

# Building period positive sports clubs

It is essential that young players are treated with dignity and respect, especially when it comes to matters of reproductive health and menstruation. This is essential to ensuring that young people who are menstruating feel supported so they can continue to participate in sport, both competitively and socially.

A Period Positive Sports Club has the following qualities:

- ✓ open and ongoing discussions about periods and their impact on players of the sport
- ✓ practical and comfortable period-friendly uniforms
- ✓ clean, safe, lockable toilets and change facilities that have sanitary bins and access to sanitary products; and
- ✓ a diversity of period products available to players to reduce their worry about any lack of access or preferred product.

## Building period positive sports clubs

Young players report missing out on a range of activities they enjoy when they have their period. The reasons they give include period product availability and the broader social, cultural, environmental, and economic factors that limit their ability to engage and participate in sport competitively or socially.

Stigma surrounding periods is reinforced by ignorance, silence and embarrassment, as well as by a lack of practical support and education for players, staff, and coaches. Young players said open and ongoing period education would better support them to stay informed about their periods, the associated symptoms they can expect, and their choices surrounding management of their period in ways that will enable them to continue to participate and not feel ashamed or embarrassed about having their period.

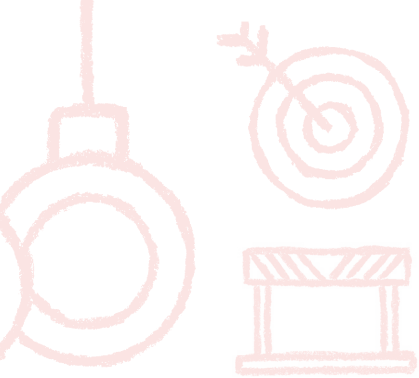
To be able to provide the best support for their players, coaches need to be educated and better informed about periods and their impact, and barriers to participation in sport.

*“I think they should be more talked about and natural. I don’t understand why it’s not talked about more; I think it would make me especially more comfortable around the topic.” – 15 year old*

*“...Girls need to be informed and know that they can talk to someone and ask for help when at training. Maybe more information about use of tampons in swimming.” – 15 year old*

### A period positive sports club has:

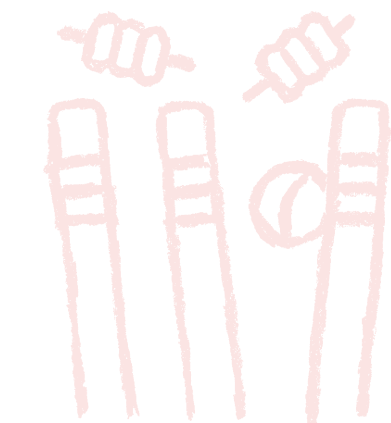
- ✓ Adequate and well-maintained facilities that include private change rooms with period products, sanitary product disposal bins, and clean toilets.
- ✓ Access to a variety of period products without having to ask any adult to supply them.
- ✓ Coaches who are trustworthy, sensitive, and informed about periods and their impact on players motivation and performance.
- ✓ Education and open discussions amongst players and coaches about menstruation.
- ✓ Practical and comfortable uniforms.
- ✓ Sporting codes and rules that accommodate menstruation and its impact on players.



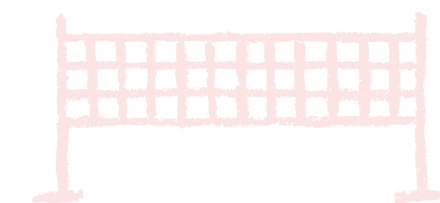
## Barriers to sports participation due to periods



- Feeling embarrassed about periods means players don't feel able to explain how they feel, to speak up or ask questions, leaving young players feeling unsupported and excluded.
- Feeling physically uncomfortable, unwell or in pain puts people off being active around the time of their period. Period pain is real – about 1 in 10 people who menstruate experience severe pain due to endometriosis and other health conditions.
- Feeling blamed for taking time off to deal with the impact of their period.
- Club staff who often don't understand how periods impact performance, or they don't talk about it in ways that are respectful or helpful.



*“Educating male coaches that girls have periods and that can affect their gameplay. Having sanitary items in female bathroom in case during a game/training we get our period.” – 15 year old*



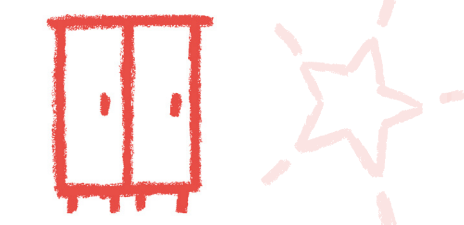
*“Making bathrooms accessible, having good facilities. Being able to go off the pitch if you get your period.” – 15 year old*



*“Supplying sanitary items. Providing toilets with sanitary bins. Being educated and having a safe environment to talk to people about advice.” – 13 year old*



*“Make coaches aware of the difference periods can impact the way we play footy. If we are in need of someone to talk to, having someone always there if we need and to feel comfortable.” – 15 year old*



# The impacts of periods on sport



## Being involved

Young people have said their periods affect their capacity to be involved in sport and other physical activities. This includes missing PE lessons at school and sporting commitments outside of school, including 'working out'.

Many said they missed out on sport because they did not have easy access to a period product while playing sport and therefore had fears of leaking. Others said they had concerns about how to use and trust certain products that were made available but different to those they were used to.

Many young women worry about their capacity to change their product if they are "caught short" (ie if their period starts suddenly). Many said that being allowed to freely go to the toilet is important.

