



**Developing an evidence-informed, clinically-backed & peer-reviewed  
online Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens (13-18yrs)  
on UK-wide social prescription.**

UK launch: 21 March 2024, House of Commons

<https://menstrualcyclesupport.com/courses-info/teens>

In partnership with:



On 21 March 2024, digital menstrual health, education and research organisation, Menstrual Cycle Support, in partnership with menstrual health charity, Endometriosis UK, launched the world's first menstrual health service for teens on social prescription at an event in Parliament.

The online menstrual literacy course is available in partner schools and GP surgeries across the UK.

Teens with a menstrual cycle can sign themselves up without a healthcare referral on [www.menstrualcyclesupport.com](http://www.menstrualcyclesupport.com) or at [endometriosis-uk.org/menstrualcyclesupport](http://endometriosis-uk.org/menstrualcyclesupport)

If you are a GP surgery or health clinic or school who would like to offer the course to your patients / students, please contact [kate@menstrualcyclesupport.com](mailto:kate@menstrualcyclesupport.com) for more information.

<https://menstrualcyclesupport.com/courses-info/teens>

This report documents the evidence-informed and patient / public involvement (PPI) research undertaken to develop and launch the course alongside clinicians, teachers, parents and young people themselves.

"From a clinical perspective, this evidence-informed course is a very useful tool for teenagers to explore their relationship with & experience of their menstrual cycle, promoting body literacy & a good awareness of when to seek help in the case of any menstrual distress. The course teaches them how to recognise when they need to seek medical support; how to create a chart as an adjunct diagnostic tool and self-management techniques for low-moderate pain and mental health issues that may be exacerbated by the menstrual cycle."

Emily Stewart, Clinical Content Consultant

"This course will transform the lives of many young people in a wholly positive way. This should become an essential part of the toolkit for any sex and relationships education programme in schools, in alternative and home education and other young people's settings...The online platform provides a familiar and accessible medium for teenagers to learn and interact with the course material."

Kathryn Pratt, Education Consultant

"This resource is a helpful tool to support adolescents with their menstrual cycle and it's heartening to see a commitment to continuously evolving the content to enable universal access, including taking on board my feedback on consideration of protected characteristics, accessibility and representation of marginalised and faith-based communities"

Humie Webb, Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Consultant

"We are often approached by parents and students asking for support with period pain and other symptoms and we look forward to being able to support them with this much needed new menstrual health service, which we hope will become a key part of our mental health policy"

Safeguarding Lead, Founding Partner School

"As a School Nurse I spend a lot of time talking to young people about their periods, and the complexities that come with periods, it is so hard to signpost to specific menstrual cycle information without tipping into the sexual health zone and often I find that's not the young person's focus, they actually just want to manage their periods better. I am also finding a lot of young people on the COC pill to aid their periods, and this then is even harder to support from a non-sexual health and contraceptive side."

School Nurse, Independent Peer Reviewer

"This is a fantastic addition to our portfolio of social prescribing activities and I'm thrilled that our young people are able to access it. I believe it will give them the tools needed to support them on their menstrual cycle journey."

Social Prescribing Link Worker, Independent Peer Reviewer

"It's so useful to have a resource that isn't simply a biology lesson, where scientific terms can be overly complex for what my actual [lived] experience is. This resource is finally something that explains how to manage every day and when and how to seek extra support with a language that I understand and don't feel embarrassed to use"

Focus Group Participant, 16 years

## Foreword

*Endometriosis UK are proud to work in partnership with Menstrual Cycle Support to deliver the 'Menstrual Cycle Support for Teens' course. The course will equip young people to gain an understanding of their menstrual cycle and to identify potential menstrual health conditions. It aims to transform stigma and shame and reduce the diagnosis times for endometriosis and menstrual health conditions.*

*We know from our research that around half of those living with endometriosis first experience symptoms when aged 16 or under. But despite this, teens who seek help from health practitioners often have their concerns dismissed or diminished. As a result, diagnosis times are poor and are getting worse. This is concerning as without a diagnosis, there is no route to secure treatment and support, and left untreated the disease may progress. Being 'too young' to have endometriosis or menstrual health problems is a myth that must be overcome.*

*GPs and other health practitioners have also told us that when teens come to them to seek support with menstrual health conditions, they can struggle to describe their symptoms using the correct language. Very few understand how keeping a diary of their symptoms can help in their discussions with health practitioners. The Menstrual Cycle Support for Teens course will provide the right knowledge and tools for those experiencing menstrual issues to get the help they need when they need it.*

