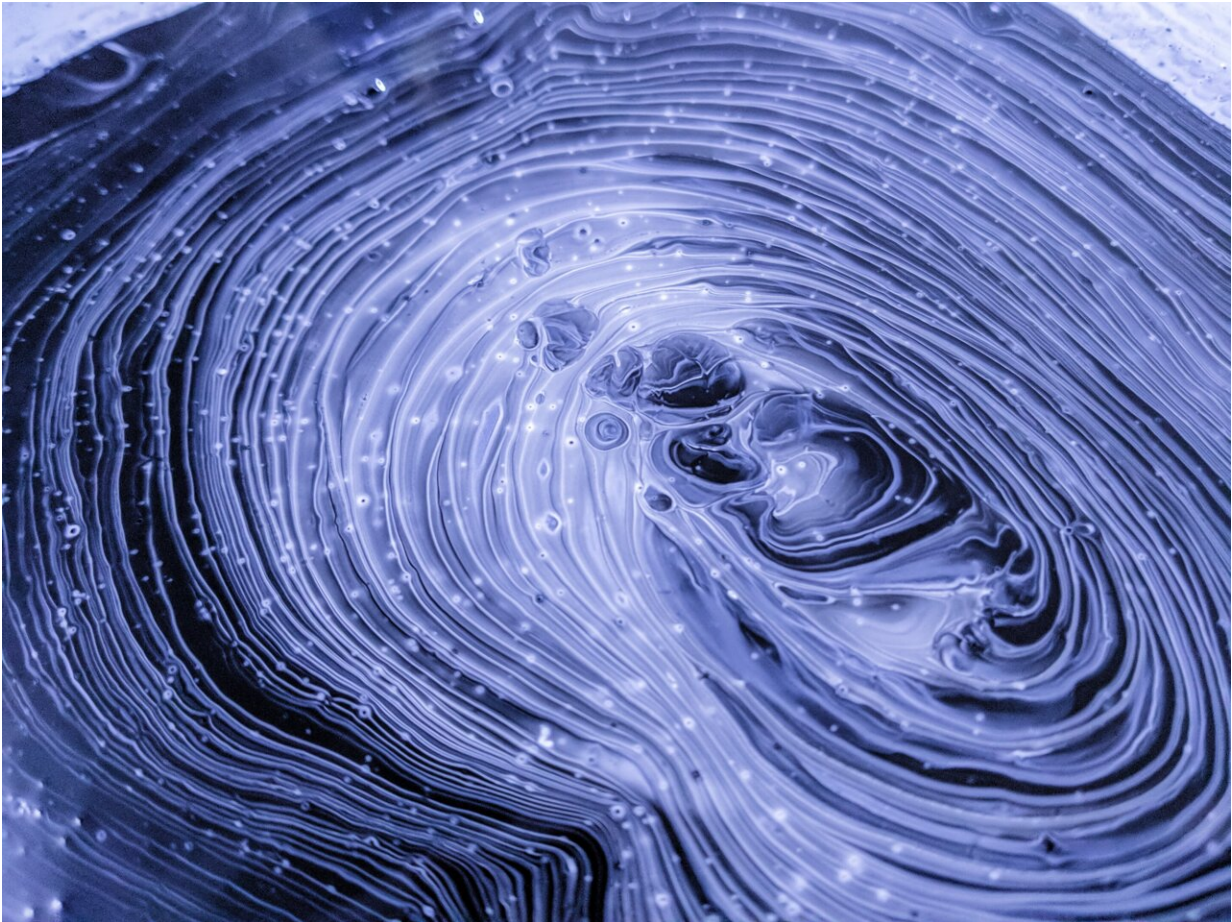


First periods can come as a shock. Five ways to support your kid when they get theirs

June 17 2022, by Melissa Kang



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It's a tale as old as time. Around half of adolescents going through

puberty will get their period.

In [high-income countries](#), an adolescent's first period (known as "menarche") happens on average between ten and 14 years of age, with most occurring between 12 and 13 years.

Why then does this extremely common event still sometimes create shock, awkwardness or distress to parents and young people alike? In a world where gender equality and gender diversity are increasingly acknowledged and understood, it's time to end period stigma—and where better to start than at home.

