

# It's Time to Talk!

## Menstrual Health & Hygiene in the UK

Despite recent progress, menstruation remains a taboo topic in the UK, shrouded by embarrassment and shame. This report makes available a large body of research, commissioned by Always®, that helps shed light on the status of Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) in the UK. Among the most recent findings is information about the impact COVID-19 has had on people's period experiences.

By sharing this information and supplementing existing knowledge, Always hopes to help policymakers, organisations, the media and others make informed decisions to improve MHH in the UK.

### This report focuses on 4 key pillars:

1. Young People's and Women's Feelings About Periods
2. Societal Attitudes Towards Periods
3. Menstrual Health & Hygiene Education
4. Access to Period Products

**Whilst much work remains to be done, Always believes that by 2030, alongside the Sustainable Development Goals, we can create a world where we end period stigma — and everyone has access to the menstrual education and period products they need to manage their periods safely and with dignity.**





## Why Should We Care?

Even today, periods can be a scary, confusing, and sometimes profoundly disabling experience in the UK. Many young people still approach puberty without the knowledge, tools and support they need to grow up feeling confident — some are even forced to miss school and other critical parts of daily life because of their periods.

But this doesn't have to be the case. By transforming cultural attitudes and breaking down period-related barriers through practical actions, like the provision of products and education, MHH efforts are helping to address poverty, improve well-being and promote gender equality.

MHH programmes enable young people to stay in school and focus on getting an education. They help

them understand their bodies better and feel more in control of them. They enable them to make informed decisions about how to manage their periods and when to seek support from healthcare professionals. Ultimately, they help tackle a gender-related barrier that, to this date, too often holds girls and women back.

Always has worked to create positive social norms and support around menstruation, whilst providing puberty and confidence education and enabling access to period products. But if we are going to end period poverty and period stigma by 2030, we need to work together across sectors, communities and society at large. There is much more work to be done and we can all play a role.

## About the Research

This report is based on 13 surveys fielded in the UK, between 2015 and 2020, by independent research agencies. The most recent survey was conducted in partnership with Plan International UK. The report also includes search data provided by Performance Media and usage data from Apple apps.

There remains an opportunity to gather further data from additional people, including marginalised groups and ethnic minorities in particular.

Always would like to thank all the contributors and research partners to the report.

### CONTRIBUTORS



### RESEARCH PARTNERS



# Key Findings

## Periods are still surrounded by shame & secrecy and too often result in negative feelings.

When getting their first period, a young person's top 3 reactions are:<sup>8</sup>

Scared	41%
Confused	36%
Embarrassed	32%

### Talking about periods is taboo.

- The UK is the least supportive European country when it comes to talking openly about periods, out of 13 European countries surveyed.<sup>1</sup>
- Whilst 63% of people (ages 18–70) say they support talking openly about periods, only 38% actually do.<sup>1,2</sup>
- People feel more comfortable talking openly about politics, family problems and sex than about periods.

#### % of population that feels comfortable talking openly about:<sup>2</sup>

1 Politics	52%
2 Family problems	47%
3 Sex	45%
<b>4 Periods</b>	<b>42%</b>
5 STDs	39%

## Period teasing and shaming is common in the UK.



2 in 5 young people (ages 13–17) have experienced it.<sup>8</sup>



While nearly 1 in 3 believe that period jokes are harmless fun,<sup>2</sup> they are causing young people to feel:<sup>8</sup>

Self-conscious	42%
Embarrassed	33%
Less Confident	28%

## The media contributes to the negative portrayal of periods in society.<sup>8</sup>



Nearly 1 in 4 young people have seen periods referred to negatively in a movie or on TV.



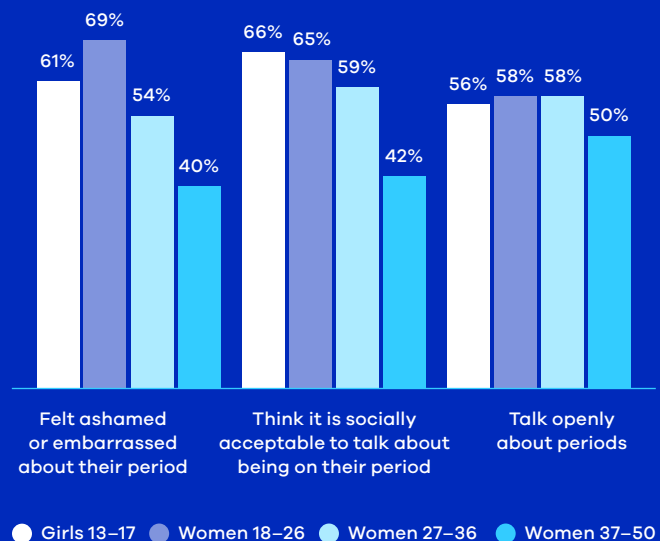
Nearly 1 in 5 have seen them referred to negatively on social media.

## Talking more openly about periods will help people with periods feel more confident.

In households that talk openly about periods, young people feel:<sup>9</sup>

Supported	63%
Comfortable	54%
Confident	29%

## Despite feeling the most period shame, girls & younger women are leading the charge against it by being the most likely to talk openly about periods.<sup>2,8</sup>



● Girls 13–17 ● Women 18–26 ● Women 27–36 ● Women 37–50

# Key Findings

## In order to create a society where periods are less stigmatised, we need to:

1. Further elevate the voices of young people who are already driving change.
2. Promote open conversations about periods.
  - To help promote open conversations, we must look at the deep-rooted values of those who currently don't talk openly about periods and develop messaging that connects with them.

- Adults who don't talk openly about periods include:<sup>2</sup>

Unconvinced Fathers	32%
Unconvinced Men 18–46	30%
Unconvinced Mothers	22%
Unconvinced Women 18–46	20%

## Whilst young people understand the basics about puberty, too many feel unprepared for their first period.<sup>8</sup>

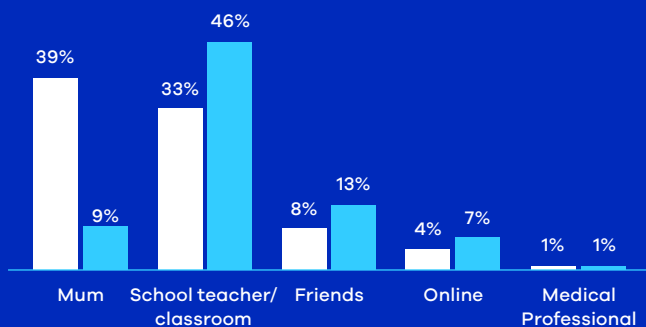
79% say they know what happens to girls and boys during puberty.



1 in 3 young people don't feel prepared for their first period.

## For young people with periods, mums are their first & most trusted source of information. For boys, school is.

Where did you FIRST learn about periods?<sup>9</sup>



● Young people with periods ● Boys

Online, young people with periods use search engines to find information, trusting social media and videos the most.<sup>8</sup>

## Access to period products continues to be an issue, especially given the impact of COVID-19.



During COVID-19, 1 out of 5 women have struggled to get period products.<sup>3\*</sup>



1 out of 5 adults are worried about their ongoing ability to afford them, rising to 1 out of 4 among parents.<sup>3</sup>

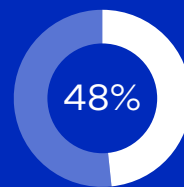
## Not being able to afford period products has negative emotional, social and behavioural impact on young people's lives.

