

Speaking to children about MENSTRUATION

TINATH ZAEBA

Despite being a universal biological process, menstruation, even in 2025, remains stigmatised. Girls are expected to just figure it out when the time comes. Boys are expected not to ask.

One of the biggest reasons so many girls are unprepared is the ongoing silence that surrounds the topic. In many homes, menstruation is something people avoid discussing, considering it inappropriate. Parents assume schools will take care of it. But schools frequently treat menstruation as an afterthought, tucking it into a single chapter in biology books rather than making it a meaningful part of health education. Knowing how to wear a pad, staying hygienic, and handling the emotional ups and downs that come with it, must also be taken into consideration, as this is a regular occurrence.

When the first period arrives, girls are overwhelmed. The common component in every girl's first period story is how they thought they were injured or sick, and were filled with dread because they had no idea what this meant. These early experiences often plant the seeds of discomfort that linger well into adulthood.

As much as adding textbook chapters is commendable in teaching young people about menstruation, we must go beyond that. We have to think about creating a cultural shift where everyone treats menstruation as a natural and essential part of growing up, just like learning about nutrition or mental health.

What we have to understand is that menstruation is also

a sign of one's health. A regular cycle can be an indicator that a person's body is functioning properly. On the other hand, irregular periods, intense pain, or other changes can signal health conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome or PCOS or even endometriosis. Without proper education, many of these warning signs are missed or ignored. That is why it's important to start these conversations early, before the first period, before the confusion sets in.

And this education shouldn't be limited to girls. Boys should be part of the conversation, too. Right now, they're often excluded, asked to leave the room during menstrual health discussions, or simply never included at all. This creates a gap in knowledge and empathy. When boys aren't taught about menstruation, they grow up to become men who are uncomfortable with it, or who make insensitive jokes, or who stay quiet when support is needed. But when they are included early on, they learn to understand and respect something that's simply a part of life.

Even now, the majority of people have no real understanding of what a healthy menstrual cycle actually looks like. It's only recently that platforms like TikTok or educational reels have started breaking down the basics, luteal phases, hormonal shifts, cycle-tracking, etc., in simple, accessible ways. Before this, most of it was just assumptions or myths passed down quietly. These new formats are helping people, like young women, finally learn how their bodies work and helping men understand menstruation symptoms. But the fact that social media had to fill this gap says a lot about how much traditional education has failed

us in this area.

It's important we take conversations seriously because the stigma doesn't stop at the household or the classroom. In many communities, menstruation is still seen as something dirty, impure, or secretive. While advertisements for menstrual products are beginning to change, they rely on coded visuals, like blue liquid instead of blood, and they promote discretion as the goal. These portrayals send a message: menstruation is something to hide.

In some South Asian cultures, even today, menstruating girls are barred from entering kitchens or temples or even participating in normal daily life. Elsewhere, they're discouraged from sports or physical activity. These restrictions subtly tell girls that menstruation makes them less capable.

But when boys and girls alike are educated about menstruation, what it is, why it happens, and how it affects those around them, they grow into more compassionate classmates, friends, partners, and future parents.

Menstruation is not just a "girls' issue"; it's a human issue. Creating shared understanding between boys and girls helps dismantle the taboo and creates space for support, respect, and openness. In a well-educated society, periods are not hidden away but acknowledged by all, without discomfort or shame.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. Get in touch via tinathzaeba25@gmail.com.

