

The background is a solid red color with scattered white and black dots of various sizes, some of which are hand-drawn or irregular in shape. A large white speech bubble is centered on the page, containing the title and subtitle.

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE TO MANAGE THEIR PERIODS

**A guide for autistic young people,
their parents and carers**

INTRODUCTION

Autistic young people often need more time to understand and prepare for changes and this is especially important when dealing with the physical and emotional changes that come with menstruation (having periods).

By helping autistic young people to understand how to manage their periods, you are giving them the skills they need to be independent, confident and resilient.

In this guide, parents, carers and autistic young people share some tips and advice about how to ensure that you are doing all you can to support young people.

Try to talk about periods before they start and help young people to plan what to do if they are away from home and have their period.

SENSORY DIFFICULTIES




Some autistic young people may find the sensory difficulties associated with menstruation difficult.

Body changes like tenderness and cramps can make a young person feel uncomfortable and reluctant to do things they would normally enjoy.

The sight, sensation and smell of blood can be scary and the worry of leaks and smells may prove distressing.

Making sure they have suitable period products with them and knowing how to use them correctly can all prove overwhelming.

By having open and honest discussion about periods and helping young people access detailed and accurate information about what to expect, you can help them become more independent and confident about their bodies and how to manage any worries.







Agree a plan of what to do if they get their period when they are away from home and prepare a period bag of the supplies they might need, like wipes, spare underwear and period products.

EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

Some autistic young people might find it hard to regulate their emotions or put how they are feeling into words, leading to behaviours of distress.

You can help autistic young people to manage mood changes and emotional symptoms of menstruation, by letting them know that they might:

-  feel angry or short tempered
-  be forgetful or struggle to concentrate
-  feel upset or 'down'
-  feel more tired.

Helping autistic young people understand why they are having these symptoms and what to expect can help them feel more in control of their changing body. It may be helpful to use online videos or blogs created by autistic young people who menstruate.

It may be helpful to prompt them to think about these feelings as useful clues to prepare them for their period.

***Sometimes if she has her period,
she just won't go to college, and
refuses to use public toilets.***

Parent of neurodiverse teen

GENDER IDENTITY



Dealing with periods can be particularly upsetting for young people who are transgender (identify as a gender different from the one assigned to them when they were born) or non-binary (identify as neither male nor female, a combination of the two or somewhere in between).



When the sex a young person was assigned at birth is different to how they feel inside, this can be incredibly distressing. This is called gender dysphoria.

Having periods can make this worse and the constant media and social messages that focus on periods being a 'girl's or women's issue' can leave trans and non-binary people who menstruate feeling excluded.



Due to dysphoria, I usually say I'm sick when I'm on my period.

Trans young person, aged 16



TOP TIPS FROM PARENTS AND CARERS

- Normalise talking openly about periods, using positive language. Remind young people that periods are normal and healthy.
- Research different period products online together. Read illustrated product leaflets or watch online videos about products.
- Encourage young people who are not using prescribed contraceptives to manage their periods to try using a calendar or period tracking app to track when their period is due.
- Keep period products readily available and easy to access so that young people can help themselves as needed.
- Consider trying period underwear, reusable pads or a menstrual cup if young people don't feel comfortable with disposable tampons or pads.
- Check in with young people regularly and give them opportunities to ask questions.

We keep a small pedal bin in the bathroom, so once used we rinse in cold water and put in the bin until ready to wash all together.



GETTING HELP FROM YOUR GP

During menstruation, it is not unusual for bleeding to be heavier on some days and lighter on others. The colour and consistency of blood loss can also change over time. Choosing the right absorbency, ensuring products are clean and changed regularly can all help a young person to feel more comfortable managing their period. However, if symptoms seem to be severe, distressing or are stopping them from doing normal activities, talking to a doctor about options for managing the symptoms can help a young person feel less overwhelmed. These may include prescribing contraceptive pills or changing how they're used, as well as advice about managing the physical symptoms more effectively.

It is important to always check with a doctor before changing any prescribed contraceptives.

Our GP prescribed tricycling, the combined contraceptive pill. My daughter now has fewer and lighter flow periods.
Mum of neurodiverse teen

Your flow changes during your period so don't feel you need to use the same product all the time. It's ok to experiment with different types and find what's right for you at that time.