Young people say it makes them feel:<sup>4</sup>

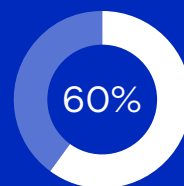
Embarrassed	61%
Sad	39%
Not very feminine	39%
Ashamed	33%

Nearly 1 in 10 girls have missed school because they did not have access to period products.<sup>4</sup>

## Conversely, amongst those who have been able to access free period products:



In the UK: 48% said it has enabled them to take part in (more) clubs, PE, sports, etc.<sup>6</sup>



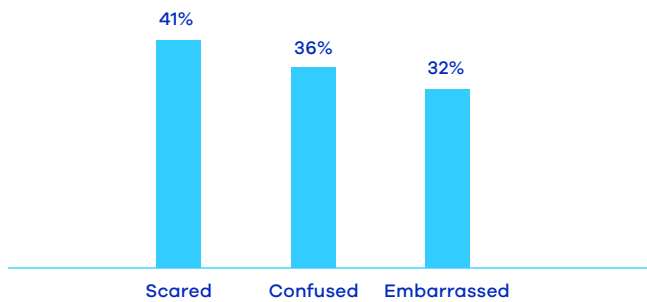
In Scotland: 60% were more able to continue with day-to-day activities during their period.<sup>20</sup>

## The majority of the British public (67%) believes the government still needs to do more to provide period products for free to those who need them.<sup>8,3</sup>

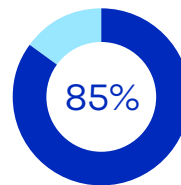
# Young People's and Women's Feelings About Periods

Period shame prevails and impairs. Although menstruation is a normal bodily function, it too often results in negative feelings. These feelings, alongside other MHH challenges, can cause people with periods to avoid participating in normal daily activities.

**When getting their first period, a young person's top 3 reactions are:<sup>8</sup>**



**These feelings cause young people to participate in compensating behaviors:**

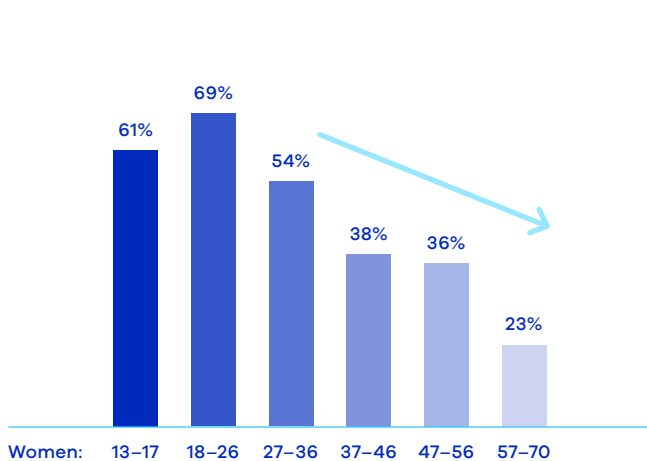


**85% of young people** have tried to hide the fact that they're on their period from those around them (e.g. by hiding their pad or tampon).<sup>8</sup>

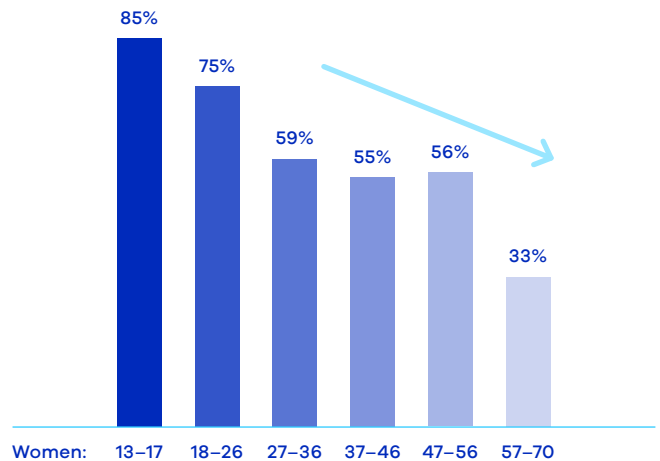
- **Nearly half** have lied about being on their period.<sup>8</sup>
- **1 in 5 girls** avoid after school activities, going to the gym or visiting friends' houses when they're on their period.<sup>6</sup>
- **1 in 3** avoid sports.<sup>6</sup>

**Feelings of period shame and period hiding are much more common among girls and young women compared to women of older age cohorts.<sup>2,8</sup>**

**Felt ashamed or embarrassed about your own period**



**Tried to hide the fact that you're on your period from those around you (e.g. hiding your pad or tampon)**



# Societal Attitudes Towards Periods

People's feelings towards periods are heavily influenced by those around them and the society in which they live, especially during puberty — a time of transformative changes.

## Society in the UK harbours harmful beliefs and behaviours related to menstruation.

### Teasing and shaming are common.



**2 in 5 young people** have been teased or shamed by others because of their period.<sup>8,2</sup>



**1 in 7 girls** aged 10–18 have received comments about their cleanliness or hygiene, **with a high of 1 in 4 amongst 19-year-olds.**<sup>19</sup> This indicates that periods are still perceived by many as unhygienic, which we know contributes to overall shame and stigma.

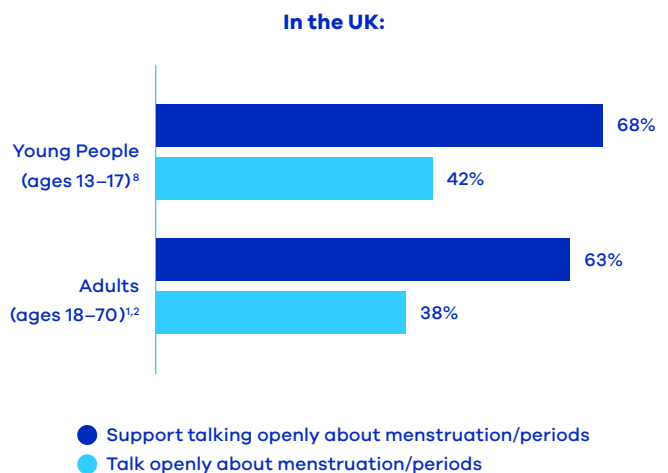
### Talking about periods is taboo.

The UK is the least supportive European country when it comes to talking openly about periods, out of the 13 European countries surveyed.

#### % that support talking openly about periods/menstruation:<sup>1</sup>

Portugal	84%
Croatia	78%
Spain	75%
France	72%
Belgium	72%
Germany	72%
Sweden	71%
Poland	69%
Netherlands	68%
Italy	66%
Romania	66%
Czech Republic	63%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>63%</b>

While a majority say they support talking openly about menstruation, few actually do.



### People feel more comfortable talking openly about politics, family problems and sex than about periods.

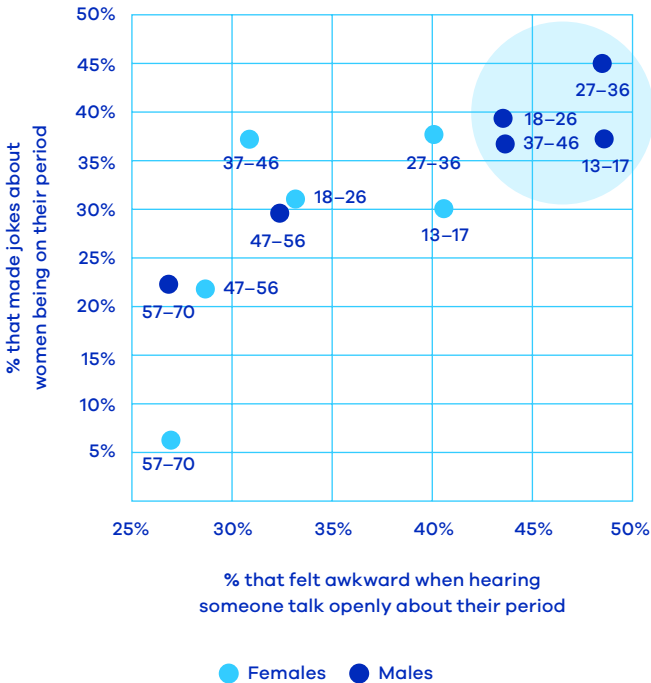
Out of the topics tested, only talking openly about Sexually Transmitted Diseases made people feel more uncomfortable than talking about periods.

