

TOTM

Our guide to talking about periods in the workplace

Let's talk periods and break the period stigma.



Period stigma is *deeply rooted in the workplace.*

Our 2022 survey revealed that the majority do not feel comfortable discussing periods in the workplace (64%). Many expressed concerns that period talk in the workplace was viewed as unprofessional and inappropriate, which left them feeling embarrassed. This reflects the negative attitudes and stigma surrounding menstruation.

How can we drive change, and why does this matter?

Periods are natural and a key pillar of health. Hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle can cause physical and emotional symptoms, which may impact everyday life. Menstrual conditions such as endometriosis and PMDD (for example) often cause severe symptoms that are challenging to navigate at work. Breaking down period stigma and encouraging open dialogue around periods is the first step to supporting menstrual wellbeing in the workplace.



How does period stigma impact employees in the workplace?

A few examples based on real life anecdotes from our community:



Too embarrassed to ask for help

The stigma and shame that surrounds periods can make it difficult to ask for help. This means that your employees may need an extra toilet break due to heavy bleeding or may be suffering with severe pain but feel too ashamed or embarrassed to speak up.

Added stress when on your period at work

Managing your period at work can be stressful. It means planning toilet breaks to change your tampon or pad, locating suitable toilet facilities if out and about during the working day, and potentially trying to work through uncomfortable symptoms. PMS symptoms can include menstrual cramps, muscle aches, bloating, migraines, fatigue, and overheating (*to name a few*).

Pain and discomfort can impact someone's ability to work

In our 2022 survey, a staggering 94% said that period related pain or discomfort has disrupted their working day. Alongside PMS symptoms, menstrual conditions such as endometriosis can cause severe pain and discomfort which makes concentrating on work a challenge.

Changing the workplace to *support menstrual needs.*

Our research discovered that getting caught short in work is a common occurrence. Period products are yet to become a workplace staple despite being as essential as toilet rolls.

It's time to build period positive workplaces where employee menstrual well-being is supported.

The real stories (shown on the right) demonstrate why it's crucial to drive change to support periods in the workplace.

"In a workplace where breaks are monitored, it's hard to have the time to rush to the bathroom and remove a menstrual cup which is tricky and can take a while to insert back, so often I won't have any time to have an actual "break" that's not in the bathroom."

"There needs to be discussion within the workplace about how to address people's needs. I've worked in schools where there is no consideration given to the fact you need to leave the classroom to change frequently. I've lost count of how many times I've been unable to leave and leaked."

"Honestly, it's extra unnecessary stress! Normally I carry around products just in case but of course, this time I'd forgotten. And of course, I had to stand up and do a presentation with the worry that something might happen whilst I'm standing up there."

Talking about periods at work.

Here are our top tips to open up the conversation and support periods in your workplace:

- Book workshops or educational talks that cover menstrual wellbeing topics and make these accessible to all employees. We recommend to record the sessions so people can access information after the event.
- When introducing a free period care provision, run an awareness campaign and signage to communicate this in your workplace. This could include competitions and shareable resources. Ask your employees for feedback to demonstrate how the company is open to period-related discussions.
- Introduce a menstrual policy to map out how your organisation supports menstruation. Include information around period shaming comments and appropriate language.
- Train managers in the company so they can support team members with periods and menstrual conditions.
- Provide period-friendly facilities such as disposal bins on-site and consider facilities for employees who have to work off-site as part of their role.
- Be flexible with toilet breaks wherever possible to ensure employees can always access facilities.



Breaking the *shame cycle* through language.

When opening up discussions around periods, we recommend to avoid language that perpetuates period stigma. This includes words such as:

- Sanitary products
- Sanitary pads
- Feminine hygiene
- Menstrual/period hygiene

These words suggest that periods are dirty or unclean. We recommend to use the product name (tampon, pad etc) or say 'period care.'

- Coded language i.e Monthlies or Aunt Flow

Period euphemisms suggest we can't openly use words such as 'period' or 'menstruation'.

- Use inclusive language to support everyone who menstruates.

