

Title:

Girls want to and, most importantly, have the right to learn.

Extension:

Back in the day when I got my first period, the only "information" that was available to me was the basic knowledge passed down from my mother about how to use a sanitary pad and the how long my period would last. She, like many women, did not have more detailed information about menstrual health and management.

From an early age I became interested in medicine and women's health issues. Thanks to this desire to understand and know my body better, I was able to become gain more information and education. Later, due to a school project in 2021, I conducted a piece of research on menstrual education for girls and adolescents and noticed that it was not only me who felt confused by the experience of my first period – in fact, many girls around me felt exactly the same. Moreover, their questions were not yet answered as there is no easily accessible and age-appropriate information available in my community.

For many years, society has instilled in us a patriarchal and sexist narrative about menstruation and our bodies. Menstruation, despite being a natural process in the bodies of women and people with a uterus, remains a taboo that is not talked about.

Girls and adolescents do not have real, age-appropriate, and easily accessible information. Many girls and adolescents experience their first menstruation with only the most basic information, mainly of a biological nature, linked to reproductive issues, taboos, and prejudices.

Most girls and adolescents do not receive adequate information about the changes they will experience during puberty and, therefore, experience this development with many questions - and fear. In the long run, the fact that many girls do not feel safe in their own bodies makes them more prone to suffer violations that can have negative repercussions on them.

Nicaragua is no exception to this reality. Nicaraguan families approach the subject of puberty from their own experiences, beliefs and fears, which perpetuates the generational transfer of misinformation about menstruation and girls and adolescents do not receive adequate guidance.

In my country, the implementation of menstrual education is still a pending debt with children and youth. Menstrual health is a latent but invisible and unmet need. Faced with this situation, I decided to undertake a social initiative of menstrual education for girls and adolescents called Menarca la Monarca and become a menstrual educator. Since starting this project independently, I have carried out continuous virtual training and specialized courses on what to expect from your first period and menstruation.

In my journey as a menstrual educator and conducting menstrual education workshops I have been able to identify what the reality of the girls and adolescents with whom I work with is. Through the evaluation of the workshops, it is evident that their knowledge about menstruation comes from a place of such misinformation and prejudices.

Since it is a taboo subject, I always notice first how uncomfortable girls are talking about their body parts and their changes during puberty. That said, they show a lot of attention and curiosity about it, too.

Gradually, the girls I work with gain confidence to ask questions, and what they most often ask about is the veracity of beliefs and myths they have heard in their environments.

The myths that are most often repeated are about the relationship between menstruation and reproduction; girls and adolescents associate menstruation with the possibility of becoming pregnant and becoming a woman, which is not the case! Girls are still girls and have the right to fully enjoy their childhood and adolescence.

Another of the most constant concerns is about what one can and cannot eat during menstruation, many of the girls stop eating foods such as eggs or beans because they believe they will make menstrual blood smell bad. All of these menstrual myths cause girls and adolescents to have a negative view of the menstrual cycle. However, they never fail to ask questions and actively participate as we talk about it.

I can affirm that girls and adolescents show a genuine interest in understanding their bodies and their changes. Furthermore, receiving education about menstruation before they experience their first period makes it easier for girls and adolescents to live this process without fear or shame about their bodies and, in the long term, to form a more positive view of their bodies and natural processes.

I believe information and education allow girls to have a more self-confident vision of themselves with which to develop a healthier and more friendly relationship with themselves. Self-knowledge lays the foundation for self-esteem and self-care, which will give them more tools to make more informed and healthy decisions in their lives. After the workshop, the girls and teens commented on how much they had loved learning more about themselves and were grateful that they had been taught about menstruation and how to better understand their bodies.

Menstrual education is a topic that I am passionate about and consider it an empowerment tool for girls and adolescents. I think it is necessary that as a society we begin to commit to recognizing the importance of implementing menstrual education for girls and adolescents. They want and, most importantly, have the right to learn more about their bodies, to feel safe and to feel in control of their bodies and their lives.