



## Family Planning Victoria Podcast Transcript – Doing 'it'

### Periods

- Anne: [00:01](#) This podcast contains discussion about adult topics. Use your judgment if there are little ears around.
- Anne: [00:07](#) Welcome to 'Doing It.' My name is Anne, I'm part of the Family Planning Victoria School of Education team. We go to schools and talk to young people and grown ups about relationships and sexuality education. That could be anything from talking about bodies, and puberty, and growing up to sex, and dating. All things relationships and sexuality education.
- Anne: [00:32](#) We're making a series of podcasts which are for parents and carers of school age children to give a bit of insight into what we talk about in class.
- Anne: [00:40](#) Our first series of podcasts is about puberty, which is something we generally talking about with students from about grade three or four. By grade five or six, students should be getting lots of information about puberty.
- Anne: [00:51](#) Today's conversation is about all things menstruation.
- Anne: [00:56](#) Periods are a big milestone in a person's life. If a person is born with a uterus, it's most likely they will start their cycle of bleeding around once a month. And this is a sign that their body can grow a baby. Learning how to manage periods at an age when talking about it might seem really taboo is a big deal. Talking openly about periods with your young person and making them a normal part of life will help them get the information they need to manage their period when it starts and manage their reproductive health into their future.

- Anne: [01:28](#) When we talk about periods in this podcast, we're going to talk about what is typical for girls and women. It's important to say at the start that not every woman has a period, and some transgender men live with regular periods. Intersex bodies are different, too. So this information might not be relevant for all.
- Anne: [01:46](#) So I'm sitting here with Bonnie, who is the School's Education manager. I'm going to ask you some questions, Bonnie, about periods.
- Bonnie: [01:52](#) Great.
- Anne: [01:53](#) Usually we would start talking about this from about grade three.
- Bonnie: [01:57](#) Yeah, introducing it at grade three and four and then really embedding that learning at five and six, and then revising of course in the secondary levels.
- Anne: [02:07](#) Yep, excellent. So can you explain what a period is?
- Bonnie: [02:12](#) What a period is ... so many young people have so many misconceptions around what it is. And so explaining it in really simple terms for young people is so important. So I explain it as ... Often I explain it alongside of pregnancy and conception, because the two really go hand in hand.
- Bonnie: [02:29](#) So I kind of explain when an egg is released, the uterus builds up a really thick spongy lining of cells in preparation for a potential egg to embed and grow into a baby. But if that doesn't happen, then the uterus doesn't need that thick spongy lining so it sheds away. And that's what breaks down and flows out of the vagina as menstrual flow.
- Anne: [02:51](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Looks a bit like blood, and talking about periods not being regular at the start, and ...
- Bonnie: [02:58](#) Yeah. Of course. And that can be really confusing for young people, too, when we see that periods generally kick in between the ages of 11 to 14, but can begin as early as eight. And we say that they happen on about a month cycle or a 28 day cycle, if you're textbook perfect.
- Bonnie: [03:17](#) And so when young people experience periods for the first time and they're maybe not so regular ... as regular as a 28 day cycle, that can be quite confronting. So explaining that in the first couple of years, they might be much more longer in between.

Sometimes they'll be shorter in between periods as well. And that's totally normal for your body to find it's natural rhythm and groove.

- Anne: [03:38](#) So you said they might start for some girls as young as eight. What are some signs that she might need to look out or expect-
- Bonnie: [03:47](#) Yeah. We do an interesting activity, actually, with parents and carers. It's a bit of a homework task that we give young people. And we get them to go home and talk to their trusted grown ups at home about what was the first sign that made them realize that puberty had began.
- Bonnie: [04:00](#) And we get so many grownups sending in their feedback saying that their period ... getting their period was the first thing that made them realize that puberty had begun. But puberty actually begins a lot earlier than your first menstrual cycle and your first menstruation.
- Anne: [04:17](#) And it's not going to be one of the first signs either.
- Bonnie: [04:19](#) No, no.
- Anne: [04:20](#) [crosstalk 00:04:20] growth spurt, and body odor, and hair-
- Bonnie: [04:23](#) All of those things.
- Anne: [04:24](#) Yeah.
- Bonnie: [04:24](#) I often tell students to look out for vaginal discharge, and that being present up to two years before a period first begins. And that vaginal discharge can be involved in the vagina cleaning itself but also around times of ovulation that can be present. Breasts changing shape and form can often be an indicator that the period is not too far away either.
- Anne: [04:48](#) Yeah. So once they're getting to that kind of adult shape and the more rounded shape breasts, and the noticing vaginal discharge, then it's probably a good time to start carrying pads and tampons.
- Bonnie: [04:59](#) Absolutely.
- Anne: [05:01](#) What do young girls want to know about periods?