Questions, so many questions

In an [analysis](#) of 1,000 questions emailed to me when I was writing Dolly magazine's Dolly Doctor column in 2004, questions about periods made up over 13% of all possible questions and topics. Typical questions included:

- I'm 15 and havn't gotten my periods yet. My sister who is two years younger then me has got hers Is there something wrong with me?
- Every time i get my period it comes at different times (dates) and they are so confusing one day its heavy then its gone for two days and comes back for another 4 it is realy annoying and its sumtimes heavy and sumtimes light and it alwaysz leaks onto my bed but im too scared to use tampons what can i use to stop it leaking?
- Is having really bad Period Pains "Normal"? but these are not Normal period pains these are one's that i can not get out of bed and i go through 4 pads a day is this BAD OR IS IT NORMAL????"
- im confused, where do u put the tampon in?? and when u have

sex is that the same hole? please help.

The questions continue today. A 2021 [survey](#) of more than 4,200 Australian 13- to 25-year-old girls and women found only around one third asked their mothers for advice about menstruation and menstrual pain. Less than a third consulted a doctor. Only around one in five learned from school about whether their experiences of menstruation were normal and about half turned to the internet for information and advice.

The real dangers of not talking about periods

Menstrual stigma plays a large part in menstrual illiteracy and can have very [real and harmful consequences](#) for adolescents. These include exclusion from school, child marriage (because periods are considered a sign of sexual maturity) or loss of dignity for displaced people.

This problem is not confined to [low- and middle-income countries](#). Attitudes to menstruation remain problematic in [high-income countries](#) too, where researchers have found [menstrual pain](#) is widely normalized and self-managed. This can thwart early detection of conditions including endometriosis.

The cultural meanings of menstruation and menarche can also contribute to [distress and dysphoria](#) among trans boys and non-binary adolescents.

Five tips for first period support

1. Focus on what to expect

The first period can be light and fleeting—a few painless brown-black streaks, rather than an obvious flow of blood lasting days. Focus on what

your child might expect that **FIRST** time, and for a short time afterwards.

The [menstrual cycle](#) does not fully mature after menarche for one to two years, and periods can be irregular throughout that time. This doesn't need to be a concern.

Tell them a period might feel a bit like wetting their pants, it might be painless or there might be cramps or low back pain.

2. Check out all the period products on offer together

Sit down and show your child period products that might be in the home already.

If there are none, there is no harm in buying a packet of disposable pads, a pair of period undies, and perhaps a box of mini tampons to look at, along with website images other options like reusable pads and menstrual cups (which can be a bigger investment).

Disposable pads are still the [most popular](#) period products in Australia. Young people are also taking up [more sustainable options](#).

Explain how to dispose of non-reusable used products and how to wash reusable products. Reassure them that tampons (and cups) are safe to use. Adolescents who swim, play sport, dance, do gymnastics or other activities may want to learn to use tampons or cups as soon as they get their first period.

3. Talk through how to manage tricky period situations

Even though the first (or first few) periods can be painless, they aren't always. Explain most period pain can be managed effectively. Over-the-counter period pain tablets work best if taken at the first hint of a period.

Other tricky situations might involve leaks, being caught without period supplies when at school, out and about, or at sleepovers. If your child moves between homes, ask about how they manage periods at the other home and whether they want your help talking with the other parent.

4. Let them know about private and confidential help available

If your child does have any menstrual problems, there are effective ways to manage them that might involve medical assessment or intervention.

The era of "normalizing" period pain, heavy bleeding and premenstrual syndrome should be long gone. Each young person has the right to health, no matter what! If your child experiences unease or distress related to gender and periods, help them source [support](#).

5. Make a period toolkit together

A period toolkit ideally consists of information and practical stuff.

Books include [Welcome to Your Period](#) (which I co-authored) and there are relevant chapters in books by [Kaz Cooke](#) and [The Girl Guide](#) by Marawa Ibrahim.

It's also good to prepare a handy little case or pouch containing:

- period pads or undies (or their preferred product)
- spare undies

- a couple of period pain tablets.

The awkwardness of adolescence will likely resonate with most of us. But wouldn't it be wonderful if something as commonplace as getting one's first period was not so tainted with stigma, shame or embarrassment?

Setting up good communication early will help ease young people into this stage of life and also create a dynamic where they can raise concerns with you along the way.

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