*For young people with menstrual health conditions, the impact of lost education and academic attainment can have a lifelong impact on their career and prospects. As well as impacting physical health, the psychological effect of being told your pain is not real, or not believed, can be significant. The Menstrual Cycle Support for Teens course will empower future generations, providing the understanding and language they need to effectively seek help.*

Emma Cox,  
CEO of Endometriosis UK

*What has struck me whilst developing this Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens with young people from across the UK, is how little has changed in menstrual education and literacy since my own experience of suffering in silence with poor menstrual health as a teen.*

*That said, the taboo has at least lifted sufficiently (thanks to the powerful push of feminism over 100 years and awareness-raising organisations like Endometriosis UK) that schools from across the country were willing and open to exploring ways to improve the menstrual experience of their young people. This is a newfound recognition of a menstrual knowledge gap that is in dire need of being filled if we are to take health and gender equality seriously.*

*Once we - students, teachers and clinicians alike - were all able to move beyond the sheer disbelief that the subject has remained confined to reproductive biology lessons (given the fact that it impacts life pretty much daily for 40 years on average), we were able to explore together the opportunities that the menstrual cycle offers for systemic change - where we look to the cycle as a blueprint for living well, a 'fifth vital sign' to assess health.*

*I suspect (and hope) that within just a few years, as the taboo continues to unravel, every school and college will have menstrual health services at the heart of their safeguarding, mental health and pastoral care and, with a sharp rise in menstrual literacy, we will all live in a more just and equitable world.*

Kate Shepherd Cohen  
CEO, Menstrual Cycle Support

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this project, especially the teenagers and young people who gave their time, to the teaching staff at our Founding Partner Schools and to the clinicians, researchers and educators who gave their time inputting into the content through the Independent Peer Review.

Thanks to the Menstrual Cycle Support Primary Care Network partners who have agreed to offer the course on social prescription, from launch.

We would also like to thank Dr Sue Walker (University of Exeter) for compiling the Independent Peer Review and to Emily Stewart (clinical consultant), Kathryn Pratt (Education Consultant) and Humie Webbe (EDI consultant) for giving a final stamp of approval of the course and content.

Special thanks to Falmouth University for supporting students to become video presenters of the course.

Finally, a big thank you to the teams at Menstrual Cycle Support and Endometriosis UK.

### Founding Partner Schools

Stoke Newington School (London); The Kingston Academy (London) ; Epsom College (Surrey, SE England); Prior Park College (Bath, SW England); Camborne International Science Academy (Cornwall, SW England); Whitchurch High School (Cardiff, Wales); JordanHill School (Glasgow); Parrs Wood High School (Manchester)

### Youth Advisory Board

Sophie Brittain, Gabriella Carr-Hill, Megan Coutanche, Sharanya Ganti, Alice Griffiths, Ellen Hutchinson, Georgia Kelly, Sophie Lawrence, Samsam Mohamed, Laura O'Sullivan, Chantai Price, Eulogeo Raphasha, Frida Rix, Yasmin Rubino, Becky Sargent, Amy Sheppard, Priya Sirah, Emily Smith Kirchner, and to all the students from across the UK who took part in the focus groups and peer review process.

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# 1. Project Brief & Partnership Outline

## The brief:

To create, evaluate, test and launch a MCS multimedia self-paced eLearning course on social prescription for teenagers (13-18 years), using an iterative co-design and mixed-methods approach with young people, schools / colleges and clinicians across the UK.

## Partnership:

Following the launch of Menstrual Cycle Support's flagship online menstrual literacy course for adults on social prescription at the House of Lords (Oct 2022), currently available in over 500 GP surgeries across the UK, menstrual health charity, [Endometriosis UK](#), and digital menstrual health, education and research organisation, [Menstrual Cycle Support](#) (MCS), have partnered to develop and launch a menstrual literacy course on social prescription suitable for teenagers.

Menstrual Cycle Support has worked with [paediatric healthcare professionals](#), [leading menstrual health researchers](#), [educators](#) and [school safeguarding leads](#); teamed up with [8x Independent and State/Academy secondary schools](#) from across the UK; and, worked closely with a [Youth Advisory Board of 20x teenagers and young people](#) to ensure diverse voices were heard from across the country in our mixed-methods approach to creating, evaluating and testing the course for teenagers.

