

# Empowering Young Women By Building Their Confidence, Comfort, Control

**A Health Curriculum designed to help girls realize/set goals, understand their body and the menstrual cycle, and gain control over their lives and optimize their futures**



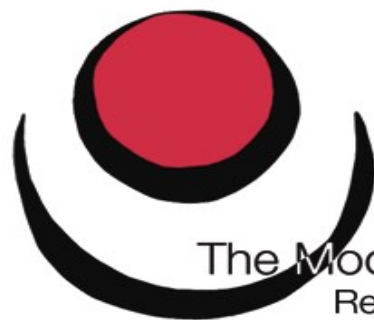
The MoonCatcher Project  
Removing barriers for girls

# The MoonCatcher Project Health Curriculum

**MISSION:** To optimize girls' lives by removing barriers related to menstruation.

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# Glossary

Puberty	<u>The time when you begin developing into an adult</u>
Menstruation	<u>The monthly shedding of the endometrium, the lining of the uterus</u>
Ovulation	<u>Release of an egg from the ovary, usually every month</u>
Fertilization	<u>When the egg and sperm join together to begin development of a baby</u>
Egg	<u>Female reproductive cell</u>
Sperm	<u>Male Reproductive cell</u>
Endometrium	<u>The lining of the uterus</u>
Cycle	<u>Something that happens again and again, like the sun rising and setting every day</u>
Hormones	<u>Chemical substances in your body that help regulate processes and growth including sexual organs, menstruation, and reproduction</u>

# Puberty

**What is Puberty?** It's the time in a young person's life when they begin developing into an adult.

**When does this happen?** It's different for everyone, but most people start to notice changes between 9 and 15 years old. Girls often begin puberty earlier than boys. It is sometimes difficult for those who begin early...or late, but puberty happens to everyone so don't be afraid or feel alone! It can be exciting, but also may seem scary or confusing. But, it's ALL perfectly normal!

**What changes happen?** It brings lots of growth and changes both on the inside and outside.

Mentally—you begin to make more decisions for yourself, form your own ideas, and you are able to take on more responsibilities at home or school

Emotionally—you may have more intense feelings of love, joy, happiness, sadness, etc. Emotions may frequently change.

Socially—friends/relationships may become more important and you might feel pressure from your friends. It's important to think for yourself!

Physically—you begin to look more like an adult, even though it takes a long time to be completely grown up!

Boys and girls: grow taller, grow hair in pubic area and underarms

Boys: voices grow deeper, shoulders widen, they grow facial hair, reproductive system matures to allow production of sperm (erection/ejaculation?)

Girls: develop breasts, your shape gets curvier, reproductive system matures to allow for releasing of eggs, and menstrual cycle begins

**What causes these changes?** Hormones cause puberty. These are chemicals produced in your body that tell different parts to change and mature. In girls, puberty is controlled by the hormones estrogen and progesterone. In boys, puberty is controlled by a hormone called testosterone.