#### % of population that feels comfortable talking openly about:<sup>2</sup>

1 Politics	52%
2 Family problems	47%
3 Sex	45%
<b>4 Periods</b>	<b>42%</b>
5 STDs	39%

### Men feel especially awkward when it comes to period talk.

They're also more likely to joke about women being on their period, especially males aged 13-46.<sup>2,8</sup>



### Period jokes make me feel...<sup>8</sup>

*"Irritated because often the jokes are degrading and insinuate fictitious things about me, like that I am highly emotional and cannot control what I do."*  
Female, Age 17.

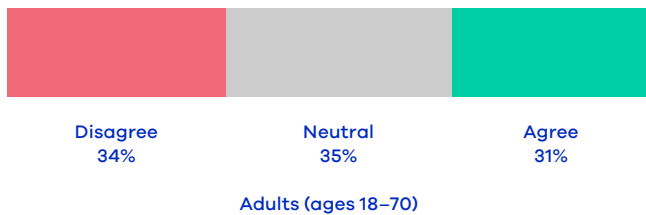
*"Annoyed as they don't understand a woman's period."*  
Female, Age 17.

*"Awkward but I did not take it to heart."*  
Female, Age 17.



### The public is divided on whether period jokes are harmless fun.

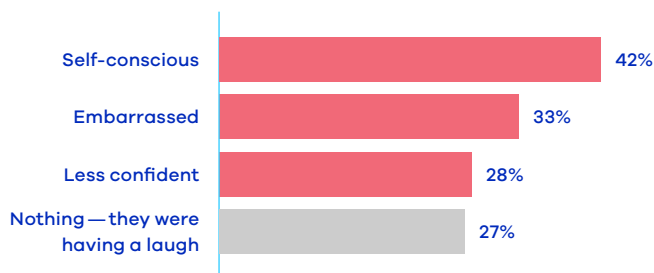
Making jokes about periods is harmless fun:<sup>2</sup>



Whilst leveraging humour can help manage stress and mitigate the negative effects of certain situations, it's important that people — especially men — avoid weaponising the conversation around periods. With most period jokes leveraging offensive and discriminatory language, we see that they propagate negative feelings amongst those with periods.

### But, reactions from young people with periods show the negative impact that period jokes can have.

How did it make you feel when someone made a joke about you being on your period?<sup>8</sup>



### The media contributes to the negative portrayal of periods in society:<sup>8</sup>



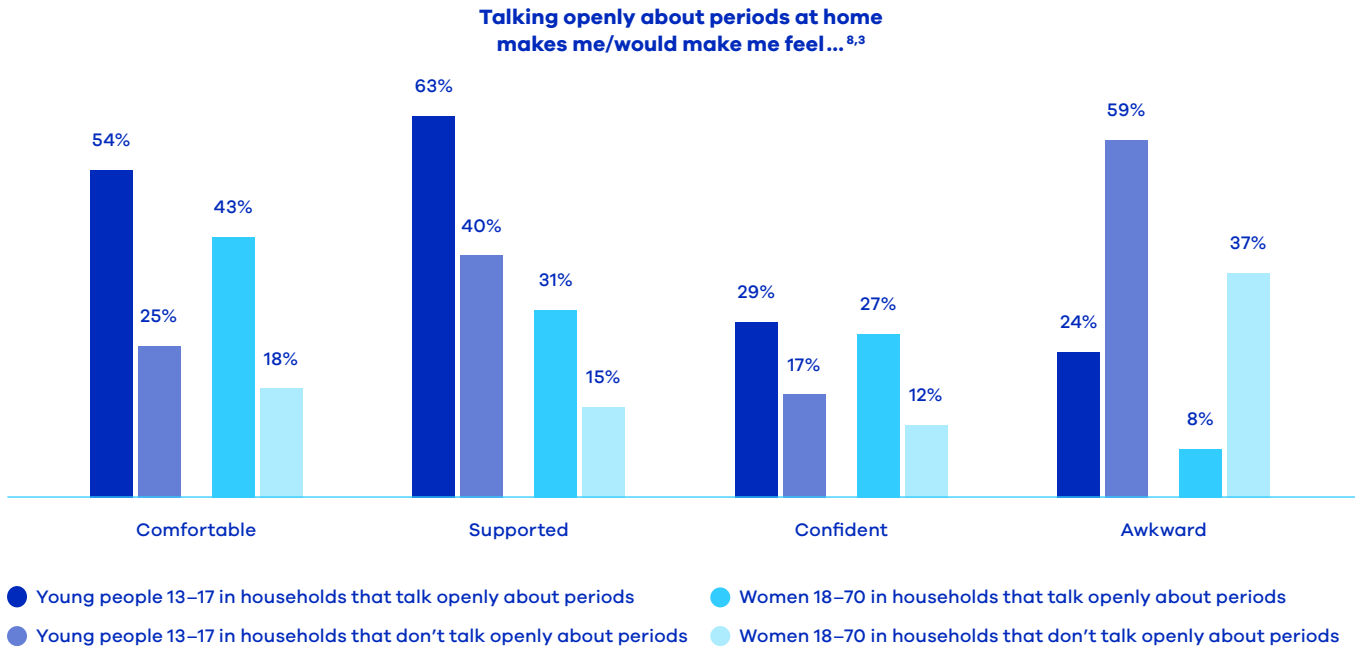
Nearly 1 in 4 young people have seen periods referred to negatively in a movie or on TV.



Nearly 1 in 5 have seen them referred to negatively on social media.

## Talking openly about periods helps young people with periods and women feel more confident.

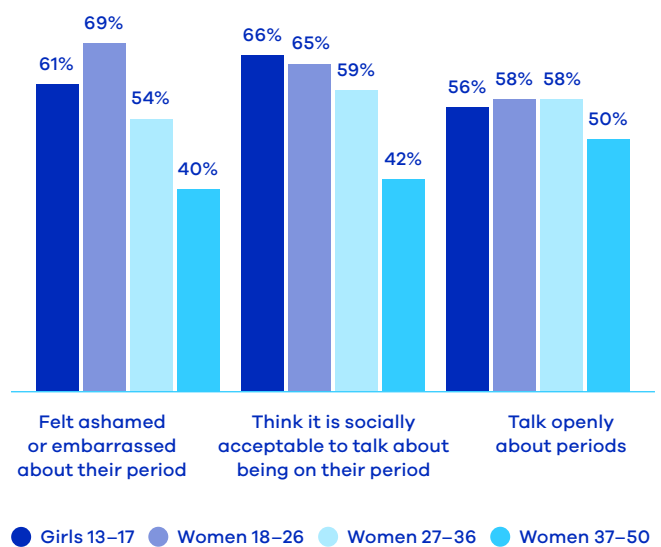
In households that don't talk openly about periods, young people and women anticipate the conversation would make them feel awkward. In households that do, young people and women actually feel comfortable, supported and confident.