The course for teenagers is an adaptation of the Menstrual Cycle Support course for adults and both are [informed by the latest evidence-based research](#) in menstrual literacy, health and education, as well as up-to-date evidence in social prescribing.

## 2. Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens: digital menstrual health management programme

- Can be taken on any device, including smart phone
- 45 minutes
- Four-step course (each step is 5-15 minutes)
- Self-paced
- Can be taken in one go, or come back as many times as needed
- Learn the cycle phases, how to track and chart, how to notice patterns and get the support you need at home, at school / college and at work.
- Anonymous NHS-approved before and after questionnaire to measure impact

As with the Menstrual Cycle Support menstrual literacy course for adults, the evidence-informed and clinically-backed menstrual literacy online course for teenagers (13-18yrs) on social prescription, is, a mindfulness-based programme designed to:

Support self-management of low to moderate period pain (or other menstrual cycle associated pain) and / or low to moderate mental health issues exacerbated by the menstrual cycle.

To help recognise 'red flag symptoms' to know:

- *when* to get medical support and
- *how* to evidence experience in healthcare appointments with a 'three month cycle chart'

To provide an accessible language to describe the menstrual cycle experience and science to friends, teachers, GPs and employers.

To explore tracking & charting methods available and how a mindful 'menstrual cycle awareness' approach (or *inner tracking*) can support a chosen tracking method

To understand different approaches to managing menstruation.

The course is designed for *anyone with a menstrual cycle* (or anyone who feels they are due to start their period soon and want to find out how to manage the experience).

The course is designed to be suitable for those with missing / irregular periods or those on medication, including hormonal contraception.



"I would absolutely recommend this to a friend, especially if they were having problems with their periods, for example, pain and problems doing tasks and this was affecting their mental health and school work".

Youth Advisory Board Member, 17 years

### 3. Objectives of the Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens

The course is designed to reduce feelings of hopelessness around the menstrual cycle, alleviate and manage menstrual cycle symptoms through stress-reduction and increase mental health and wellbeing. It is also hoped the courses will help to speed up diagnosis times and reduce wasted GP appointments by empowering patients with the confidence, tools and language to express their symptoms and needs, as well as provide ongoing support for participants if they are waiting for a secondary care appointment.

### 4. Iterative co-design with young people, clinicians and schools / colleges using mixed-methods approach (summary)

In order to ensure the content of the teens course is evidence-informed, clinically backed and co-designed by young people themselves, Menstrual Cycle Support carried out a mixed-methods and PPI (Patient and Public Involvement) approach to evaluate the suitability of the adult course for teenagers, adapting the course based on feedback for launch.

#### Independent Peer Reviews

This included running 2x Independent Peer Reviews, the first with paediatric healthcare professionals, social prescribers, researchers and educators; the second with teenagers themselves. We invited the teenagers involved to be a member of our Youth Advisory Board.

#### Working with Founding Partner Schools

We established partnerships with a mixture of Independent and State / Academy secondary schools from across the UK, ensuring a variety of social and economic demographics and inclusivity of schools with high numbers of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. These Founding Partner Schools then helped us by finding interested students to participate in focus groups (in-person and virtual).

## Focus Groups

We ran a series of 4x focus groups with 26 students aged between 13-18 years and 8 teachers- two with students in person (at the schools - Epsom College and Camborne International Science Academy), one with teachers in person (Epsom College) and a virtual focus group to ensure all partner schools were able to participate. Teachers also participated in the focus groups. Students were invited to be a member of the Youth Advisory Board.

## Menstrual Cycle Support Youth Advisory Board

The Youth Advisory Board (20 young people aged 15-23 yrs) helped to test the course and also helped select the logo for the course. The teen course video presenters - 5x menstrual activist students from Falmouth University also sit on the Youth Advisory Board.

"I enjoyed all of the videos and that there were interactive parts if you wanted to take part of them. Also, the people in the videos were my age, so made it more relatable and comforting for me. Enlightening, helpful, engaging."

Youth Advisory Board member, 17 years

## Independent Professional Assessment (Clinical, Education, EDI)

Prior to launch, 3x independent assessments of the course were carried by a clinical consultant, an education consultant and a Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity consultant, who provided feedback for immediate implementation (which was actioned) and suggestions for ongoing improvement.

## Primary Care Network Partners

Menstrual Cycle Support Primary Care Network partners, representing 135 surgeries have agreed to begin prescribing the course from launch, helping to begin to capture measurable impact through our NHS approved questionnaire.