- Bonnie: [05:04](#) Often they want to know how long they last for. Anywhere to three to five days, but up to seven is totally normal. So normalizing that for them. Some girls want to know how much blood is lost because there's a lot of misinformation around that. So we do a great exercise ... I take into the classroom my water bottle and big measuring cup, and I get them to estimate or guesstimate for me how much blood they think is going to be lost.
- Bonnie: [05:30](#) Of course, they fill up the whole measuring jug. They think it's going to be an extraordinary amount of blood, so normalizing for them the fact that it's 35 to 40 mls is about average, which is a tiny amount to what they picture in their minds.
- Bonnie: [05:46](#) The period is made up of a couple of different things. So it is made up blood and cells that line the uterus as well as a mixture of mucus. So the appearance of that period blood when they first start getting it can be quite different to the normal blood that they might notice when they cut their hands. It might be darker in appearance and then turn brighter. Or it might be more brown and mucousy. And that's all completely normal as well.
- Bonnie: [06:15](#) So not to be expecting the bright red blood that comes out if you've got a bloody nose, but it's something quite different to that.
- Anne: [06:23](#) Yep. So girls would notice that they have their period if they go to the toilet or if it's on their underwear, and they only use pads and tampons on the days that they notice that blood coming out of their body.
- Anne: [06:32](#) And girls kind of think that they need to use pads and tampons forever every day. So that's not true.
- Bonnie: [06:40](#) No.
- Anne: [06:40](#) In a class, what are we recommending that students do to manage their period during a day if they do have it?
- Bonnie: [06:47](#) And I guess this depends on what they're using to manage their period as well, so it will be dependent on whether they're using pads, or tampons, or menstrual cups, or the period underwear that's available as well.
- Bonnie: [07:00](#) But changing all of those things as regular as needed to for comfort. So for pads, that's about every four to five hours. I

usually tell girls ... particularly when they're nervous about having to change them at school if you think about every four to five hours, it's kind of when they wake up in the morning, then it might be at recess or lunchtime at school. That's probably when the school bell goes for home time and then it's for bed as well.

Bonnie: [07:26](#) So changing it four or five times a day. Tampons need to be changed a little more regularly than that. So they're about every three to four hours, making sure that the girl washes her hands before and after of course inserting anything into her vagina.

Bonnie: [07:41](#) And menstrual cups ... you can go for eight hours without changing those. They can be really useful.

Anne: [07:46](#) And we show those in class in primary school. Girls will usually be freaked out by the idea of them. But they're definitely an option that's becoming more popular.

Bonnie: [07:56](#) Yes. Yeah, definitely. And they're really curious about them. I find more and more so I'm getting these little environmentally conscious young people who are ... well, and financially conscious young people. Because they ask me about the price of pads and tampons, and they're horrified to think that they're going to have to go from during puberty right through to menopause having to buy these things all of the time.

Bonnie: [08:19](#) And they're also thinking about the environmental impact. So things like reusable cloth pads or the menstrual cups are a really good cost and environmentally savvy way to manage periods.

Bonnie: [08:33](#) They also want to know things like how to manage it. Will I be getting it at the same age as what my mum did? Will everyone know that I've got my period? Do I have to tell my teacher that I've got my period? So lots of questions around that. And increasingly, I'm getting questions around why does periods hurt.

Bonnie: [08:53](#) And so really again explaining to them that pain is not something that every woman experiences. And if pain is present, and it's affecting their daily lives, and it's really that they should talk to a health care provider around.

Anne: [09:06](#) So that's not usual to have to miss school.

Bonnie: [09:08](#) No.