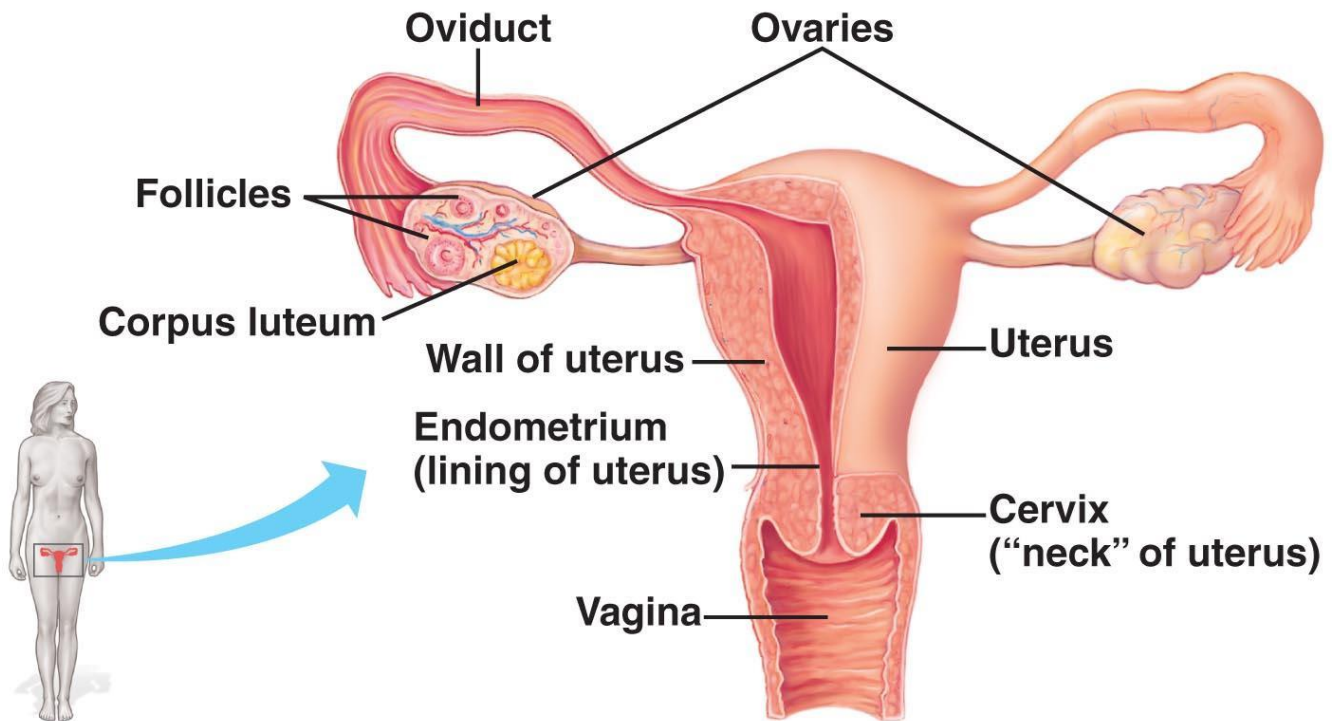
**How long does puberty take?** The process of becoming an adult may take only two or three years for some, while others will take longer. It does not happen all at once. It's a slow and gradual thing and includes a lot of changes.

## Menstrual cycle

The word cycle is used to describe things that happen again and again. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening. The moon starts as a little crescent, then gets bigger until it is full, then gets smaller until it disappears. These are examples of cycles.

Girl's bodies also experience a cycle which happens about every 28 days. It is the menstrual cycle. Some girls call it their period. The menstrual cycle makes it possible for a girl to become pregnant. It is important to understand what happens so we are not afraid of or embarrassed by our cycles. With knowledge, we can be confident, comfortable and in control of our monthly cycles.

We know that we bleed from our vaginas for a few days each month when we are not pregnant. By understanding what organs girls have inside their bodies and how these organs function we can be more confident and in control. Inside each girl's body, are the female reproductive organs.

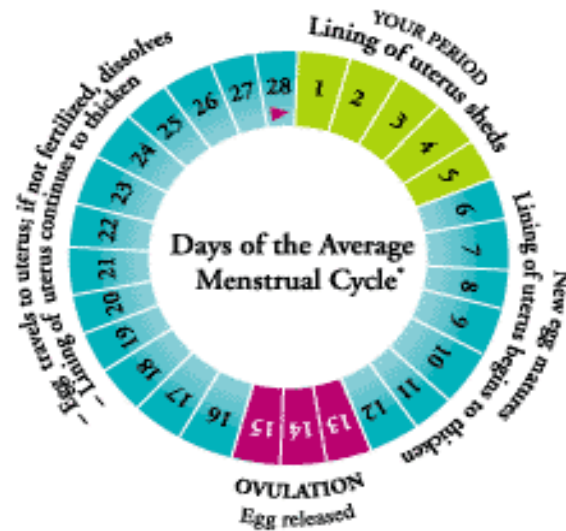


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We have a uterus or womb where a baby grows before birth, a vagina or birth canal, two ovaries and fallopian tubes leading from the ovaries to the uterus.

