

## The leader's instructions (STOP-explanations for the plays) (pdf)

### 1. Stereotypes on menstruations

The interviewees linked such things as adulthood and preparedness to give birth, being sick, moodiness and pain, bad smell and dirtiness.

In this scene you are at a slumber party with friends at the home of one of the group members.

You have cooked tortillas together and talked about your crushes. After eating you eat candy as a dessert and talk together. Soon the topic turns to menstruations. One of the members has just gotten their periods and wants to ask their friends more about it.

1: What do these periods mean?

2: You are a **grown woman now!**<sup>1</sup>

3: Yeah, when your periods start **you can have babies!**<sup>2</sup>

1: Oh no that can't be, I mean were still kids... This **kind of grosses me out.**<sup>3</sup> My little brother said that I'll become **grumpy now every time I get my period.**<sup>4</sup> I was upset when I noticed that he saw that we went to the store to buy pads.

3: Ugh no they do not smell but your stomach really hurts. And yeah, everyone tells me now **whenever I am upset that I'm on my periods even if I am not.**<sup>5</sup>

2: Yeah the **stomach pain**<sup>6</sup> is bad! I was also **called disgusting** when we were at the cabin with my friends and I was on my periods!

1: Hey did you know that my family has friends in Uganda and the daughter of the family told me that periods mean that you're **sick!**<sup>7</sup> I wonder if that is true?

### STOP – explanations for the leader

1) Getting your first period does not yet mean that you are grown up or ready for adulthood. It is a natural part of being a teenager, but childhood still continues. You should also take in consideration the diversity of genders and talk about it with the trackers: everyone who menstruates are not women, and not all women menstruate. Gender identity can be a difficult thing and it is important that no one is labelled based on their looks or personal assumptions.

2) Menstruation does not mean that you are ready to have children even if your body is capable. In addition, everyone who menstruates is not automatically able to have children.

3) Disgust is a common stereotype when it comes to menstruation, but it is still a natural thing and nothing to be disgusted by. What positive adjectives could be linked to menstruation?

4) Menstruation can cause mood swings and irritation, but no one's feelings should be dismissed by assuming they are menstruating. In addition, it is very harmful to define all negative feelings or expressions as "tantrum" or "caused by menstruation" because this diminishes the person's chances to express their feeling or to say no to something.

5) The use of words of this kind increases stereotyped linked to menstruation and strengthens the supposition that feelings are a result of menstruation. This diminishes the other person's feelings.

6) Menstruation can cause pain but everyone has a different experience – some experience pain and some do not.

7) Menstruation does not mean that you are sick – it is a natural part of development.

Helpful questions for the conversation:

- Do you know any other beliefs about menstruation that are not true?
- How is menstruation seen in Finland? Are they a natural thing or are there any negative assumptions?
- Can menstruation also have societal influence?

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## 2. Education and knowledge

Many menstruating persons know nothing about menstruation before they start. The sudden start of menstruations can cause shame, fear as well as confusion. Without knowledge about periods the person might not understand what is happening in their body and can for example think it is an illness.

In this scene you are in Uganda and on your way to school. A group of friends walk to school together. One of the friends has a stomach-ache and suddenly starts to bleed and their dress is stained.

1: Ouch my stomach hurts!

2: Oh that's a shame. It'll pass!

3: Hey look at your dress! There is something red!

1: What are you talking about, red? It's blood! (starts crying) It is coming FROM THERE, **what is happening to me?**<sup>8</sup>

2: **Oh no are you going to die?**<sup>9</sup>(is frightened)

1: I don't want to die, **help!**<sup>10</sup>

3: Yuck you have to go home now! **That is gross!**<sup>11</sup> My mom said you **should be ashamed** if others notice you are bleeding.

1 **returns home crying**<sup>12</sup> when the others continue to walk to school.

STOP – explanation to the leader

8) In Uganda and in many other countries (including Finland) many people do not know what is happening to them when they first get their period. It can also be very scary, and this is since menstruation is not discussed enough.