## Iterative co-design

The PPI (Patient and Public Involvement) research from our mixed-methods evaluation approach was analysed and used to help adapt the adult course for application for teenagers and to ensure an iterative co-design.

## 5. Measuring Impact

At Menstrual Cycle Support, we carefully measure the impact of our programmes to ensure we build robust evidence-based content, continuously update the course based on feedback of participants and inform the wider menstrual health research bodies in the UK. (In 2024, for example, we are presenting abstracts to the UK's leading menstrual health research conferences on the impact of our course for adults).<sup>1</sup>

We work closely with the leading social prescribing data analysis organisation, [Meaningful Measures Ltd](#), and have applied their NHS-approved methodology to measure the impact of the course for teens. This validated tool is an individualised outcome measure used for evaluation of biopsychosocial and person-centred approaches to supporting people.

We aim to publish our first Impact Report of the course for teens, 12-18 months following launch.

We have provided further information about the impact of the course for adults in the Appendix.

**Menstrual Cycle Support aims to publish our first Impact Report of the course for teens, 12-18 months following launch.**

## 6. Menstrual Cycle peer Support groups in schools / colleges & surgeries:

<https://menstrualcyclesupport.com/courses/teens-support-group-toolkit/>

### **Social connection benefits**

Menstrual Cycle Support recognises the importance and benefit of peer support. Research into social prescribing activities shows how “good social connections improve health literacy and reduce health inequalities... [enabling] an improved

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<sup>1</sup> 4Ms Consortium Conference and Menstruation Research Network Conference.

sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> Some of the health and social benefits of social connection include lower stress and anxiety, reduced isolation or loneliness, more motivation and energy, improved mood, more confidence and reduced pain with fewer symptoms.<sup>3</sup>

To enable safe social connection for teenagers through our digital platform, we have created a Menstrual Cycle peer Support group online toolkit so that teaching staff and students are empowered to set up / facilitate a group in their setting.

### **Best-practice tips for teachers**

This toolkit, intended for use in places of education, provides best-practice tips for teachers (and students) for setting up and facilitating/ enabling a peer support group for participants who have completed the Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens.

The Menstrual Cycle peer Support group is not intended to teach the content of the course but to enable participants to discuss, practice and share what they have learned in a safe and supportive space.

### **Nature connection**

It is recommended, in warmer months, that the peer support group is held outside, this is in line with the evidence that spending more time outside and in nature improves your mental health, as well as the research about the benefits of 'green social prescribing', which enables individuals to connect with nature, their community and themselves too.<sup>4</sup>

### **Thanks to:**

The toolkit was created in consultation with Menstrual Cycle Support Community Consultant, [Trudi Holden](#), who is a Natural Health therapist and experienced facilitator of women's circles and the practice of group sharing menstrual cycle stories.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-prescribing-applying-all-our-health/social-prescribing-applying-all-our-health>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theaccessgroup.com/en-gb/blog/hsc-10-ways-social-prescribing-can-improve-mental-health/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing/>

# Appendix

## 1. Who is Menstrual Cycle Support?

Menstrual Cycle Support is an accredited digital menstrual health, education and research organisation who have created the world's first menstrual health service available on social prescription.

Founder and CEO, Kate Shepherd Cohen is a multi-award winning menstrual health pioneer. She was awarded Innovator of the Year at the International Social Prescribing Awards for the pilot of Menstrual Cycle Support on social prescription (2021), with address from HRH King Charles III.

[www.menstrualcyclesupport.com](http://www.menstrualcyclesupport.com)

## 2. Who is Endometriosis UK?

Endometriosis UK is the UK's leading charity for all those affected by endometriosis, determined to ensure that everyone gets prompt diagnosis and the best treatment and support.

The charity works to break down barriers to access - whether information, treatment or support - wherever endometriosis impacts on lives. They are a powerful voice for those with endometriosis, driving up care standards across the UK and providing vital support services, reliable information and a community for those affected by endometriosis.