The ovaries produce eggs. At puberty, these eggs begin to mature and every month one egg is released into the fallopian tube and moves to the uterus where it may be fertilized by a male sperm and start growing into a baby. If it is not fertilized and the girl is not pregnant the egg along with some blood and tissue is discharged from the uterus in what we know as our period.

It is important to know that the menstrual cycle is not only the few days of bleeding. Changes are taking place all month which make pregnancy possible.



† Note: This diagram shows a 28-day cycle. Some women's cycles may be longer or shorter.

The entire cycle takes about 28 days and keeps repeating itself every month for many years (possibly 25 – 30 years!). It only stops if we are pregnant or older and no longer able to become pregnant. Normally this is how the cycle flows:

Days 1 through 5. This is the time we bleed. The amount of bleeding can vary from a small to heavy flow. Also, the color of the blood can vary from brownish to red. Some girls may experience cramping during their periods, some may not. This is all normal and should not cause alarm! By understanding what happens and what to expect, we can manage this stage carefully and safely and can continue all the important things in our lives like going to school.

Days 6 through 12. A new egg is maturing in the ovary.

Days 13 through 15. A mature egg is released from the ovary. Usually one egg is released, but sometimes two or more are released and can result in twins or triplets. Some girls may actually feel a slight pain when this is happening—but most don't even notice.

Days 16 through 28. The mature egg travels through the fallopian tube to the uterus. If sexual intercourse has occurred it is possible to become pregnant. Days 14 to 20 are the most likely time for a girl to become pregnant, but it depends on the length of the cycle (not all cycles are 28 days), and when intercourse has occurred.

During days 16 through 28, the lining of the uterus thickens with sticky mucous, tissue and blood in preparation to nurture a fertilized egg which can develop into a baby.

**If the egg has not been fertilized** the thick lining of the uterus is not needed, and it sloughs off, meaning it leaves the body through the vagina (birth canal). This is DAY 1 of a new cycle.

**If the egg has been fertilized**, then the lining is needed to support the growth of the new baby and the menstrual cycle stops during pregnancy. It will resume a few weeks after the baby is born.

## How can you improve your life through understanding and managing your period?

Your menstrual cycle is a normal part of life—even though it may bring some emotional and physical changes that can be uncomfortable or confusing at times. Understanding why changes are happening and knowing ways to deal with them will make your menstrual cycle and life more manageable!

### Emotional Changes

Our emotions change with our menstrual cycle. Everyone is different, but we need to know that our moods can change as the days change and some times this happens very quickly. These emotions range from quick anger to crying to happiness and sadness at the same time. If you know this may happen, then you can develop habits that can help you to deal with the mood swings.

**Deep breathing exercises** can help get you through these emotional ups and downs.

We breathe every day but deep breathing is different. It is calming and puts more oxygen into your bloodstream and makes you feel better. Go to a quiet place and make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes. Listen to the world outside. Then breathe in deeply pushing down on your diaphragm, against your stomach, as far as you can so that your lungs are full, but without expanding your rib cage. Then breathe out all the way. Continue breathing deeply in and out for a full minute, 10 breaths. Then, keep breathing deeply but more slowly. Breathe in deeply and hold for ten seconds and then breathe out. Breathe in again and hold for 10 seconds and breathe out again slowly. Repeat ten times. This should make you feel more relaxed and comfortable. Every time you practice this it will be more effective and make you feel more in control of your emotions. (If time allows, practice the deep breathing exercise with the class.)

**Physical Exercise** is another way to help deal with these changes in emotions.

If you don't walk far to school, take a walk with friends and walk quickly for a kilometer or so. This will help work off tensions and anxiety.



