

HOW TO BE A PERIOD

You'd better sit down for this: "Two-thirds of teens report stress as a result of limited access to menstrual supplies, along with feelings of shame and self-consciousness," says period activist Nadya Okamoto.

One in five girls doesn't have the period products

she needs—and it's a problem that's only getting

worse. Here's what you can do about it.

WARRIOR

BY EMILY LAURENCE

This just in: Roughly half the planet gets their period. That means there are literally billions of menstruators in the world: Your mom, favorite female teacher, Zendaya—yep, they all get their period.

So talking about your period should feel normal...because it is. But for some reason, it can still feel embarrassing (shoutout to anyone who's tried muffling the sound of ripping open a pad while in the bathroom stall at school).

This shame is a big deal because it can stop girls from speaking up if they need period products, whether it's simply because they forgot to stash some in their backpack or because they don't have access to tampons or pads at all.

And not being able to afford period products is, unfortunately, a common reality for many teens. According to a recent study, one in five teen girls surveyed couldn't pay for menstrual hygiene products, and 66% felt stressed because they didn't have access to tampons or pads. This is wrong, plain and simple. It's not like getting your period is a choice.

It's time for period products to be readily available in every school—and it's time to make this a reality.

PERIOD POVERTY IS REAL

When 17-year-old Laila Brown got her period at age 14, it wasn't exactly something she wanted to shout from the rooftops. "I used to be so embarrassed to talk about it," she says. Due to financial constraints at home, many months Laila didn't have period products—something known as period poverty.

Laila is far from the only teen who has had issues at school because of her period. "I've run out of pads before and it really stressed me out," Megan G., 15, shares. Adds Madison L., 16, "At my school, they don't supply period products, so sometimes I went without them. I was super worried that my period would leak through the toilet paper I had wadded up."

This is a common theme among many menstruators. According to pad-maker Kotex, the number of those who don't have access to period products increased by 35% in the last few years. And it's not like the problem just goes away: Because periods happen every month for most people, the issue is ongoing.

TAKING ACTION TO END PERIOD SHAME

Laila got so sick of being quiet about the need for period products that she and her sister, Asia, co-founded 601 for Period Equity, a nonprofit dedicated to ending period shame and providing girls with the products they need.

Nadya Okamoto went down a similar path. She became passionate about period poverty after learning about homeless women not having access to feminine hygiene products, so she

founded the nonprofit Period when she was 16. Now 24 and the author of *Period Power*, Okamoto continues to advocate for this cause. "I've experienced financial and housing instability myself," she said. "And realizing I never consciously thought about period poverty was a huge privilege check."

HOW TO GET FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS IN YOUR SCHOOL

Next time you walk down a crowded school hallway, remember that one out of every five girls you pass doesn't have the period products she needs. Matter of fact, there are only five states in the entire country that require schools to have free period products. Unless you want to move to Scotland or New Zealand (where the law requires all schools to have free period products), there are some steps you can take to get them for free in your own school.

Okamoto says the first step is bringing it up with people who have the power (aka the administrators). If you aren't sure which person to schedule some face time with, ask your school nurse. That's who people usually go to when they need period products, so your nurse will not only understand the importance of what you're talking about, but they'll also know which person to recommend you talk to. If your school doesn't have a nurse, ask a health teacher.

"Sometimes schools just aren't aware it's an issue; it's not something they've thought about," explains Okamoto. Be completely honest about how the lack of period products is affecting you and others, especially if you've had to miss school because of it.

Okamoto also adds that period products shouldn't be hidden away. For example, you shouldn't have to ask your school nurse for a pad every time you need one—they should be easy to grab and go. So be sure to voice that need, too.

When you speak up, Okamoto says you can expect one of two things to happen. The first is that the administrator might say,

Wow, you're right! Let's solve this! Or they could say that there just isn't the budget for free tampons and pads.

If that happens, the next step is reaching out to a local nonprofit you can partner with to get period supplies in your school (go to period.org for thought-starters) or hold a product drive by partnering with a national or local organization (check out helpingwomenperiod.org).

While creating change can be scary, it can be done, especially if you've got a solid squad to back you up. Just ask Laila.

"At its core, grassroots organizing is about people who share a common goal or struggle and decide to make a change by recruiting other like-minded people and organizing for or against something," she shares. "There are so many ways to better serve menstruating students and to give girls dignity and better opportunities." And, saying it loud, we all deserve it. 🙌