## How do we drive change?

**Young women are feeling the most period shame but, at the same time, they're leading the charge against it by being the most likely to talk openly about periods.**

Older women feel less shame, but they're also less likely to help mitigate the feelings of shame amongst younger women because they're less likely to talk openly about periods.<sup>2,8</sup>





## In order to create a society where periods are less stigmatised, we need to:





1. Further elevate the voices of young people who are already driving change.
2. Promote open conversations about periods.

To help promote open conversations, we must look at the deep-rooted values of those who currently don't talk openly about periods and develop messaging that connects with them. Connecting with those values will ensure the message resonates more broadly and ultimately will help drive change.

### Adults who don't talk openly about periods include:<sup>2</sup>

Unconvinced Fathers	32%
Unconvinced Men (ages 18–46)	30%
Unconvinced Mothers	22%
Unconvinced Women (ages 18–46)	20%

### Key value attributes and suggested messaging:<sup>2</sup>

Societal Group Unconvinced to Talk Openly About Periods	Key Value Attributes	How to Position the Message
 <p><b>Unconvinced Fathers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive to conform to social norms</li> <li>• Value friendships, social trust and etiquette</li> <li>• Often question what really matters in life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communicate what supporting someone during their period looks like</b>— and how that ties to friendship and trust (e.g. by taking the time to understand what his child is going through— through open period conversations and ensuring they know they can come to him if they want to talk— he can strengthen his relationship with them)</li> <li>• <b>Provide techniques or tools</b> to talk about periods with others, so they don't end up in awkward situations (e.g. provide practical guidelines and social guidance on talking about periods)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Unconvinced Men (ages 18–46)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value respect</li> <li>• Believe the father is the head of the family</li> <li>• Have strong social values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reframe the value of respect.</b> Highlight the positive role that respectful men can play towards women (e.g. by proactively supporting people during their periods they can show respect and help the person feel more confident and capable; avoid blaming men for toxic behaviour)</li> <li>• <b>Stress how talking openly about periods can show care for people</b> in their lives and is part of doing 'the right thing' (e.g. explain that women often feel a lot of shame and discomfort around periods and that by talking openly about periods with them, they can help change that)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Unconvinced Mothers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional</li> <li>• Proud mothers</li> <li>• Nervous about big societal changes</li> <li>• Consider learning new things important</li> <li>• Prioritise their child's health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Avoid framing period talk as too progressive</b>, or requiring radical change— instead try to normalise period conversations (e.g. focus on how mothers have been passing on their knowledge about periods to their children for centuries)</li> <li>• <b>Highlight the positive health-impacts</b> of talking openly about periods (e.g. it allows her child to better understand their cycle, notice and discuss irregularities, feel comfortable seeking help, etc.)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Unconvinced Women (ages 18–46)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More traditional</li> <li>• More focused on their success, career and status</li> <li>• Value health</li> <li>• Want self-respect</li> <li>• Not self-confident or pleasure-seeking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Position periods as non-threatening:</b> instead, encourage her with messaging that positions talking openly about periods as something that will not harm her status, career or self-confidence (e.g. give her the vocabulary to push back if she experiences harmful period jokes in the office/life in general)</li> <li>• <b>Help her see the positive impact:</b> focus on how talking about periods is healthy and a form of self-respect (e.g. it can improve your understanding of your menstrual cycle, validate your experiences and improve self-acceptance)</li> </ul>

## Period Stigma & Gender Norms

Period stigma is one branch of an interconnected web of gender issues. It ties into how society perceives girls and women, which spills over into how girls and women perceive themselves.

### Period stigma is correlated with gender roles:

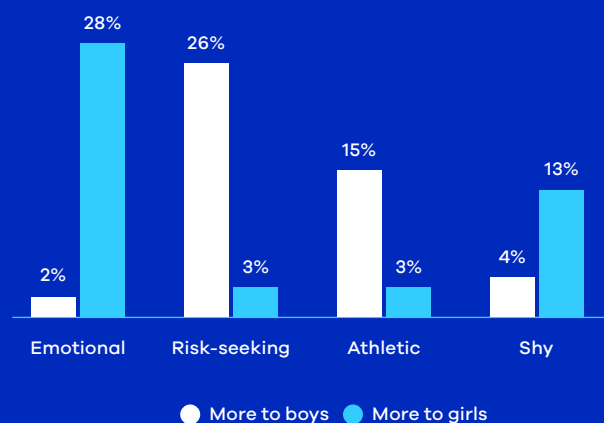
The less likely people are to talk openly about periods, the less likely they are to see girls as risk-seeking, athletic and ambitious.<sup>2</sup>

### Gender stereotyping is still an issue in the UK.

There is still a stark difference between how the British public perceives boys and girls:

- **Emotional:** 16 times more people believe this applies more to **girls** than boys
- **Risk-seeking:** 10 times more people believe this applies more to **boys** than to girls
- **Athletic:** 4 times more people believe this applies more to **boys** than to girls
- **Shy:** 3 times more people believe this applies more to **girls** than boys

Characteristics that, according to the British public, apply:<sup>2</sup>



# Menstrual Health & Hygiene Education

MMH education plays a critical role in helping people realise that periods are a natural, healthy part of life — not something to be awkward or embarrassed about. It enables young people to feel ready and confident to manage their periods and helps ensure that parents, teachers and peers are best positioned to support them.

## Most young people understand the basics about puberty:<sup>8</sup>

- 79% say they know what happens to girls and boys during puberty.
- 67% feel like they have the knowledge they need to stay confident.

## Girls seem to be better informed than boys:<sup>8</sup>

- 86% of girls say they know what happens to girls and boys, versus 65% of boys.
- 71% feel like they have the knowledge to stay confident, versus 65% of boys.



**But only 1 in 3 feel prepared for their first period.<sup>8</sup>**

### When I got my first period...<sup>8</sup>

*"I didn't really know what was happening or what it was." Female, age 17.*

*"[I felt] dysphoric." Non-binary, age 16.*

*"I felt nervous and a little confused." Female, age 16.*

## The UK Department of Education's new statutory guidelines should help.

The new [guidelines](#) that came in to play in September make **puberty and menstrual health education mandatory for primary and secondary schools in England**. This should help fill existing knowledge gaps, whilst fostering open communication and helping break down societal barriers and stigma around MHH.

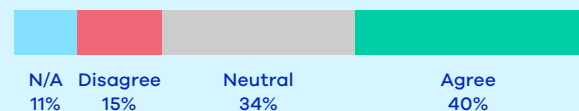
**84% of young people** agree with the government's guidance to make it mandatory to teach both sexes what the other sex goes through during puberty.<sup>8</sup>

## Parents and carers play a crucial role in building knowledge and influencing attitudes.

- Mum is the #1 trusted source of period information amongst young people with periods.<sup>8</sup>
- 67% of young people have had at least one conversation with their mum about periods. 31% have had at least one conversation with their dad.<sup>11</sup>
- Three-quarters of mums (73%) and half of dads (53%) feel they have enough knowledge to talk to their children about puberty and periods.<sup>2</sup>
- **But 1 in 3 feel awkward about explaining puberty and periods to their kids.<sup>3</sup>**

## The COVID-19 pandemic has made 2 in 5 parents feel more responsible for teaching their kids about periods.<sup>3</sup>

**In the light of the recent coronavirus quarantine, I now feel more responsible for educating my kids about puberty & periods at home**



Parents of children under 18 years

## This perceived responsibility is not translating into action:<sup>8</sup>

- Only 14% of young people feel they talk more about periods in their household now than they did before the pandemic.
- 1 in 6 feel they've learned less about puberty and periods as a result of not being in school in the past months.