- Anne: [09:09](#) Or not be able to go to work, or school, or do activities.
- Bonnie: [09:13](#) No. Yeah.
- Anne: [09:14](#) All that sort of stuff.
- Bonnie: [09:14](#) Anything stronger than a hot water bottle and Panadol, and you really want to be talking to a health care professional.
- Anne: [09:20](#) Yep. So if you're talking to younger students about this, what are recommendations at school?
- Bonnie: [09:27](#) Recommendations around managing periods or-
- Anne: [09:30](#) To talking about it at school. Like, if we're going to a class we wouldn't generally separate boys and girls.
- Bonnie: [09:35](#) No, definitely not. The reason being is because most boys have got a mother, or a sister, or a friend, or a cousin, or someone in their life who's going to have a period at some stage. It's really important that they ... we take away some of the stigma, and the shame, and the anxiety around managing periods. So really talking about it being a normal process that everyone can understand.
- Bonnie: [10:03](#) And for boys, it's really important that they do understand these in case they do want to have children in the future as well because they're so intrinsically linked.
- Anne: [10:11](#) Yeah, it's part of understanding how to make a baby.
- Bonnie: [10:13](#) Exactly, right. So yeah. We wouldn't separate them. In some situations, the girls do like to have a chat on their own as just a little bit of a girls group just to throw some questions around. And that's okay.
- Bonnie: [10:26](#) But I would say the large part of the discussion takes place together. In school settings too, talking about how to manage periods within school settings can be really helpful. So I always talk about during puberty, there's an increase need for privacy. And particularly around schools and visiting their school bags ... whether that be in their tubs or in their lockers. Because they might be needing to manage their periods.
- Anne: [10:51](#) And if you ask them, girls will often say they feel really scared about having that in their bag for the first few times. That

someone would see it, or make fun of it, or embarrass them for needing to go to the bag and get pads or tampons.

- Bonnie: [11:05](#) I tell a great story that one girl talked about educators here at Family Planning. And I tell this story all the time because it's fabulous and the kids love it.
- Bonnie: [11:14](#) But this young girl was really ... she was self conscious around having her pads in her undies, and her wipes, and her bags. Everything in her school bag. She was really anxious around that. And she didn't want to have the pencil case or the little bag that we often recommend.
- Bonnie: [11:29](#) So she and her mom went out on a shopping expedition and they bought two identical water bottles that you couldn't see through. They both had really wide opening. So one was her normal drinking bottle that she would use during class, and her other one was her period water bottle. Inside she slid in her undies, her pad, all her tampons-
- Anne: [11:50](#) That's so clever.
- Bonnie: [11:51](#) ... her wipes. It's so clever. So giving young people strategies like that is really empowering just to take away that anxiety around having to manage these things.
- Anne: [12:02](#) We're going to have a whole lot of girls with 50 water bottles in their bags.
- Bonnie: [12:07](#) That's exactly right. But a really good plan that her and her mom concocted and something that really worked for her.
- Anne: [12:13](#) Yeah. And another reason to talk about it in front of the boy's to say, "Look, this is what's going to happen. And it's really normal for women to do these, to have pads and tampons in their bag. So don't make fun of it if you see it."
- Bonnie: [12:24](#) That's right.
- Anne: [12:26](#) And what about girls accessing pads and tampons at school?
- Bonnie: [12:29](#) Well, with our new change of government they're going to be in there for free.
- Anne: [12:34](#) Free! Yay.

- Bonnie: [12:34](#) Yay. If only we could get that right across Australia for young girls ... again, it will just be that extra step in really affirming that this is not scary. It's not abnormal. It is a natural and normal part of growing up. And it's something that's going to be sticking around until you hit menopause.
- Bonnie: [12:50](#) So sometime before 45 and 55 for most women. This is excellent. All schools will have access to pads and tampons now. They all keep their own stock usually in the sick bay or with the school nurse.
- Anne: [13:05](#) Yeah. And sometimes in the class with the teacher.
- Bonnie: [13:06](#) Yeah.
- Anne: [13:07](#) Sometimes the teacher will say to the girls at the start of the school year, "Hey, they're in my drawer if you need them. Just come and find me."
- Bonnie: [13:12](#) Often ... particularly around years five and six and onwards, that's definitely the case.
- Anne: [13:17](#) I had a teacher who had a hand signal for the girls. So she taught all the girls a hand signal, and if they needed to talk about periods or get pads and tampons, they would just flash her this hand signal.
- Anne: [13:30](#) So some girls do ask, "How would I talk about this home? Or how would I tell my mum or dad that I have my period?" What's the advice for grownups talking about this at home?
- Bonnie: [13:43](#) Yeah. And for some, it will be very easy. For some, it will be very hard. So some families will use different aids to help them with this talking about this. They might have books, they might access videos, some might just ... some families might just leave the packet of pads or tampons lying on the bed and that sort of thing.
- Anne: [14:04](#) I think just having them around ... and boys and girls will say, "Ah, I've seen those. These are in my bathroom. That's what they are."
- Bonnie: [14:11](#) That's right. Yes, yeah. We always absolutely advocate that young people have someone that they can talk to and open up and have these honest communications around.