9) You do not die from menstruation.

10) The feeling can be scary once you start bleeding and do not know what is happening. Everyone has the right to know about their bodily functions and this is why menstruation should be discussed more.

11) Disgust is a common stereotype when it comes to menstruation, but it is still a natural thing and nothing to be disgusted by. What positive adjectives could be linked to menstruation?

12) Some people have to stay home due to menstruation and for that they miss school days. Do you think it is right? How could you fix it? (Menstrual padding, enough information, good bathroom facilities etc.)

Helpful questions:

- What is the situation in Finland, do children know what is happening in their body when they start menstruating?
  - Should everyone have the right to know what is happening in their body? Who is responsible for sharing this information?
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### 3. Beliefs

There are many beliefs and social norms related to menstruation. The interviewees expressed that often many people believe that menstruation makes a person dirty. In this period you are not allowed to hold a baby, climb in trees or ride a bicycle, go to sacred places such as church or mosque, play with other children or cook food. During menstruation, the person is not allowed to participate in farming activities because the plants are believed to ruin.

In this scene you are in Uganda. A mother and her two daughters are talking together because the younger daughter has gotten her period.

Mom: Now that you have started bleeding you must remember a few important things.

Little sister: Oh what things?

Big sister: Important **female** information!<sup>13</sup>

Mom: Yes. Now that you are bleeding there are many **things that you should not do!**<sup>14</sup> The most important thing is you **are not allowed into sacred places such as church or mosque**, because you are **dirty**.<sup>15</sup>

Big sister: Yeah! **And you cannot cook food because it will be ruined!**<sup>16</sup>

Little sister: I am not dirty. We were not taught that in school! We have this thing in scout where we discuss about these things and there we were told that bleeding is not a dirty thing but it's normal!

Mom: Yeah, I heard about that, but you are still not cooking!

Little sister: You should also go and educate yourselves...

### STOP – explanations for the leader

13) Getting your first period does not yet mean that you are grown up or ready for adulthood. It is a natural part of being a teenager, but childhood still continues. You should also take in consideration the diversity of genders and talk about it with the trackers: everyone who menstruates are not women, and not all women menstruate.

14) During menstruation you can still do all the same things such as swim, go to school and to hobbies. You just have to take care that you have the appropriate protection for example a tampon or a menstrual cup while swimming.

15) Things said in this line are very harmful for equality thus they limit the life cycle of a menstruating person and label them as dirty, even though menstruation is a completely normal thing. What would you feel if someone denied you something because of your personal quality? (for example menstruation, long or short hair, the colour of your shirt)

16) These kinds of beliefs exist because people do not have enough information about menstruation. Food doesn't spoil due to menstruation.

Helpful questions:

- How could these harmful beliefs be reduced?
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#### 4. The community's attitude, behaviour, and approach

Talking about menstruation to other people can be uncomfortable, which can lead to people not talking about the subject. Some people that do not menstruate might not realize how menstruation affects them. Sometimes discomfort and lack of knowledge can unravel in for example bullying. This can cause fear and discomfort to people who menstruate about their own menstruation for which they might easily stay home because they are afraid of others' reaction.

In this scene you are in school in Finland. The pupils are in math class and the teacher is handing out the exams. One of the pupils did not do so well in the exam and they are sad about it. The class ends when the bell rings and the children want to go out to jump rope.

1: I don't think I want to jump rope.

2: At least come and spin the jump rope, someone must do it.

1: I don't want to (says angrily).

A group of other people start bullying the person:

1: Haha look, they **are all moody because they have their periods!**<sup>17</sup> Did you **get your period?**<sup>18</sup>

2: YEEW **GROSS!**<sup>19</sup> they have their periods!

3: Stop, I'm **just having a bad day!**<sup>20</sup>

1: **Periods are making you cranky,** yew now **you're always cranky!**<sup>21</sup>

2: **And you smell of periods,**<sup>22</sup> yew! Run to the bathroom!