# Sources of Puberty & Period Education

Young people with periods differ from boys in where they learn about periods.

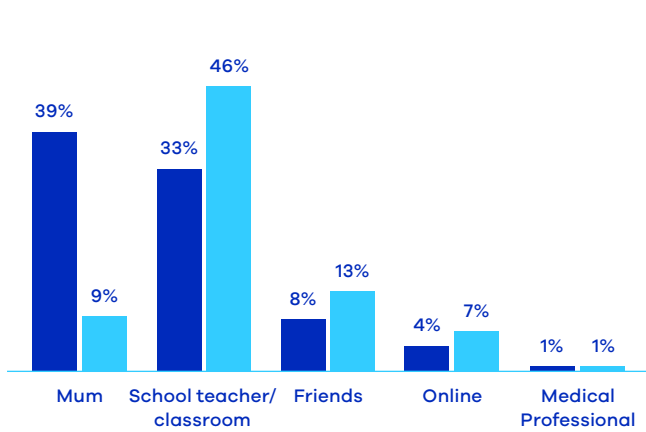
### Among Young People with Periods:

- Mums are the first, most trusted and greatest source of information about periods for most.
  - 81% have had multiple period-related conversations with their mum. They find these conversations to be comfortable (68%) and helpful (80%).
  - Only 38% have talked to their dad about periods.
- School is the second most important source of information, followed by online resources and friends.

### Among Boys:

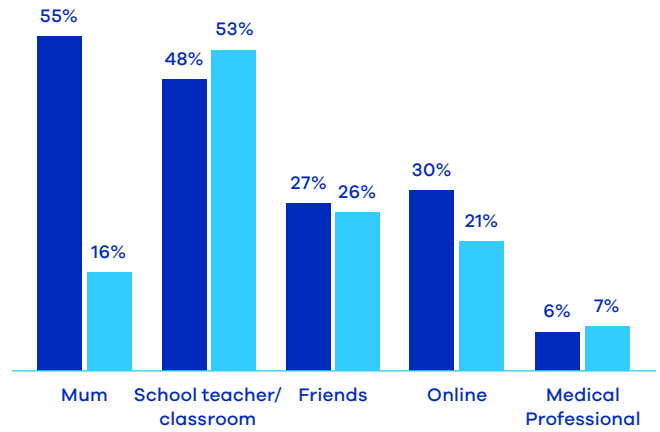
- Nearly half of boys first learn about periods at school. Unlike girls, only 9% first learn about them from their mum.
- School is their greatest and most trusted source of information about periods.

Where did you FIRST learn about periods?<sup>a</sup>



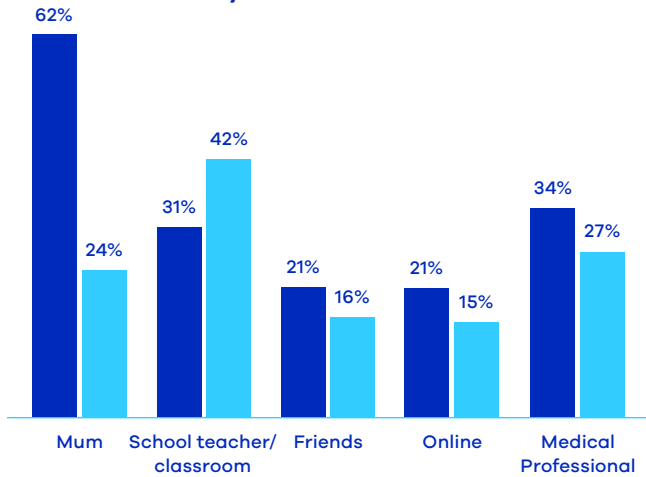
● Young people with periods ● Boys

Where have you learnt THE MOST about periods?<sup>a</sup>



● Young people with periods ● Boys

What sources of information do you TRUST the most?<sup>a</sup>



● Young people with periods ● Boys



### Online, young people with periods use search engines to find information, trusting social media and videos the most.

Of those that learned about periods online, nearly half used Google to search for information.<sup>8</sup>

- The most searched terms related to periods are:<sup>17</sup>
  - How to stop period pain
  - Spotting before period
  - Puberty-related topics, including questions about first periods and what happens during puberty
- For many of these topics the most frequently consulted source online is the [National Health Service website](#).<sup>17</sup>

Of those that trusted online resources, social media and video platforms top the trust list.<sup>8</sup>

- Half rank social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) and video sites (e.g. Vimeo, YouTube) as their most trusted sources.
- Websites and forums come in third.

### Boys' online habits are similar, but they use social media more than Google as a source of learning about periods online.<sup>8</sup>

**Very few young people rank apps as either their most useful or most trusted source of period information.**

But, amongst users, the most popular are Flo and Clue.<sup>14</sup>

### Educators

Educators source their teaching materials on puberty and periods from:<sup>12</sup>

Period protection brands including Always and Tampax	58%
The PSHE Association	56%
The National Health Service	51%
TES	50%
A general internet search	43%

### Parents

When asked what sources could be helpful for information about their daughter's first period, mums of teens said:<sup>7</sup>

None	36%
Information my daughter brought home from school (pamphlet/booklet)	21%
Online	18%
Friends/Family	16%

Puberty and period topics that most interest mums are:<sup>11</sup>

- How to talk with your daughter about periods
- Personal hygiene and good health
- Emotional and physical changes related to puberty
- Boosting confidence



## “About You” — The Always & Tampax School Programme



Always & Tampax have provided a **free puberty and confidence education programme** to schools in the UK and Ireland for more than 10 years. The materials are reviewed and updated on a yearly basis.

Currently, the “About You” programme provides tailored content for both primary and secondary schools with the goal of helping students:

- Understand and embrace their changing body with confidence
- Develop their self-esteem and mental well-being
- Develop healthy relationships with themselves and others

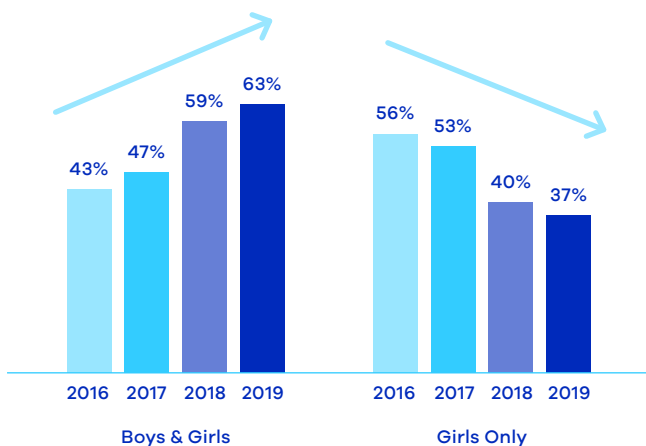
### The “About You” programme has consistently been highly rated by educators:<sup>13</sup>

- ✓ 95% agree the programme is either very credible or credible
- ✓ 95% would recommend the programme to a colleague
- ✓ 93% say students find the programme informative, easy to engage with (90%) and interesting (90%)

### The programme has typically been taught as part of PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education):<sup>10</sup>