[www.endometriosis-uk.org](http://www.endometriosis-uk.org)

### 3. What's in the Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens?

Menstrual Cycle Support Four Step Course (45 mins)	Step 1 (Learn) What phase am I? (15 mins)	Step 2 (Practice) What day am I? (10 mins)	Step 3 (Reflect) What's my cycle doing? (15 mins)	Step 4 (Dream) What does my cycle need? (5 mins)
<b>What we're learning</b>	<p>The <b>four phases</b> of the menstrual cycle and why it matters to know.</p> <p>The practice of <b>Menstrual Cycle Awareness</b></p> <p>How the menstrual cycle compares with <b>other natural cycles</b></p> <p>Simple <b>science of hormones</b></p>	<p>Why having an <b>awareness of every day</b> of our menstrual cycle is important</p> <p>How to practice Menstrual Cycle Awareness, every day, using a <b>Cycle Check-in</b></p> <p>Five different <b>methods of charting &amp; tracking</b></p>	<p>How to compare three menstrual cycle charts and <b>notice patterns</b></p> <p><b>Finding the good</b>, as well as challenging places in your menstrual cycle</p> <p>How to use charts to <b>evidence your experience</b> at the GP, parents, teachers and friends.</p> <p><b>Red flags</b> to watch out for and what to do if you're concerned</p>	<p>Short visualisation exercise to help <b>dream into what you need</b> during your period</p> <p>How to <b>make your dream a reality</b></p>
<b>Why we're learning it</b>	<p>Understanding of our place in the world as cyclical beings and <b>the power of having a menstrual cycle</b></p> <p>A <b>relatable language</b> to describe our experience so we can better understand ourselves</p>	<p>Staying in tune with ourselves every day, in a mindful way, to help <b>manage cyclical changes</b> and improve wellbeing.</p> <p>Understanding <b>how charting &amp; tracking methods can be enhanced</b> by Menstrual Cycle Awareness practice.</p>	<p>To discover our own version of 'normal'</p> <p>To <b>help organise our life</b> so that it supports our menstrual cycle and so that our menstrual cycle supports our life</p> <p>To <b>get support</b> when we need it.</p>	<p>To help us tune into what we really need and <b>feel empowered</b> to get it</p>

### 4. Social prescribing

#### a.) What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing is defined as 'a way of connecting people to activities, groups and support that improve health and wellbeing'.<sup>5</sup> It is a means of 'enabling health professionals to refer people to a range of non-clinical services. The referrals generally, but not exclusively, come from professionals working in primary care settings, for example GPs or practice nurses'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/what-is-social-prescribing/>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/social-prescribing#:~:text=Social%20prescribing%2C%20also%20so%20metimes%20known,example%2C%20GPs%20or%20practice%20nurses>

Social prescribing is effective alongside other treatments, like medications or therapies. Social prescribing is designed to help add to the effect of any treatments being received.<sup>7</sup>

Menstrual Cycle Support is an active member of the Social Prescribing Innovation Network, led by the [National Academy of Social Prescribing](#) (England), [The Social Prescribing Network](#) and of the [Scottish Social Prescribing Network](#), and a member of the [College of Medicine and Integrative Health](#).

“I’d like to see [the Menstrual Cycle Support course] in every GP surgery in the country”

Michael Dixon, GP and Chair of College of Medicine

### **b.) Menstrual Cycle Support on social prescription (for adults) Independent Impact Report (Summary)**

The digital Menstrual Cycle Support course for adults is offered in over 500 GP surgeries across the UK, with self-referral also available (currently 70:30 self-referral:referral). Menstrual Cycle Support referrals have come from a variety of healthcare professionals in primary and allied healthcare. For example, GPs and nurses, as well as physiotherapists, osteopaths, dieticians, mental health and social workers.

Research is ongoing but early indicators, as shown in an independent impact report compiled using an NHS-approved research methodology by leaders from the social prescribing movement Dr Marie Polley and Dr Helen Seers, Meaningful Measures Ltd, demonstrate that the course for adults has had extraordinarily significant positive statistical impact on confidence in talking about the menstrual cycle and overall wellbeing:

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<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/social-prescribing#:~:text=Social%20prescribing%20helps%20to%20connect%20people%20with%20mental%20or%20physical,medication%20involved%20in%20social%20prescribing.>

## Meaningful Measures Impact Report sample findings

	Baseline score (±SD)	Follow-up score (±SD)	Score change (±SD)	P value Statistically very significant (p≤0.0001)
Relationship with menstrual cycle	3.4 (±1.5)	4.4 (±1.1)	1.0 (±1.4)	p≤0.0001
Confidence to talk about menstrual cycle	3.7 (±1.7)	4.5 (±0.8)	1.4 (±1.7)	p≤0.0001

*'The menstrual health support course has enabled people to become more aware of their menstrual health cycle, have more confidence to talk about their menstrual health cycle with clinicians, and have more knowledge to chart their cycle and adapt their life according to the different phases.'*  
(Extract from the Impact Report Conclusion)