## Physical Changes

Just before your period begins, you may feel bloated, tired and you may have cramping as your menses flushes the endometrium from the uterus. You can manage this discomfort with deep breathing, physical exercise, and using bottles of hot water on your stomach. Drinking fresh water, getting enough sleep, and eating well will also help.

**We know how to do our deep breathing exercises!!**

**A hot water bottle can help.** If your cramps are severe, heat water and pour it into a plastic bottle. It will feel good when you put it against the cramped area.

**Eating well is also important!** Eat fruits and vegetables, including bananas for potassium. Women lose iron during their periods, so eating foods rich in iron, like dark green vegetables, is a good practice. Spinach is a special vegetable that is easy to grow and contains iron. Drink lots of fresh water every day. This will make your periods more manageable.

**Stretching exercises can also help.** Muscles like to be stretched and it actually relaxes them, making us feel better. Stretching exercises will also give you more energy and help you feel less tired. Below are some exercises you may want to use. (If time allows, have class try some stretches.)



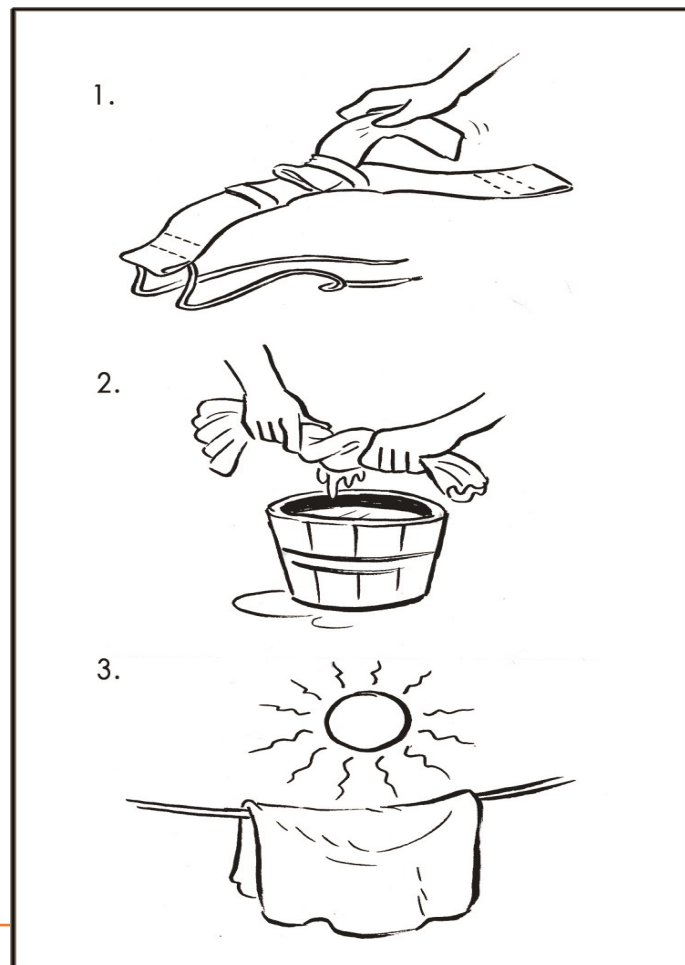


## Personal Hygiene

The last thing you want is an infection or to smell like your period. It is not always easy but you should wash your hands and your private parts with soap and water at least twice a day, making sure to rinse thoroughly. This will help avoid infection and eliminate odor.

## Menstrual Pad hygiene

With each MoonCatcher kit there are three absorbent pads. There is always one to change into. When you change to a clean pad, put the soiled one into the waterproof bag. As soon as possible, wash the soiled pad with soap and water. Hang the clean pad in the sunshine to dry. The light not only dries the pad, but it kills germs that cause infection. Then, rinse the waterproof bag thoroughly in plain water (no soap). Hang the bag open in the shade (not sunlight) to dry. There is a card in the bag that shows the three steps to keep the pads clean and sanitary. These pads should last 3 to 4 years if treated well.