- Bonnie: [14:22](#) Particularly when it comes to things like managing periods ... like, where do they put the used pads and tampons, or whatever product they're using. How do they manage that? How do they go about buying these? So there are some practical things that they need to get sorted in the home. What bin do I use? How do I manage this? Because we don't want young people thinking that it's something that they can just flush down the toilet or not have access to.
- Anne: [14:45](#) Or not need to change during the day.
- Bonnie: [14:48](#) That's absolutely right. And also talking about alternative menstrual products, too. That might be another conversation that can be had at home. So things like period underwear, or menstrual cups ... You know?
- Anne: [14:59](#) Period underwear, I think, is really great. That's something we're educating teachers about as well because they're kind of new and teachers haven't really seen them yet.
- Bonnie: [15:09](#) Yeah. And they're so good particularly for gymnasts or swimmers, or any females that find using pads or tampons confronting. They're just a pair of undies that you wash out at the end of each day.
- Anne: [15:22](#) Sometimes I talk with young people about ... or what if you're living in two different houses. On one weekend, you're staying with dad. And the next weekend, you're staying with mom. And you get your period and you're at dad's house. Are you allowed to talk to dad about periods?
- Bonnie: [15:37](#) Of course you can. But again, it goes back to ... you know, really setting up-
- Anne: [15:41](#) But they don't know that.
- Bonnie: [15:45](#) They don't. They don't. I think that's our responsibility as the trusted grownups in young people's lives to make sure that we have attempted in some way, shape, or form to make a comfortable environment where open discussions can be had.
- Bonnie: [15:58](#) And this is tricky. That's why at Family Planning, we always recommend establishing these when our young people are young.
- Anne: [16:05](#) Yeah.

- Bonnie: [16:05](#) So that when we get to these tricky age where we navigating our changing bodies and the weird and wonderful things that they do, we can know the ways in which to communicate around these and go- [crosstalk 00:16:17]
- Anne: [16:18](#) And ask questions and know it's going to be okay.
- Bonnie: [16:19](#) Yeah.
- Anne: [16:20](#) Yeah. Awesome. Thank you so much for talking to me.
- Bonnie: [16:23](#) Thank you. Thanks for having me.
- Anne: [16:25](#) Bye.
- Anne: [16:27](#) Thank you to Bonnie. I hope that helpful for everyone to get some inside into how we talk about periods with young people in a class. And just finishing up with some suggestions for continuing those conversations at home.
- Anne: [16:41](#) Don't shield boys from learning about periods. They usually have lots of questions, too.
- Anne: [16:47](#) Everyone has a different experience of periods.
- Anne: [16:51](#) Periods generally start after a girl has noticed breast development and her breasts are getting to the more rounded, adult shape. Another sign she would notice before her period starts is vaginal discharge.
- Anne: [17:03](#) Some girls might want to be prepared for periods even years before they have them. It's okay to start carrying pads, and tampons, or spare underwear in their bag anytime.
- Anne: [17:12](#) In terms of resources to help talk about this, books are really great to have around. Adult women will be a really strong influence in how girls learn to manage periods and how they talk about them as well.
- Anne: [17:25](#) You might want to try emailing different pad or tampon companies to get free samples. Companies that sell period related products often have great resources to explain periods on their website.
- Anne: [17:36](#) Kotex is a company that will send out free pads and tampons. Website is [ubykotex.com.au](http://ubykotex.com.au). Cottons also have information

about periods and starter kits from \$5. Family Planning Victoria have partnered with Cottons to create a guide for young people with autism on how to manage periods.

Anne: [17:55](#) You can find that at [amaze.org.au](http://amaze.org.au).

Anne: [18:00](#) You can find out more information about menstrual cups or DivaCups at [lunette.com.au](http://lunette.com.au). They have some really good information about how those are used as well. [inaudible 00:18:09] period underwear a few times. Modibodi is the Australian period underwear company. They sell period underwear, swimwear, and exercise gear.

Anne: [18:18](#) [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org) Has great information for helping to explain how periods work. And in class, we use a video from Jean Hailles for women's health. Go to [Jeanhailles.org.au](http://Jeanhailles.org.au).

Anne: [18:29](#) For more information about us, you can go to [fpv.org.au](http://fpv.org.au). Please follow us on Instagram, or Facebook, or Twitter. Look out for our next episode of the podcast or subscribe so you don't miss out. Thank you so much for listening.