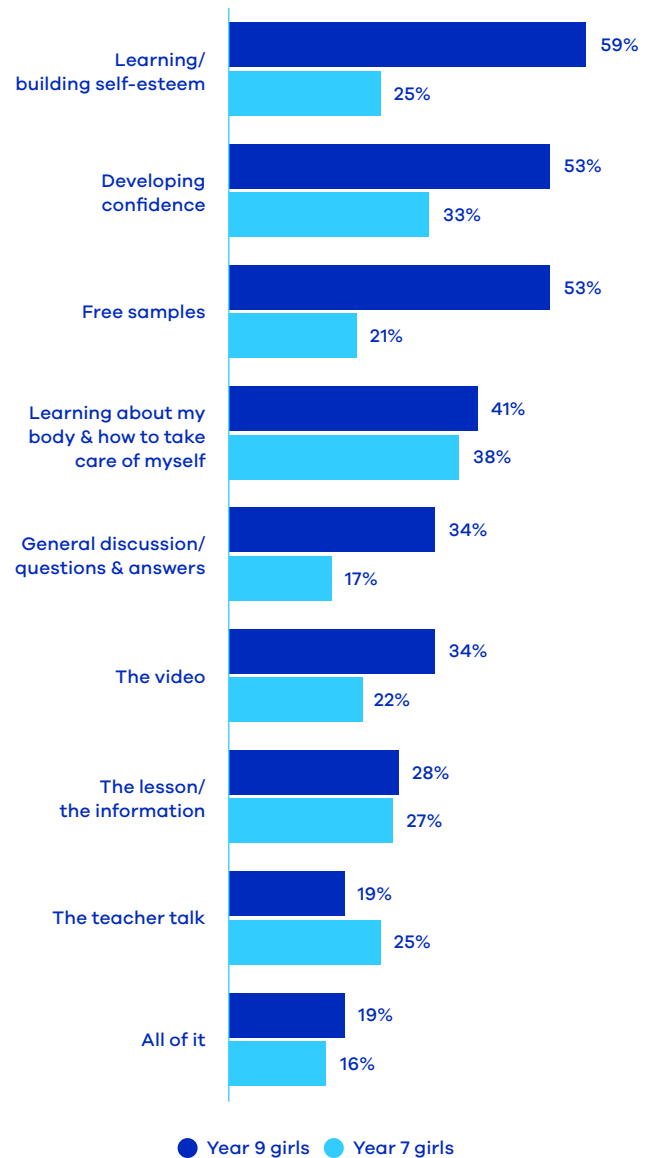
- **The majority of teachers have taught the content in 1 or 2 one-hour lessons (44%/33%).<sup>13</sup>**
- **Co-ed classes are becoming more common**, with 60% of teachers planning to teach the content to girls and boys together, versus 43% in 2016.

Class composition is becoming more co-ed<sup>12</sup>



**Learning how to build self-esteem and confidence are amongst the favourite parts of the programme, especially for Year 9 girls.**

Favourite programme content<sup>12</sup>



**95% of teachers encourage students to talk with their parents after the programme.<sup>13</sup>** A parent leaflet is included in the resources to help facilitate this conversation.



**A period product sample pack is also provided to each student to use, or save for later.**

# Access to Period Products

The issues surrounding access to period products have received much attention recently, with a focus on “period poverty”—the inability to afford period products, and the “tampon tax”—a 5% VAT levied and collected by the government on the price of period products due to their status as “non-essential, luxury goods.”

**The government has started to introduce measures to help address these issues, including:**

**1. Free period products in schools:** As of January 2020, all state-maintained schools and colleges in England are eligible to receive government funding to provide free period products to students.<sup>19</sup>

A similar school programme launched in Scotland in 2018 has been well utilised by students:<sup>20</sup>

- ✓ Two-thirds (65%) of girls and young women in Scotland receive free period products from their school, college or university.
- ✓ Amongst those, 84% say it positively impacts them.

**2. Free period products in Scotland:** In November 2020, Scotland passed the Period Products bill and became the first country in the world to make period products free to all who need them.

**3. Free period products in the NHS:** As of summer 2019, patients in NHS hospitals are eligible to receive free period products on request.<sup>16</sup>

**4. Elimination of the “tampon tax”:** The 5% VAT was eliminated as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, when the UK’s Brexit transition period ended.<sup>15</sup>

**But — access to period products continues to be an issue in the UK.**

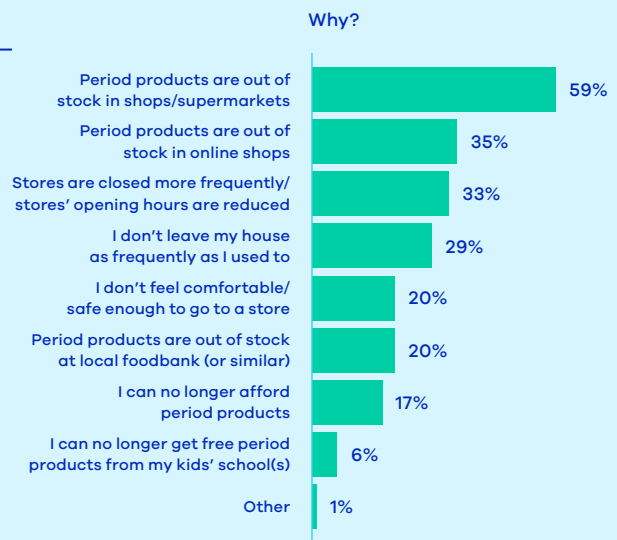
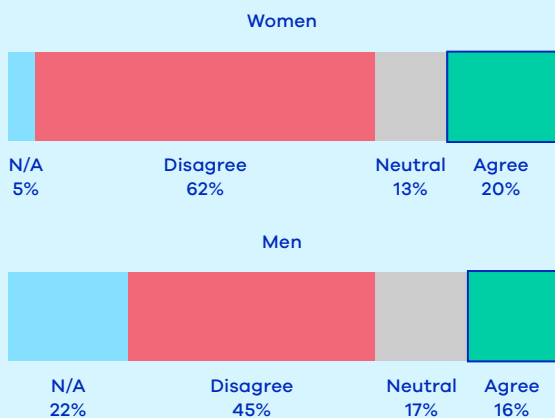
**In 2019:<sup>6</sup>**

- 1 in 6 girls considered herself to be experiencing period poverty.
- 9 out of 10 girls have had a friend ask them for a pad or tampon because they could not afford one themselves.

## In 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic)

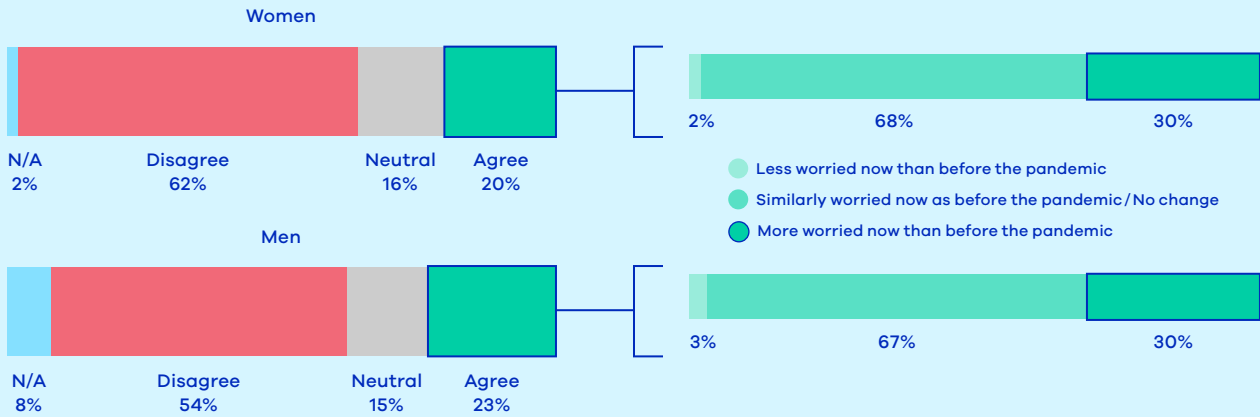
**1 out of 5 adults have struggled to get period products.**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, I have struggled to get period products<sup>3\*</sup>



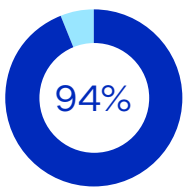
**1 out of 5 adults are worried about their ongoing ability to afford period products.**  
 Out of those who are worried, a third of them are more worried now than they were before the pandemic.