## RESOURCE PAGE 1

### Questions, Graphic Organizer, Role Playing

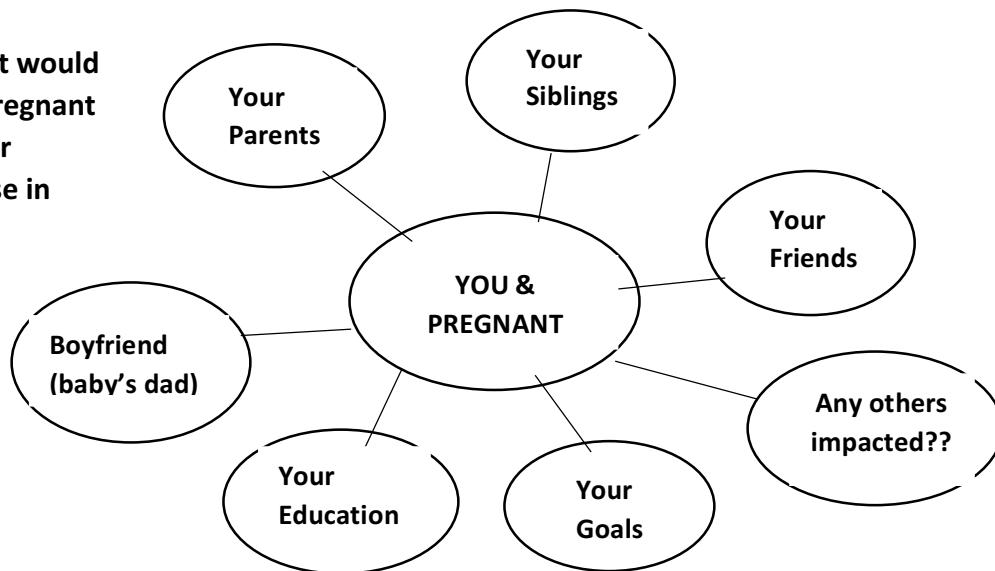
**A. QUESTIONS:** to use during introduction to lesson to help students understand goal setting, importance of education, and consequences of not finishing school.

1. "Imagine yourself in five years. What are your life goals? Think of things you'd like to accomplish, where you'd like to live, family, work..." ( Ask for some to share )
2. "How would these goals change if you didn't stay in school?" ( Ask for some responses )
3. "What are some reasons you might stop going to school?" ( Responses?)

**B. GRAPHIC ORGANIZER:** to use during discussion of impact of pregnancy on goals & future. Students can "brainstorm" all those who might be impacted, but this image might help.

What impact would becoming pregnant have on your life and those in your life?