Read the full Impact Report: <https://menstrualcyclesupport.com/news/adult-impact-report-2024/>

### c.) Social prescribing for children and young people

There is emerging evidence around the benefits of social prescribing for children and young people. In a recent report (2023) commissioned by NHS England and published by the National Academy of Social Prescribing, as well as a report published by UK children's charity, Barnardo's (Oct 2023), social prescribing was revealed to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as being cost effective.<sup>8,9</sup>

"Social prescribing can play an important role in supporting young people who are struggling with their mental health, by connecting them to non-medical support that makes a huge difference"

Charlotte Osborn-Forde. Chief Executive of the National Academy for Social Prescribing

<sup>8</sup> Hayes, D., Jarvis-Beesley, P., Mitchell, D., Polley M., & Husk K. [On behalf of the NASP Academic Partners Collaborative]. (2023). [The impact of social prescribing on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#). London: National Academy for Social Prescribing.

<sup>9</sup><https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/report-missing-link-social-prescribing-children-young-people.pdf>



## 4.) The evidence-informed therapeutic practice that underpins the course

The Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens on social prescription is an adaptation of the evidence-informed and clinically-backed course for adults and both are informed by the latest evidence-based research in menstrual literacy, health and education, as well as recent evidence in social prescribing.

### a.) Evidence-informed

As with the course for adults, the Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens content is guided by the biopsychosocial principles of pain management set out in [NHS pain-management programmes \(PMPs\)](#), including: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR); Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT); and, Compassion-Based Therapy (CBT). The course also follows and links to NHS guidelines for management of period pain, heavy menstrual bleeding, irregular / missing periods.

The content is designed to support the guidelines for menstrual health, as set out by [National Institute of Care and Excellence \(NICE\)](#), the [Royal College of General Practitioners \(RCGP\)](#), the [Royal College of Obstetricians/Gynaecologists \(RCOG\)](#), the [Royal College of Nursing \(RCN\)](#).

The courses specifically support the creation of a symptom 'diary' as an adjunct clinical decision support tool, providing clinicians with additional information to deliver personalised care on social prescription.

We have been guided by the most recent evidence-based research in menstrual health, literacy, education, as well as recent evidence in social prescribing.

Of note is the work by leading menstrual health scholar, Dr Sally King (medical sociology), Founder of [.menstrual-matters.co.uk](#).<sup>10</sup>

In particular, her recent research into:

the gaps in menstrual literacy: <https://www.menstrual-matters.com/black-box/>;

premenstrual 'inflammation': <https://www.menstrual-matters.com/pmi/>.

And, her guidance to using the Universal Pain Assessment Tool for menstrual cycle symptoms:

<https://www.menstrual-matters.com/period-pain-norm/>

In addition, we utilised the latest evidence-based research on the menstrual cycle as 'fifth vital sign':

[https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/org/od/directors\\_corner/prev\\_updates/menstrual-cycles](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/org/od/directors_corner/prev_updates/menstrual-cycles)

And the menstrual cycle as indicator of good health in adolescents: :

<https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2015/12/menstruation-in-girls-and-adolescents-using-the-menstrual-cycle-as-a-vital-sign>

Menstrual Cycle Support is a member of the [4M Consortium \(menarche, menstruation, menopause and mental health\)](#), the [Society for Menstrual Cycle Research \(SMCR\)](#), the [Menstruation Research](#)

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<sup>10</sup> Dr Sally King took part in the Independent Peer Review of the Menstrual Cycle Support course for adults (2022) and her feedback was instrumental in shaping the core content of our programmes..

[Network](#). We have received the Period Positive: Trained and Tested accreditation from menstrual educator, former Head of PHSE, author and Founder of [Period Positive](#), Chella Quint.

## **b.) Clinical input**

The Menstrual Cycle Course content for adults, which the teen course is based on, had input from clinicians in general practice, psychology, nursing, gynaecology, reproductive and sexual health, occupational therapy, social prescribing and osteopathy, as well as from the leading menstrual health charities, NGOs, menstrual educators and researchers and, of course those who experience a menstrual cycle, themselves.

The teens course has had additional input from GPs, senior practice nurses and social prescribing link workers; as well as, paediatric healthcare professionals including consultant paediatricians with specialism in adolescent health and school nurses plus teaching staff, for example: PSHE teacher, girls' Sports Leader, Designated Safeguarding Leads and Head of girls' boarding house.