The impacts of periods on swimming and other water activities are often mentioned by young people. Many described being 'scared of leaking' in the water, or of not wanting or feeling comfortable using tampons over sanitary pads. Many said they didn't know how to use tampons and were too scared to try. Others believed that swimming or playing sport was "not ok" while they were on their period.

*"Sometimes I don't dance as the idea of using tampons kind of scares me and I am not comfortable using them. Swimming also for that reason."*  
– 14 year old



## Period management

Common period symptoms, such as headaches, cramps, dizziness, nausea, and fatigue, have a significant impact on a young person's performance, motivation, and participation in sport. Many players felt that dropping out of sport altogether often coincided with arrival of their period.

While some young people reported avoiding 'high intensity' activity while menstruating, others described how their severe period pain and discomfort made any kind of movement difficult.

Whatever the reason, they recognised that a lack of comfort or low confidence in managing their period was something that was compromising their fitness levels and capacity to engage in physical activity altogether.

Although it is essential that young people who menstruate not be pressured into 'soldiering on', it is also important they are correctly informed about ways to manage their periods so that their opportunities to participate in sport and other everyday physical activities are not unnecessarily limited.

*"[Our periods] impact our lives and how we feel about sports. [They] can lower your self-esteem and how you think about yourself. [It] affects feelings about trainings."* – 14 year old

*"I avoid all sport because it's uncomfortable and the fast-paced exercise makes me dizzy due to blood loss as well as headaches, dizziness and nausea being some of my symptoms. I also can't move a lot on my first and or second day due to pain, so I stay home from school very often."* – 15 year old



## Facilities

Young people often refer to sporting clubs and sports venues that had no functioning toilets or change rooms available to females. Where sports clubs did have facilities, cubicles were not always private enabling players privacy if they have their period. This was particularly prevalent within clubs considered to be traditionally male dominated sports, such as cricket and football.

Adequate facilities are paramount for young people's inclusion and participation in sport. Not only does there need to be toilet and change facilities, but these need to be clean and well maintained. Some respondents noted they did not use poorly maintained or unclean toilets, "holding on" until after the game, and in some cases becoming unwell because of this.

The respondents also noted that many of the toilet cubicles at sporting facilities did not have a sanitary product disposal bin. For dignity and privacy, there need to be sanitary product disposal units made available in each toilet cubicle – not just a few.

*"I think having a girls change room would help and having female products in there will be helpful and maybe someone to talk to." – 13 year old*



## Period products

Period-positive sports clubs have period products freely available to players in places that they can easily access them without having to ask their coaches or staff members for these items.

At one club, respondents reported having to use toilet paper instead of a period product because there were none provided.

Many respondents noted that they carried period products in their kit bags and knew they could rely on their teammates to have spares if they had run out. However, they expressed feeling embarrassed about needing to ask for a period product from a coach. Some preferred to ask their teammates, or their mothers for sanitary items, rather than their coaches. This was especially true of players whose coaches were male.

Some players reported feeling scared or hesitant to use tampons or menstrual cups due to the stigma and a degree of fearmongering that surrounds their use. For some sports, such as swimming or gymnastics where the respondents felt physically exposed, they would forgo trainings and competitions, during their period. This demonstrates a need for young people to be informed about their choice of period products and how to properly use them in different situations and conditions. Many respondents mentioned customised period underwear, shorts and bathers as being valuable alternatives to pads and tampons for use while participating in sport and other physical activities.

*"I think having pads and tampons inside the cubicles would make girls feel more comfortable to use them without having to ask for them." – 14 year old*



## Coach support

It is important for players to have a trustworthy and supportive coach. They need their coaches to be understanding of the ways in which their periods impact their performance and motivation.

*"...You should have a coach you can trust as well as a coach you can talk to about your period." – 12 year old*

Having mostly male coaches at their sports clubs made some respondents feel uncomfortable about raising issues surrounding their periods. They commented that

having women, or other people who menstruate around their clubrooms, made it easier and less embarrassing for them. They often felt their male coaches were not understanding and would more often than not respond to their comments about their period-symptoms with a “toughen up” attitude. Others were worried about being benched for the duration of their period, or forced to play if they were feeling unwell.

*“There have been people that don’t feel comfortable telling their coach their struggling with periods, because their worried about losing pitch time or being blackmailed into playing because of shaming.” – 15 year old*



## Sports Uniforms

It is important that sports uniforms are comfortable and practical. For many young people on their periods feeling uncomfortable and over exposed in their sports uniforms was enough to deter them from playing sport at all.

*“[Periods] impact our lives, [without] our sport and the uniform making it worse. Clubs need more support when it comes to this topic and to help gymnasts.”*  
– 14 year old

Respondents worried about leakage or exposure in their sports uniforms. For example, gymnasts felt over-exposed because they aren’t allowed to wear shorts at competitions. Similarly, cricketers felt uncomfortable with the requirement to wear a white uniform. Respondents wanted dark coloured fabrics and to be allowed to wear bike shorts underneath their uniforms for additional coverage.

Other respondents requested flexibility in the rules of their sports clubs to allow for substitutions at any point in the match if they signalled a need for this and to be able to take more breaks.

*“... Having extra players so you can go off. The rules being that you can come off at any time.” – 13 year old*

## The Commissioner’s Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (‘the Act’). The Commissioner’s role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia’s children and young people. This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard

The Commissioner’s strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation in the adult world.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes and practices that relate to delivery of services aimed directly at them.

Unedited quotes from children and young people are used in this guide to ensure their views are faithfully communicated. Thank you to the South Australian young people who shared their experiences and insights. This work would not have been possible without the support provided by:

- St Mary’s Soccer Club
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- Barossa Swimming Club
- Payneham Norwood Cricket Club
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