#### STOP – explanation to the leader

17) The use of these kinds of words increase stereotypes on menstruation and strengthen the assumption that feelings are only caused by menstruation. This diminishes the person's feelings.

18) You should never make assumptions about some one's menstruation because it can be harmful and disturb their privacy

19) Disgust is a common stereotype when it comes to menstruation, but it is still a natural thing and nothing to be disgusted by. What positive adjectives could be linked to menstruation?

20) It is good to talk about your feelings out loud and say if you are having a bad day.

21) Menstruation can cause mood swings and irritation but no one's feelings should be discarded just because they are menstruating.

22) Menstruation does not smell as long as you take good care of menstrual hygiene and health. No need to worry that other people could smell your periods.

Helpful questions:

- How does bullying affect school?
  - How do community's opinions and attitudes affect how people think about certain subjects?
  - Does bullying happen in your school? For what kind of things?
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## 5. Menstrual hygiene

Maintaining menstrual hygiene in Ugandan schools is not easy. According to the interviewees the bathrooms often do not have enough water available and you should carry it in yourself, but it is not always possible. In addition, the bathrooms are described as dirty or non-existing. This can cause school dropouts during periods.

In this scene you are in Uganda. A group of friends are on a break and jumping rope. Suddenly one of the friends stops jumping and blushes.

1: Hey, are you okay?

2: I think I got my period (whispering).

1: Oh, well go to the bathroom, I can come with you!

The others continue jumping when the two head to the bathroom.

1: **There is no water!**<sup>23</sup> I can't even wash my dress.

2: Ugh it's always the same!

1: **I have no choice but to go home!**<sup>24</sup> We would have math next though, it's my favourite. (Says sadly)

2 returns to the others.

3: Where did 1 go?

2: They had to go home. The bathroom was again in bad shape.

3: Ah okay. Well, **I don't think it's fair that you have to skip school every time you have your period.**<sup>25</sup>

The bell rings and the group return to class.

### STOP – explanations for the leader

23) If the bathrooms do not have any water or paper it is nearly impossible to take care of your menstrual hygiene. In addition, for example in Uganda schools might not have any toilets. This affects also to school absences when you cannot change your pad during the day.

24) Many have to skip school days due to menstruation. You are able to do all the same things during menstruation but if you do not have any pads or the school does not have any toilet facilities, you might not have any options.

25) For equality's sake it would be crucial that everyone has the same possibilities to study and learn. Learning is a basic right for everyone!

Helpful questions:

- How should the bathrooms be so that it would be easy to take care of menstrual health?
  - Is it fair that you must miss school because of menstruation?
  - What does absence from school mean? (If you are absent every time for menstruation, you will miss a big part of the teaching and get left behind, repeat years if you miss exams, it affects equality and the society when a part of the population is in a more vulnerable state due to menstruation).
  - How is the situation in Finland? Do you sometimes have to miss school due to menstruation?
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## 6. Menstrual hygiene products

The interviewees were worried about the use of menstrual hygiene products. One concern was that the products would be harmful. Many mentions were made about disposable pads burning the skin or causing cancer. One pad could be used as long as possible because they are very expensive. Depending on family and resources, in addition to actual menstrual pads, old clothes, toilet paper, banana leaves, panties or cotton pads can be used as menstrual padding. In some schools they teach how to make cloth pads.

In this scene a group of friends are going swimming. The friends are on their way to the pool:

1: Oh no!

2: What is it?

1: I think I got my periods! (shyly)

2: Well let's run to the pool, there is a bathroom and you can buy tampons in the cafeteria. It's okay if you got your periods.

1: Yew I don't want to use a tampon! I heard you **get sick** if you use one. It can cause **cancer**<sup>26</sup> ... Besides, you **can't even swim**<sup>27</sup> if you're wearing one!

2: Nonsense, it doesn't cause cancer and you won't get sick. Believe me I've used them!