**I am worried about my ability to afford period products for myself or my family members<sup>3</sup>**

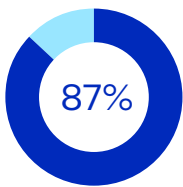


**Parents are more worried than the broader population, with 1 out of 4 worried about their ongoing ability to afford period products.**

**School staff are frequently asked by girls for support and, at least before the new government policy came in to play, couldn't always give it, causing frustration.<sup>9</sup>**



Over **9 in 10 school staff** had been **approached personally by a student** asking for a pad or tampon or know a colleague that has. And it's something that happens regularly for most — twice a week or more frequently.

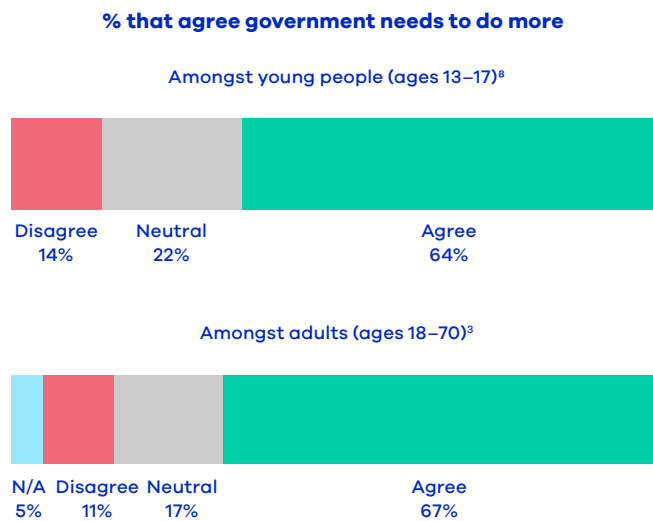


In 2018, **the majority of school staff (87%)** said they had access to a supply of period protection — but **for almost half it often ran out.**



Overall, school staff were frustrated about the issue — **2 in 5 felt like they were failing their girls** as they could not provide a long-term solution, and **a third** felt angry because they believed they should be doing more as a school.

**A large majority of the British public believes the government still needs to do more to provide period products for free to those who need them.**



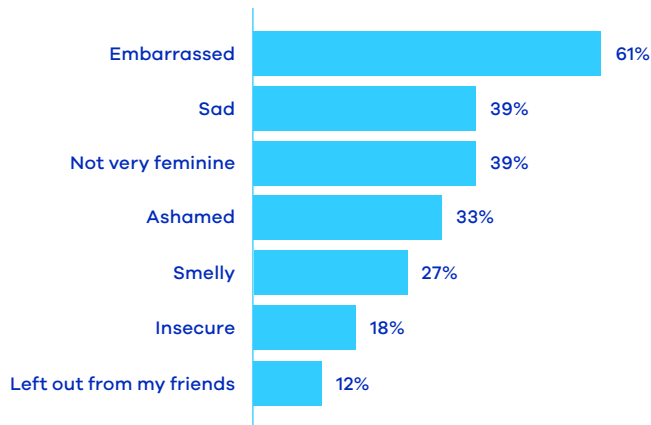


## Lack of access to period products has a negative emotional, social and behavioural impact on young people’s lives.

More than half of girls and women who have experienced period poverty believe it has had a direct effect on their success, confidence and happiness.<sup>5</sup>

### Negative emotional impact:<sup>4</sup>

Not being able to afford period products makes me feel:



### Girls miss school:<sup>4</sup>

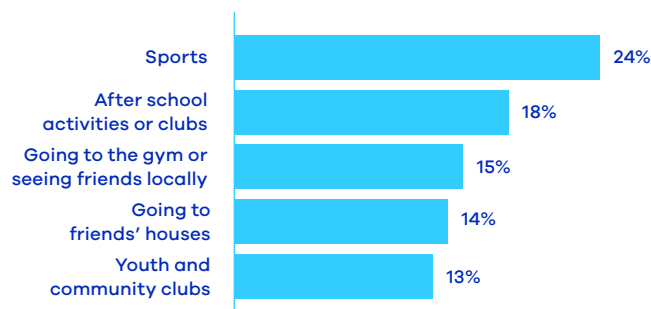
- Nearly 1 in 10 girls have missed school because they did not have access to period products.
- Girls have missed an average of 4.56 days of school because they/their family couldn’t afford pads or tampons.

### Negative impact on behaviour and performance in school:<sup>9</sup>

- 3 in 5 teachers think girls affected by period poverty are more likely to have behavioural problems.
- 40% agree that girls in need of free period protection are often quiet and reserved in class.
- One-third agree that they tend to perform below average.

### Girls miss clubs & activities:<sup>6</sup>

Activities avoided due to lack of access to period products:



### Missing these activities has a negative impact on social development:<sup>6</sup>

Among women who didn’t attend clubs or activities during their school years:

- 29% said it affected their ability to socialise
- 22% feel it held them back in later life
- 22% think they lacked skills necessary for teamwork/working with others later in life

### COVID-19 has helped reinforce the importance of school, sports and other organised activities for young people’s development:

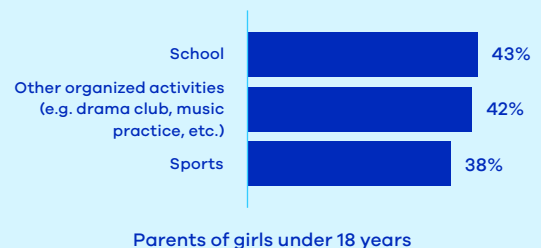
Amongst young people:<sup>8</sup>

- 52% agree not being in school has made it **difficult to learn new things**
- 58% **feel disappointed** because they missed a special moment in their life (e.g. a prom, a tournament, a recital)
- % that say not being able to after-school activities has made them:



Amongst parents:<sup>3</sup>

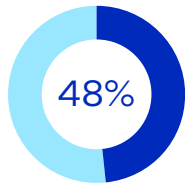
- % of parents that didn’t really appreciate how important these things are for their daughter’s social, emotional and academic development until the coronavirus quarantine:



\*Some data on this page is only available for girls and women. Where data for young people is available, it has been used.

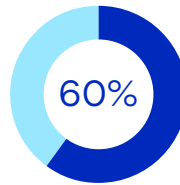
## Access to free period products at school enables young people to stay engaged.

Amongst those who have used the free products available to them:



In the UK

**48% said it has enabled them** to take part in (more) clubs, PE, sports, etc., whether in or out of school.<sup>6</sup>



In Scotland

**60% were more able to continue with day-to-day activities** during their period.<sup>20</sup>

## Period Product Preferences & Habits<sup>7</sup>

### Most young girls use pads.

For their first period:



**81%** used pads



**19%** used tampons

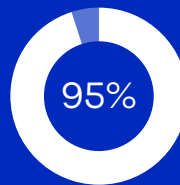


**19%** used liners

### Tampon usage grows as girls get older.

- Tampons tend to start being used as they allow any activity (particularly swimming, going to the beach and playing sport).
- Main reasons for not using a tampon are that they're difficult to insert (33%) or not comfortable to wear (30%).

