

MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM VOICES WITH EXPERIENCE

Endometriosis South Coast -
Parents Guide

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This report is built around one clear aim:

To amplify the voices of local people who grew up in Portsmouth and to share what they say would have helped them when they were younger.

Their reflections highlight how parents, carers, and wider support systems can make a meaningful difference, not by doing everything, but by:

- recognising early signs of pain or distress
- creating safe moments to talk
- making small adjustments
- helping children understand what is and isn't normal
- guiding them towards support
- believing them

This is not about criticising or pointing to missed opportunities.

It is about celebrating the unique and powerful role parents and carers already play as the first point of contact for most young people — and showing how small, practical changes can transform a child's confidence, wellbeing, and long-term health.



Voices From Local People

We heard from **538** people living in Portsmouth and the surrounding areas

They shared honest, powerful reflections about:

- their first periods
- pain and symptoms in school
- how adults responded
- what helped (or didn't)
- how their experiences shaped later life
- and what they now know would have made things easier

Their experiences are not presented as “facts” or “clinical findings”.

They are lived experiences, a gift of hindsight that helps us understand what young people may still be facing, and what can improve outcomes, support prevention and early intervention efforts (avoidable underdiagnosis, pain, discomfort, missing out on experiences).

Period Support For Parents & Caregivers

Why this matters

Many children start their period while they are still in school.

Periods can bring:

- Pain
- Worry
- Embarrassment
- Questions

Young people need kind adults who can help them feel safe and understood.





What Pupils Told Us About Their Experiences

We asked 538 people in Portsmouth about their early periods.

They shared what it felt like growing up.
Here is what they said:

1: The pain was very bad

Some children:

- could not get up
- felt sick or faint
- could not focus in school

But they thought they should
“just put up with it.”

“It hurt so much. I thought I had to be brave.”

2: They thought the pain was normal

Many were told:

- “Everyone gets pain”
- “You’ll just have to cope”
- “It’s part of growing up”

So they did not ask for help.

“I did not know it was OK to say it was too much.”



What Pupils Told Us About Their Experiences

3: They felt shy or embarrassed

Some worried:

- people would laugh
- they would “make a fuss”
- they might bleed through clothes

So they kept quiet.

“I felt ashamed to say anything.”

4: They did not have the words

They didn’t know what to say like:

- “This pain is different”
- “I need help”
- “I am scared something is wrong”

They needed an adult to help them speak up

5: They needed someone to listen

When adults believed them, it changed everything

“One person listening would have helped me so much.”

Things You Can Say

How are you feeling today?

You can always tell me anything

Ask kindly if they seem upset or tired

Celebrate their body and how it works

Talk openly, little chats help more than one big chat

Talk about periods before they start

Bad pain is not normal

Things You Can Do

- Help them relax when it hurts
- Keep pads and spare underwear easy to find
- Keep warm packs, blankets, and supplies ready
- Over-the-counter medications can help
- Give them quiet time and rest when needed
- Help them ask for a doctor's appointment
- Speak up together to get support

You don't need to be an expert, you just need to care.

And you already do.

Signposting

- When accessing clinical support, focus on explaining how the pain impacts your young person's day-to-day life and activities.
- The pharmacist may be able to assist with over-the-counter medications
- Help your child or young person fill out a symptom tracker for 3 months to show the GP. HeyGirls online has a great one.
- The mental health support hub (NHS online) has some resources that may help if this is affecting your child or young person's mental health.
- Symptoms may be worse if there is neurodiversity. Please speak to your GP about this.



Final Message

What **EVERY** child and young person should hear

“I believe you.”
“Your pain matters.”
“You are not alone.”
“We will get help together.”

Your support can:

make them feel safe
stop shame before it starts
help them get care sooner
build lifelong confidence

You are doing better than you think.



We're here to support you



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