A



**C. ROLE PLAYING** – To use during discussion of how to gain control of when facing sexual advances.

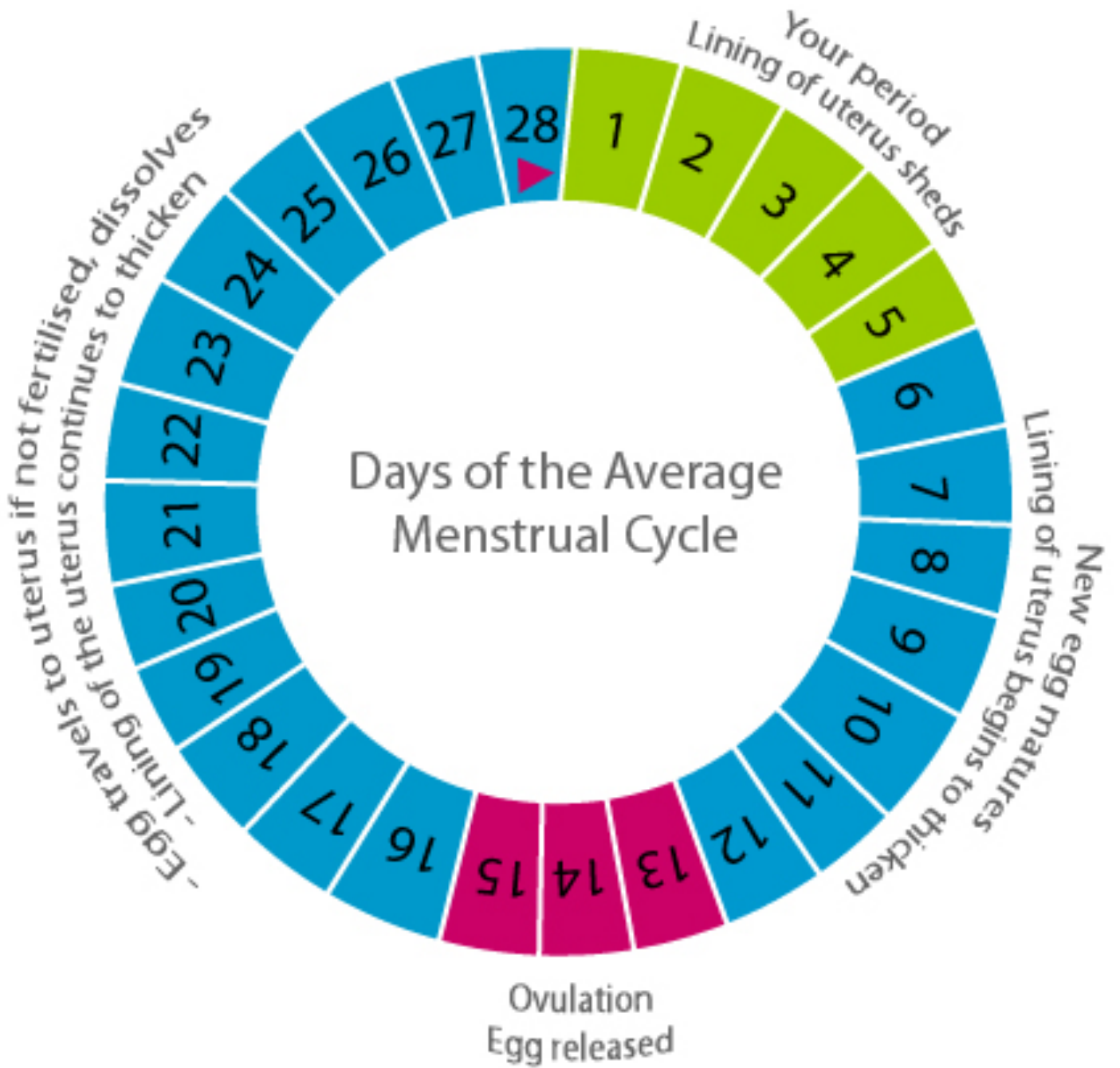
Two people in role play—one taking role of female and other taking role of male.