1: Oh well I was told so... But maybe I don't want to use them...'

2: Why? Let's just buy them, it will be fine.

1: I don't know, I don't know even how to use them and besides (says quietly) **I don't have the money for it**.<sup>28</sup>

2: **But they're not that expensive**.<sup>29</sup>

1: Oh they are! I only get a few pads and **they have to last**<sup>30</sup> because we can't afford to buy more.

2: Oh! I've never thought of it like that! Hey, guess what! (goes through their bag) I have an extra tampon here and I can tell you how to put it! I use the menstrual cup but luckily, I still had these!

1: Okay let's do it.

They run gladly to the pool

**STOP – explanation for the leader**

26) Menstrual products do not cause illness or cancer and they are safe to use. In Uganda many believed that they could cause illness and cancer for example. These kinds of beliefs are due to the fact that not everyone has enough information about menstruation.

27) During menstruation you can still do all the same things such as swim, go to school and to hobbies. You just have to take care that you have the appropriate protection for example a tampon or menstrual cup while swimming.

28) Yes, everyone is not able to afford menstrual products thus they are expensive. In Uganda, a family's daily budget is often so small that no money is left for menstrual products. Even in Finland they are expensive thus the scenario is also possible here. Do you know how much menstrual products are taxed in Finland?

29) Because families' financial situations can be very different, it can be difficult to understand that not everyone has access to certain things that others could consider self-evident.

30) Based on the interviews conducted in Uganda we noticed that menstrual protections are used as long as possible. Some might only have one pad or use old clothes, plant leaves or magazines instead of pads. Should everyone have access to necessary hygiene products?

Helpful questions:

- How does the lack of tampons / pads or other menstrual products affect going to school? What about hobbies?
- Could it be possible that someone in Finland would not be able to afford menstrual products?
- Can you think of any beliefs or stereotypes on menstruation products in Finland or does everyone know how to use them?

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## 7. Going to school while menstruating

During menstruation school dropouts increase. Many times, people stay home due to the lack of menstrual paddings or hygiene. In addition, a lot of shame, fear and shyness is connected to menstruation for which often people are afraid to talk about it with their parents. Sometimes even parents do not let their children go to school during menstruation. Missing school due to menstruation disrupts the schooling of children and teenagers because often they are absent from four to five days. This affects their learning and school activity because they have not learned the same things as their classmates. Sometimes absence from school can also lead to punishment and dropouts.

In this scene we are home and ready to go to school.

Child: Mom, mom come here! (screams)

Mom: Well what is it, you should get ready for school!

Child: Mom I'm bleeding!

Mom: Let's see. Aah, you got your period. **Today you'll be staying home because you can't go to school like that!**<sup>31</sup>

Child: Mom! We have an exam! Why can't I?

Mom: Do you want to go to school with your dress dirty? **We don't have any pads right now.**<sup>32</sup>

Child: Well maybe no one will notice.

Mom: They certainly will and then **you'll get bullied! You are staying home, end of discussion!**<sup>33</sup>

### **STOP – explanations for the leader**

31) Menstruation is still a taboo in many countries as for example in Uganda. There is a lot of shame and taboos regarding menstruation also in Finland. Some people in Uganda think that you should not go to school while menstruating. Do you think this is right?

32) In addition to harmful beliefs, the lack of menstrual protection can lead to absence from school. During menstruation you have to stay home. This can lead to being absent from school 3 to 5 days every month. What consequences does this have? (Underachieving, staying behind, dropping out, inequality.)

33) Because there are many unpleasant beliefs and a lot of shame linked to menstruation, people might also get bullied for it, for example if you are in a bad mood or have stains in your clothes. Do you think this is right? (no)

Helpful questions:

- How does school absence affect your life?
- Is it good that parents want their children to stay home?
- Is it good that a child wants to stay home? What could be the reasons for this?
- What about gender equality in a bigger perspective?