**Tricycling is when the patient takes three packs of contraceptive pills back-to-back, without a break. This method can help alleviate some of the distressing symptoms of a regular monthly period by reducing the number of bleeds.*

SINGLE USE PERIOD PRODUCTS

Tampons *



- Small and easy to keep in a bag or pocket.
- Available with or without applicators.
- Choice of different sizes for different flow.
- Discreet and easy to use.



- Risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) - a rare but life threatening condition caused by bacteria getting into the body and releasing toxins.
- Very light flow can make inserting a tampon uncomfortable.
- Heavy flow can cause leakage if wearing the wrong tampon or not changing it often enough for different flow.
- Not safe to use if your period hasn't started.



Sanitary pads*



- Readily available and may be less expensive than other products.
- Available in different sizes, shapes and materials.
- Easy to use - simply stick them to your underwear.
- Safe to use overnight without the risk of TSS.
- Safe to use in case your period starts unexpectedly.



- Less discreet, visible under tight clothing.
- Bulky to carry around.
- Not so easy or quick to change if needed.
- Can shift around if not secured properly.



*May be available free from school or college. Your school or college may already be signed up to the UK Government's period product scheme, available to all state maintained schools and 16 to 19 education organisations in England. It provides free period products to students who need them in their place of study. The scheme is available for organisations to order until July 2024.

REUSABLE PERIOD PRODUCTS

Period underwear & reusable pads*



- Kinder to the environment: wear, wash and reuse them.
- Available in different styles and absorbencies.
- Ideal as back up for use with pads or tampons for heavy flow.
- Available in dark colours to mask blood staining.
- Safe to wear in case your period starts unexpectedly.



- Need to change regularly to avoid unwanted smells.
- Wet feel may be too unpleasant for some.
- Expensive to get started.
- Rinsing and washing may be off-putting if blood is a sensory trigger.



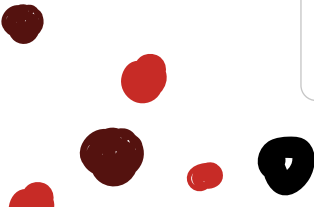
Menstrual cup*



- Environmentally friendly cups are reusable and can last up to 5 years.
- Collects blood instead of absorbing it, reducing risk of TSS.
- No smells as the period blood doesn't get exposed to air.
- Chemical-free so better for your body.
- Longer wear time – can be worn for 8–12 hours, so less need to change while away from home.



- Changing it can be messy.
- Difficult to be able to clean cup in a public bathroom.
- Might be difficult to replace if your period starts unexpectedly.
- Different sizes according to age and flow.
- Not safe to use if your period hasn't started.



TOP TIPS FOR USING REUSABLE PERIOD UNDERWEAR

The important thing is when washing not to use fabric conditioner as this acts as a sealant on the fabric and reduces absorption.

Also not tumble drying is recommended on everything that we have tried.

Do your research! There's lots of different brands of menstrual cup, reusable period pants and even reusable, washable pads. Prices change all the time so don't be afraid to shop around.

Some period underwear has side fasteners so it can be changed without removing trousers or shorts.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Autistic people and menstruation

www.autism.org.uk



**The Autism Friendly Guide to Periods by Robyn Steward -
Autism training from a person not just a textbook**

[https://www.robysteward.com/
the-autism-friendly-guide-to-periods](https://www.robysteward.com/the-autism-friendly-guide-to-periods)



Your Changing Body: Autistic Girls and Period

[https://www.autismhelpuk.org.uk/post/
your-changing-body-autistic-girls-and-period](https://www.autismhelpuk.org.uk/post/your-changing-body-autistic-girls-and-period)



All Gender Period Underwear | Leak-free

<https://www.modibodi.co.uk/collections/all-gender>



Many foodbanks can supply free period products.

To find out where your local foodbank is visit
[https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/
/adult-social-care/paying-for-care/benefits/
home-essentials-in-a-crisis/find-a-foodbank](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/adult-social-care/paying-for-care/benefits/home-essentials-in-a-crisis/find-a-foodbank)

**This resource was coproduced by members of
Parent Carer Voice (PCV)**

parents and carers of young people
using mental health services in Kent.

To find out more about the services available,
please email talkaboutmh@kent.gov.uk