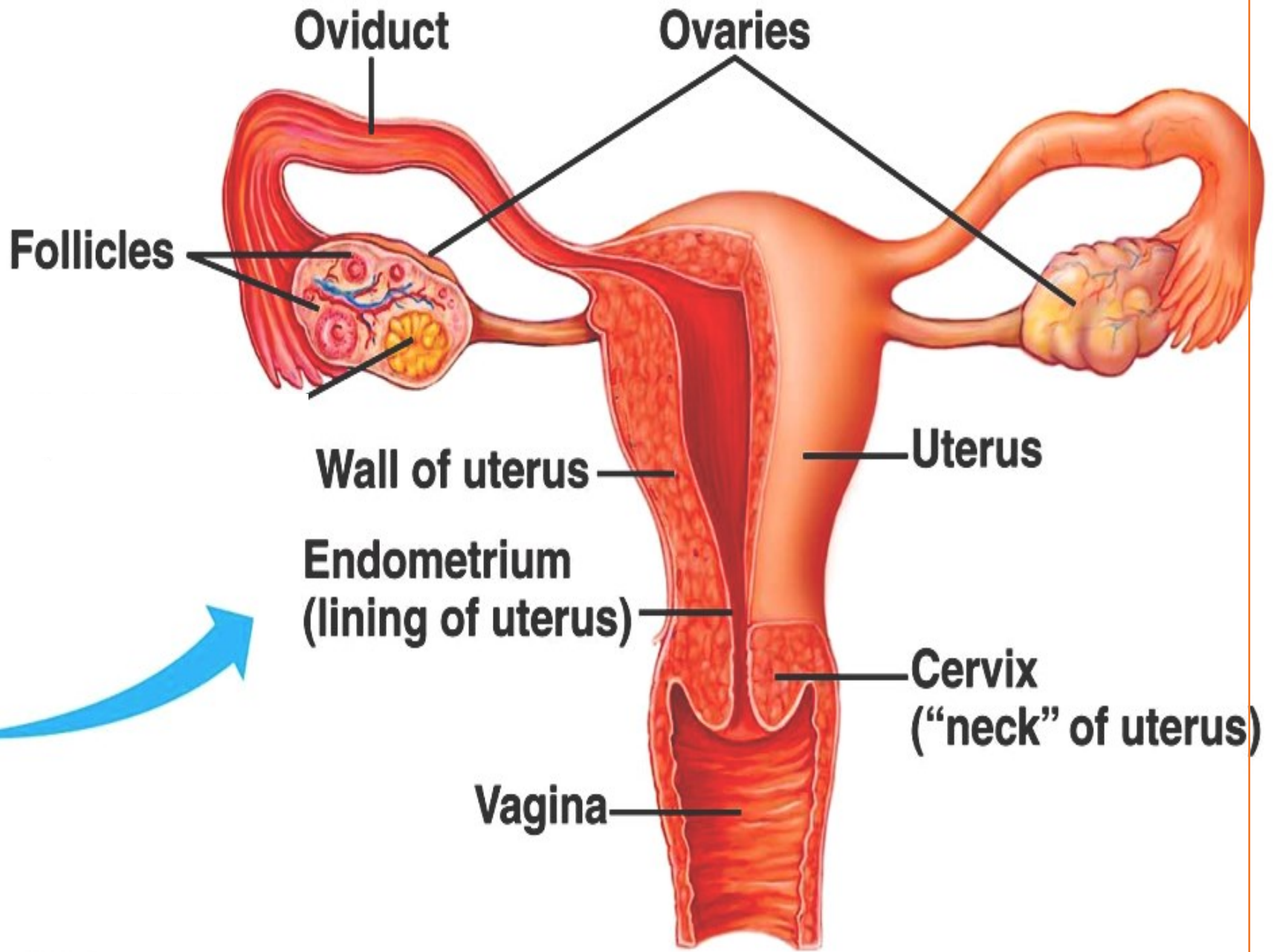
Male approaches female and makes it known that he wants to have sex with her.

Two possible situations:

- a. This is not someone who the female has a relationship with or who she wants to have any sexual contact.
- b. This is someone who the female likes (maybe even loves) but she is not ready for sex and doesn't want to risk getting pregnant.

**NOTE: IF MALES ARE PRESENT FOR THIS PROGRAM,** IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THEY BE BROUGHT INTO THE DISCUSSION/DIALOGUE WITH INCLUSIVE QUESTIONS AND PUBERTY REVIEW, FOCUS IS GIVEN TO THEIR ROLE IN PREGNANCY AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR LIFE, AND CONSIDERATION TO HOW THEY CAN BE MORE SUPPORTIVE TO FEMALES REGARDING MENSTRUATION, PREGNANCY, AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS.





# MoonCatcher Project Health Curriculum

## **Part I – Confidence (10 – 15 minutes)**

### **A. Purpose of lesson:**

- To introduce the instructor and program goals
- To establish a rapport with the girls
- To explore the relationship between finishing school and goals
- To acquire health information that will help girls finish school

### **B. Talking points:**

- Introduction to instructor and program
- Goal setting
  - What are your life goals during the next 5-10 years?
  - How would these goals change if you did not stay in school?
  - What are some reasons you might stop going to school?