At Menstrual Cycle Support, we also have clinicians in senior positions and an established [Clinical and Research Advisory Board](#). This includes, for example:

- **Dr Stewart Smith (Primary Care):** Senior Practice GP, early adopter of social prescribing (St Austell Healthcare) & Integrated Care Board member (GP Collaborative Chair, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly).
- **Mr Michael Dooley (Secondary Care):** Consultant Gynaecologist
- **Kate Williamson (Allied healthcare):** Registered Osteopath (also Schools Partnership Lead).
- **Dr Richard Pratt (Paediatrics + Health tech):** GP, Associate member of Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health (RCPCH), Clinical Director Umanuu, Clinical Lead ORCHA.
- **Dr Helena Tucker (Psychology):** Clinical psychologist specialising in treatment methods associated with premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and pre-menstrual exacerbation of underlying mood disorders (PME).
- **Dr Gemma Sharp (Research):** Professor of Epidemiology, University of Exeter, and Chair of 4Ms Consortium: Menarche, Menstruation, Menopause and Mental Health.

## **c.) Independent Peer Reviews**

**The course for teens** has been independently peer reviewed - led by **Dr Sarah Walker** (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Health Statistics at the University of Exeter Medical School and a member of the Menarche, Menstruation, Menopause and Mental Health (4M) Consortium).

One of Dr Sarah Walker's current projects is the Support for Parent Carers in England (SPaCE) project, a Three NIHR Research Schools Mental Health Programme funded role in the Children and Young People's Mental Health (ChYMe) research collaboration. Sarah is also working on the SPLENDID Programme, carrying out a complex intervention systematic review of social prescribing interventions. Her PhD (2017) predicted the risk of uterine, breast and cervical cancers in symptomatic women in primary care.

Participants included a range of paediatric healthcare professionals (including school nurses), researchers and teaching staff, as well as a group of teenagers aged 13-18 years.

**The course for adults, from which the course for teens was adapted**, was independently peer reviewed - led by **Dr Nuša Farič** (University of Edinburgh/UCL – Health Informatics/Health Psychology/Population Health).

Dr Nuša Farič is a scientific consultant and researcher specialising in innovative Health / Fem Tech solutions. She holds a PhD in Health Psychology and Informatics at University College London (UCL) and supervises several MSc research projects, one of which included first-of-a-kind analysis on the effects of oral contraceptives on depressive symptomatology in healthy women. One of the six-method studies in her PhD was recommended by the UK Health Security Agency on gov.uk as a demonstration of digital health tool research methodology.

The peer review of the content for adults included leaders in the field of menstrual health, research and education; as well as people with a menstrual cycle, themselves.

#### **d.) Menstrual Cycle Awareness**

The Menstrual Cycle Support courses on social prescription both for adults and for teens, teach the mindful practice of 'Menstrual Cycle Awareness', which was created and developed by psychotherapists **Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlizer**, co-Founders of [Red School](#).<sup>11</sup> The practice is rooted in ethno biography (they have worked with thousands of people with a menstrual cycle) and is informed by post Jungian psychology e.g. Process Work, archetypal psychology, mindfulness and the embodied movement practice of Movement Medicine.

At Menstrual Cycle Support, we have evolved the practice of Menstrual Cycle Awareness (with the permission of Red School), applying and adapting it for use in a healthcare setting so that it may further support those with a menstrual cycle.<sup>12</sup>

#### **d.) Health tech regulation accreditation**

Menstrual Cycle Support is a Health/Fem tech business. As such we seek to adhere to the principles as set out by the [Organisation for Health Care Regulation Apps](#) (ORCHA), which measures against 350 international health tech standards and regulations, including those on the NHS Digital Technology Assessment Criteria (DTAC).

In March 2023 we scored a well-above-average 82% in our first ORCHA compliance review and the course for adults is listed on ORCHA's App Library designed for clinicians to find trusted resources to signpost patients.

The course for teens is currently under review with ORCHA (March 2024).

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<sup>11</sup> [www.red-school.net](http://www.red-school.net)

<sup>12</sup> Menstrual Cycle Support is not funded by Red School.

## **e.) Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity audits**

We are committed to continuously evolving the Menstrual Cycle Support Course to ensure universal access.

The Menstrual Cycle Support courses are designed for *anyone* with a menstrual cycle. We do not use gendered words (e.g. girl / woman) in our content as we recognise that not everyone with a menstrual cycle identifies as a girl / woman.

