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Having the period talk with your eco warrior child



Period products have changed: Cheeky Mama reusable cloth sanitary pad

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By [Rosie Murray-West](#)

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Period products and attitudes have changed. Here's what you need to know before you talk to your children about periods - which you should do by the time they're 8, experts tell Rosie Murray-West

"I bet Greta Thunberg doesn't flush her tampons into the sea". Sometimes parenting a young eco-warrior can throw up some interesting discussions.

My 12-year-old can spot a piece of single-use plastic at 50 paces, is considering veganism and attends Friday climate strikes. But how would her dedication to Planet Earth play out when it came to her first period?

Statistics show that the next generation of young women are ready to put their parents' money where their principles are when it comes to menstruation, with reusable period pants and other eco solutions becoming more popular.

"Today's consumer is becoming more aware and concerned with environmental and sustainability issues, so they are looking for alternative options," says retail expert Nicole Higgins, who coaches entrepreneurs through her business The Buyer and Retail Coach. She adds that the global market for reusable pants alone is set to grow from \$79 million (£58 million) to \$300 million over the next five years.

The market is saturated (if you'll excuse the pun) with environmentally friendlier options for the menarche. With bright colours and designs aimed at the increasingly young girls who use them, they promise to make menstruation at a young age easier to manage and less of a burden on the environment.



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"Navigating pads and tampons can be very complicated for young girls," explains Ruby Raut, founder of period pants brand WUKA (<https://wuka.co.uk/>). "Every girl knows how to use a pair of underwear."

And with new products, comes a new form of "period chat", says Lauren Derrett, who is about to launch a new reusable pads business called Wear'em Out (<https://thisgirlisenough.co.uk/contact>). "Children today already know a lot of the basics, so it's important that we shift to the impact of menstruation on the world." Jette Viridi, founder of organic tampons business il (<https://www.ilolove.com/>), reminds parents to remember that developments around gender may also affect the way we should talk about periods.

It's easy to be daunted by the responsibility of "the chat", but parenting coach Alex Kremer says that if you're honest and open you won't go far wrong.

“It’s incredibly important to keep the lines of communication open from an early age. Fostering honesty and openness from the beginning means it’s not an “icky” topic. We should be educating our children around changing bodies from an early age.”

Modern sanitary products - what’s available?

Period pants



Modibodi describes its moderate-heavy absorbency reusable pants as: 'super absorbent, stain repelling and comfy, so you can wear leggings, play footy, or just chill with zero period panic'

What they are: Absorbent pants that can be worn without tampons or towels (including at night) and then washed and reused. A seven pack of reusable pants from ModiBodi is £117 (<https://www.modibodi.co.uk/collections/bundles-red>), or Wuka’s First Period Pack is £49.99 with the code FIRSTPERIOD and includes a bra and three pairs of pants. (<https://wuka.co.uk/products/my-first-period-pack>)

Pros: Very easy

Cons: Initially expensive - constant washing and drying

Menstrual cups

The Mooncup's makers say its soft medical grade silicone cup holds three times as much as a tampon

What they are: Small silicon or latex rubber cups that catch menstrual blood rather than soaking it up. The best-known version is the Mooncup - available at Boots for £21.99 (<https://www.boots.com/brands/mooncup>), but there are many others available from specialist sites such as putacupinit.com (<https://putacupinit.com>), including those suitable for new users.

Pros: Once mastered, these cups can be used for swimming, sleeping and during any day of your period and are cost effective over time.

Cons: Initially difficult to use and may require a toilet cubicle with a sink inside, which is often unavailable in school

Reusable sanitary towels

What they are: Sanitary towels composed of manmade or natural fibres that are attached around ordinary pants with press studs and washed after use. [Cheeky Wipes cloth sanitary pads](https://www.cheekywipes.com/bamboo-minky-cheeky-mama-cloth-sanitary-pads/cloth-sanitary-pad-kits-starter.html) (<https://www.cheekywipes.com/bamboo-minky-cheeky-mama-cloth-sanitary-pads/cloth-sanitary-pad-kits-starter.html>) are available at £27.50 for a starter pack including five pads and a waterproof bag.

Pros: Cost effective over time, easy to use and waste free

Cons: Can be bulky and used towels must be carried home in a schoolbag, washed and dried

Organic and biodegradable pads and tampons

Natracare's tampons are 100% cotton, and free from perfume and chlorine. They are also biodegradable

What they are: Versions of sanitary towels and tampons made of organic material, designed to biodegrade. Widely available - 16 Natracare cotton tampons are £2.50 in Waitrose (<https://www.waitrose.com/ecom/products/natracare-organic-tampons---regular/082811-42093-42094>).

Pros: The products we are all familiar with but with less worry about waste and chemicals.

Cons: More expensive than traditional sanitary products and still can't be flushed, so will need to be composted.

Do's and don'ts for a modern period chat

DO

Start early

According to the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies at University College London, the average age to start your period is 12.9, but anything over eight years old is considered normal.

“Secondary school is definitely too late,” says Hayley Smith, founder of FlowAid, which provides free sanitary products for vulnerable and homeless women and girls. “By Years 5 and 6 girls and boys will need this information.”

Parenting coach Kremer adds that it isn’t just girls in primary school who should be taught about periods: the boys should too. “They need to understand what their mothers/sisters/future girlfriends go through and how to support them.”

Mind your language

Virdi, who owns organic tampon brand ilo, suggests examining the way you think and talk about your own period. “Using words like ‘dirty’ about used tampons can change the way girls feel about their periods- actually menstrual blood is very clean. Talking about being ‘emotional’ during your period can have negative connotations too.”

DON'T

Focus on the bleeding

“Just informing a girl that they will bleed for seven days can be terrifying, unless you talk about why,” says Virdi. Understanding the entire cycle means that girls will be ready for other symptoms, including hormonal fluctuations and even pain around ovulation.

Try this useful [factsheet](https://womhealth.org.au/conditions-and-treatments/understanding-your-menstrual-cycle-fact-sheet) (<https://womhealth.org.au/conditions-and-treatments/understanding-your-menstrual-cycle-fact-sheet>) for indepth information.

Expect to be the expert

It’s amazing how many of us go through our lives without understanding our own bodies, so before you try to help your child, you should do your homework first. Even once you’ve gained the scientific expertise, your child might find your take on menstruation outdated, especially if you struggle with embarrassment around it.. Raut, from Wuka, believes that parents have much to learn from their children on this issue. “Girls and boys these days are very open to having a conversation about periods, but the older generation were taught that periods are taboo and some kind of dirty thing.”

Resources from the [Family Planning Association](http://www.fpa.org.uk/shop-products-and-training?f%5B0%5D=field_subject_area%3A149) (http://www.fpa.org.uk/shop-products-and-training?f%5B0%5D=field_subject_area%3A149) (FPA) can help with technical knowledge

for you and your teen.

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