### **C. Activities:**

- Ask students the reflective questions.
- Permit just a few students to share their thoughts and ideas for each of the reflective questions.

### **D. Instructor resources:**

- Resource page 1; part A questions

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## Part II – Comfort (15 – 20 minutes)

### **E. Purpose of lesson:**

- To gain an understanding of physical, emotional, and mental changes that occur during puberty
- To understand how the menstrual cycle works, and how/when pregnancy may occur
- To appreciate how this information can help students reach their goals

### **F. Talking points:**

- Managing your menstrual cycle
  - Understanding how your body is changing and your menstrual cycle will help you reach your goals
- Understanding changes of puberty
  - Review physical, emotional, mental changes males & females
  - Explanation of menstrual cycle including:
    - normal, natural process of becoming an adult
    - why it happens (including our body's ability to become pregnant)
    - what happens during each phase (including explanation of ovulation)

### **G. Activities:**

- Ask students to review the changes that occur to males and females during puberty. Supplement any facts that students fail to mention.
- Explanation of menstrual cycle.
- Clarify reproductive system anatomy as it is used in describing puberty and the menstrual cycle.

### **H. Instructor resources:**

- Puberty information sheet
- Glossary
- Menstrual Cycle information sheet
- Reproductive System Anatomy Chart
- Days of the Average Menstrual Cycle Chart

# MoonCatcher Project Health Curriculum

## Part III – Control (20 – 30 minutes)

### I. Purpose of lesson:

- To provide skills that give control over their bodies and their menstrual cycles
- To provide ways to deal with cramps/discomfort of menstrual cycles.
- To demonstrate how to keep a monthly calendar to chart menstrual cycle.
- To reflect on how pregnancy could impact their goals and relationships.
- To demonstrate and practice ways to say “no” to unwanted sexual advances.

### J. Talking points:

- Managing your menstrual cycle
  - Understanding your body, your menstrual cycle, and how to take care of yourself will help you reach your goals
- How to deal with cramps or discomfort during menstrual cycles
  - Exercise, stretching, warm compresses, rest
- Mooncatcher pads
  - How to use/wear the pads
  - Care of the Mooncatcher pads and carry bags
- Monthly Calendars
  - Tracking cycles to determine if a pattern exists.
- Pregnancy prevention (If topic is allowed at school)
  - When ovulation (and pregnancy) most likely to occur during the menstrual cycle
  - Possible to get pregnant anytime you have sexual intercourse.
  - Not having sex (abstinence) is the ONLY way to prevent pregnancy.
  - Condoms can reduce risk of pregnancy and risk of sexually transmitted diseases



- Impact of pregnancy
  - Reflection of how a pregnancy would impact their lives, relationships, education, and goals.
  - Consider all the people/aspects it would impact: parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, father of the child, education, goals, etc.
- Saying “No” to unwanted sexual advances.
  - Role play scenarios to depict and practice ways to say “no” to sexual advances when you are not ready for sex and you don’t want to risk pregnancy or disease.
- Closing
  - Summary and review
  - Reminder to ask questions, ask for help or advice regarding their sexual health.
  - Their futures depend upon their confidence, comfort, and control of their bodies, menstruation, and reproduction.
  - ANY QUESTIONS?
  - Thank You!!

### **K. Activities:**

- Distribution of exercise charts. If time allows, demonstration of some of the exercises, stretching activities.
- Demonstration of use and care of Mooncatcher pads.
- Distribution of calendars and explanation of tracking menstrual cycles. Allows students to be prepared for menstruation and estimate ovulation
- Reflective question about impact pregnancy would have on all aspects of their lives, relationships, education, and goals.
- Student volunteers can role play scenarios on saying “no”. If time allows, other students can try scenarios and share if they have a good one.

### **L. Instructor resources:**

- How can you improve your life through understanding and managing your period?
- Exercise Chart
- Mooncatcher Pads and instruction sheets
- Calendar
- Resource Page 1: Part B (impact of pregnancy)
- Resource Page 1: Part C (role playing)