We hope to have [addressed health inequalities](#) by making the course available for free in schools and surgeries across the country and also available on self-referral (participants can sign themselves up, any time).

We hope to have [addressed digital inequalities](#) by ensuring the course is available on all devices, including smart phones. By enabling schools / colleges / workplaces to provide course to students whilst at school / college, students are able to utilise their place of education / work computer / internet access. The course is also available to download and print.

We employed an Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Consultant to review content of adult course, (**Neelam Heera**, CEO of [Cysters](#) charity representing the voices in menstrual health of marginalised communities) and **Humie Webbe**, EDI consultant to Welsh Government, to review content for teens course.

We are currently translating our content using a phased approach, beginning with Welsh. We are committed to enabling access to anyone with a menstrual cycle living in the UK, including those whose first language is not English.

We are working with reviewers at the [British Dyslexia Association](#) and [National Autistic Society](#) to improve access and content inclusivity. The content has gone through an Inclusivity Audit with [Purple](#), who provide consultancy to ensure an improved user experience for disabled people and their families. Please also see the Menstrual Cycle Support [Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity policy](#) and our [Accessibility](#) statement for further information.

## **e.) Legal & Data Protection**

We have updated our terms and conditions, terms of accessibility, cookies policy and created a separate privacy policy, designed for young people.

We understand that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) explicitly states that children's personal data merits specific protection. It also introduces new requirements for the online processing of a child's personal data.

Children have the same rights as adults over their personal data. These include the right to:

- be provided with a transparent and clear privacy notice which explains how their data will be processed
- be given a copy of their personal data
- have inaccurate personal data rectified and incomplete data completed
- exercise the right to have personal data erased if they wish.

We have made it clear to users how and why we are using data. Please see our [Privacy Policy - teens](#) for more information.

The Menstrual Cycle Support course for teens is designed for children aged 13 years and older - this is because, by law, children must be at least 13-years-old to provide consent for an information society service (ISS) to process their personal data. Parents must provide consent if the child is under 13 (Information Commissioner's Office, 2021b). An ISS is an online service that is typically commercial and provided on request, for example social media platforms, apps, connected toys and devices, and search engines (Information Commissioner's Office, 2021c).

Menstrual Cycle Support Data Protection Officer is Kate Shepherd Cohen [info@menstrualcyclesupport.com](mailto:info@menstrualcyclesupport.com). Menstrual Cycle Support is registered under the Data Protection Act 2018 under number ZB433581 and is listed as Data Controller.

## **g.) Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is at the heart of Menstrual Cycle Support, with robust features supporting a comprehensive safeguarding framework.

We recognise that trauma, unpleasant memories and/or underlying mental health issues can surface throughout the menstrual cycle and that when charting events or physical / mental health, as we guide teens to do in our course, challenging symptoms can sometimes raise safeguarding concerns. In addition, a young person may record signs of abuse or neglect and share these with a teacher.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, some participants may be supported to access and complete the course, for example, by someone over the age of 18 (e.g. a healthcare professional, teacher or parent/guardian); and, since our participants are under the age of 18 (over 13 yrs).

We have carried out a full risk assessment and provide a policy with clear instructions for safeguarding concerns and the ability for young people to report a Safeguarding Concern to Menstrual Cycle Support, should they feel unable to approach the safeguarding leads at their school / college / work or GP surgery.

Our Founder, Kate Shepherd Cohen is a fully qualified Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and, to develop our policy, we have been working with the DSLs from our Founding Partner Schools. For more information, please see our Safeguarding Policy: <https://menstrualcyclesupport.com/safeguarding/>

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<sup>13</sup> We are guided by the latest research into the effects of trauma and the menstrual cycle. E.g. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9189376/>

## 5. Application of research for an iterative co-design

The research from our mixed-methods evaluation approach was analysed and used to help adapt the adult course for application for teenagers and to ensure an iterative co-design, this included, for example:

- ensuring videos were presented by young people and all images represented teenagers (whilst also reflecting regional and ethnic diversity)
- Making the course more interactive
- Embedding the science earlier in the course but presenting it in terms of 'the menstrual map'
- Presenting other cycles in Nature
- Applying a young person's narrative in the content
- Ensuring all consent (terms and privacy) could be understood by 13 year old.
- Creating a Toolkit for young people to set up Menstrual Cycle Support Group at school / college
- Creating a 'worried?' page, where young people could access relevant additional support
- Updating Safeguarding, terms, privacy policy to ensure the safety of young people taking the course