### Mums make the purchases and influence product choice.



**95%** of mums buy period products for their teens.

- 64% of mums decide the period products for their teens.
- 69% of mums recommend the brand they use themselves for their teen. When choosing something else, it's because the mum believes their teen has a different flow.

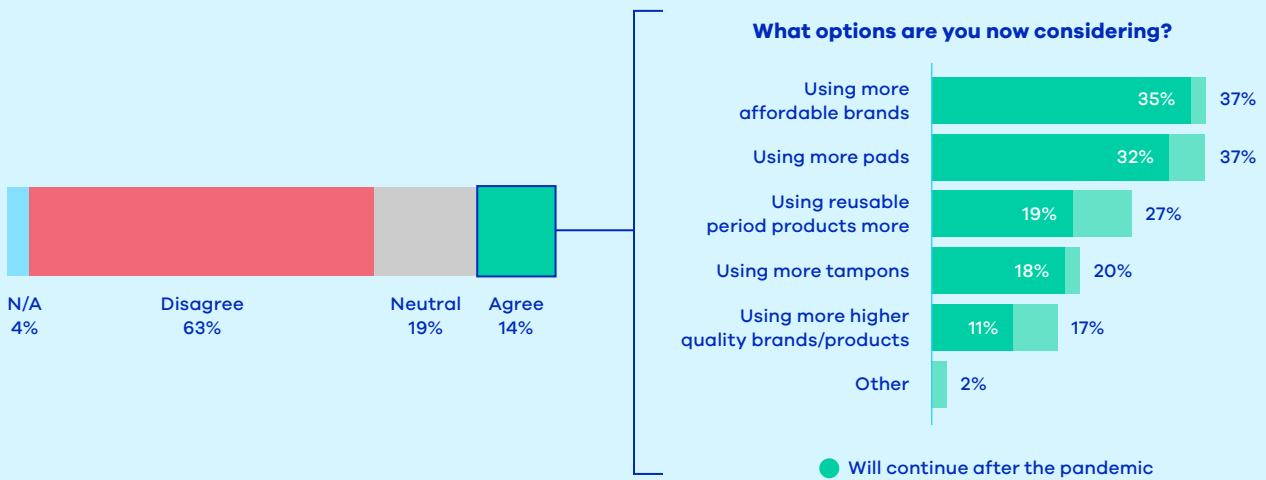


## COVID-19 has driven a shift in product choice and purchase behaviour.

### 14% of women have reconsidered the types of period products they use.

The biggest shift in product choice is toward using more affordable brands and using more pads. The majority of those that have experienced this change in preferences expect to keep these behaviours after the pandemic is over.

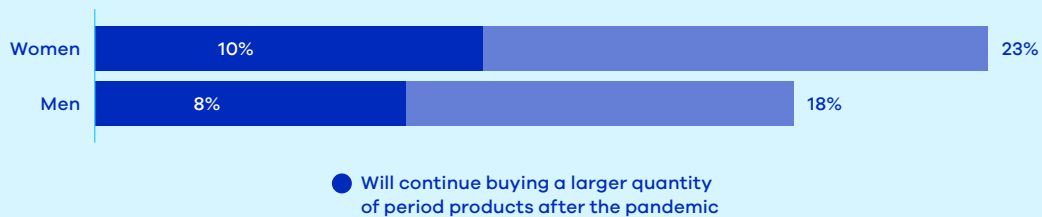
In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, I'm now reconsidering the types of period products I use:<sup>3\*</sup>



### 10% of adults expect to continue buying a larger quantity of period products after the pandemic is over.

23% of women and 18% of men have bought more period products during the pandemic. Among those, around half expect to continue buying a larger quantity of period products after the pandemic is over.

Have bought more period products since the COVID-19 pandemic started than typically did before:<sup>3\*</sup>





## What Needs to Be Done?

**Always believes that periods shouldn't get in the way of young people reaching their full potential.** To help drive meaningful progress towards this mission, Always will continue to work with organizations like Plan International UK and people across the country to:



**Encourage society to talk more openly about periods** by raising awareness of the issues surrounding MHH and the positive impact that this openness will have.



**Elevate the voices of young people** who are already leading the charge against period shame.



**Continue to provide high quality puberty & confidence education** to children, parents and broader society.



**Continue to address the lack of access to period products** that too many people across the UK still face today.

For more information please visit [always.co.uk](https://always.co.uk) or contact Kiran Behal ([behal.kk@pg.com](mailto:behal.kk@pg.com)).

### Survey Details

- <sup>1</sup> Glocalities, January/February 2019: Quantitative nationally representative survey of 18-70 yrs, Europe n=15,586; UK n=1047.
- <sup>2</sup> Glocalities, January/February 2020: Quantitative nationally representative survey of 18-70 yrs, UK n=1043.
- <sup>3</sup> Glocalities, April/May 2020: Quantitative nationally representative survey of 18-70 yrs, UK n=1030.
  - <sup>3\*</sup> Out of those that have someone in their household who experiences periods.
- <sup>4</sup> OnePoll, January/February 2018: Quantitative nationally representative survey, UK n=500 girls 10-18 yrs, n=500 parents of girls 10-18 yrs, n=1000 women 18-63 yrs. with periods.
- <sup>5</sup> OnePoll, June 2018: Quantitative nationally representative survey, UK n=1000 women 18-82 yrs.
- <sup>6</sup> OnePoll, July 2019: Quantitative nationally representative survey, UK n=500 girls 10-18 years who have periods, n=1500 women 18-91 yrs.
- <sup>7</sup> Point of Market Entry Purchase Behaviour, June 2015. UK n=300 moms of teens, n=300 teens.
- <sup>8</sup> SurveyMonkey, May/June 2020: Quantitative survey, UK n=2030 girls and boys 13-17 yrs.
- <sup>9</sup> We Are Futures, February 2018: Quantitative survey, UK n=545 school teachers and staff.
- <sup>10</sup> We Are Futures, 2018: Quantitative survey, England n=121 teachers, n=80 female students, Year 7.

<sup>11</sup> We Are Futures, January 2019: Quantitative survey, England n=128 parents of 11-14-yr-olds.

<sup>12</sup> We Are Futures, September 2019 (1): Quantitative survey, England n=213 teachers, n=60 parents.

<sup>13</sup> We Are Futures, September 2019 (2): Quantitative survey, England n=553 teachers, n=105 female students, Year 7 and 9.

### Other Sources

- <sup>14</sup> Apps.apple.com/gb. June 2020.
- <sup>15</sup> Collinson, Patrick. The Guardian. March 2020. [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/06/budget-2020-chancellor-plans-to-finally-end-tampon-tax](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/mar/06/budget-2020-chancellor-plans-to-finally-end-tampon-tax)
- <sup>16</sup> NHS England. March 2019. [www.england.nhs.uk/2019/03/the-nhs-in-england-will-offer-free-tampons-and-other-sanitary-products-to-every-hospital-patient-who-needs-them-simon-stevens-announced-today/](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/03/the-nhs-in-england-will-offer-free-tampons-and-other-sanitary-products-to-every-hospital-patient-who-needs-them-simon-stevens-announced-today/)
- <sup>17</sup> Performance Media, March 2020: Google search analysis.
- <sup>18</sup> Plan International UK. January 2018. "Break the Barriers: Girls' experiences of menstruation in the UK."
- <sup>19</sup> UK Department for Education. January 2020. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/period-products-in-schools-and-colleges/period-product-scheme-for-schools-and-colleges-in-england](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/period-products-in-schools-and-colleges/period-product-scheme-for-schools-and-colleges-in-england)
- <sup>20</sup> Young Scot. January 2020. <https://youngscot.net/news-database/free-period-products-scotland>