Menstruation
A HANDBOOK FOR GIRLS AND BOYS
The Red Elephant Foundation
what is puberty?

Did you know, that as you grow up, your body changes and develops? Around just before or soon after you become a teenager, you go into a phase of rapid growth and changes. This is called "Puberty".

All the changes happening in your body are caused by hormones. Hormones are chemicals that are carried in the bloodstream which help you grow.

For boys, these changes include the "cracking" of their voice, growth of body hair and a sudden increase in height. For girls, these changes include the development of breasts, and the onset of menstruation. These things are perfectly normal and are a part of growing up!
what is menstruation?

Menstruation, or having your period, is a monthly occurrence. During menstruation, the lining of the uterus flows out through the vagina. Menstruation usually takes place each month, and lasts for about 3 to 7 days. The menstrual cycle is the time from the first day of one period to the first day of the next.

Most young women have their first menstruation when they're between 9 and 16 years old. If you don't get your period by the time you are 16, you may want to talk to your doctor.
what is menstruation?

While menstruation is a sign of growing up, it is important to remember that you are not yet ready for marriage or prepared to have a baby.

Menstruation prepares your body for pregnancy, while your body is still growing. So, if a girl gets pregnant before she is 18, she and the baby may get hurt or fall ill, because the body is not ready for pregnancy, yet.

When menstruation begins, it is called menarche. Around middle age, menstruation ends, and this is called menopause.
what happens during menstruation?

The menstrual cycle is the time between the first day of one period to the first day of the next period. This cycle differs from girl to girl. It could be as short as 21 days or even as long as 32 or 35 days.

About halfway through the menstrual cycle, one mature egg leaves the ovary. This is called ovulation. Most women and girls do not feel it when they ovulate, but it is normal to have pain in the lower abdomen some times.

After the egg leaves the ovary, it then travels through a fallopian tube towards the uterus.
what happens during menstruation?

When the egg travels through the fallopian tube, a spongy, soft lining continues to build up in the uterus. This lining is supposed to cushion the egg.

The lining is where the fertilized egg may attach for pregnancy to begin. If pregnancy does not happen, the lining breaks down and the blood and tissue flow from the uterus through the cervix and vagina, and out of your body. This is called the period.

During an average menstrual period, a girl will lose 4 teaspoons of menstrual fluid. In order to absorb the blood when it flows out, women and girls use pads or tampons or menstrual cups.
what happens during menstruation?

Shortly before and during menstruation, some women and girls experience stomach cramps, acne, body ache, cravings, low moods, back and leg pain, bloating and fatigue, among other things. This is perfectly normal, because hormonal changes in the body can lead to these symptoms. A good way to deal with them would be to use hot water bags or take hot water baths, enjoy a bar of chocolate, and get good rest. If you exercise regularly and eat healthy, these symptoms are usually much lighter.

If the pain is unbearable and persists despite pain medication, it might help to see a doctor.
why the silence around menstruation?

Good question!
Actually, we don't know! Menstruation is a perfectly natural process, and is universal - all women, regardless of their custom, religion, language, region, race, colour and ethnicity, do menstruate within the period between menarche and menopause.

Getting your periods does not make you impure in any way. It is absolutely normal for every girl to go through this and there is nothing wrong with it. Which means, you can go about your every day life, doing all that you do, without restraint!
is menstruation taboo?

Well, it's not taboo. It's perfectly normal and natural.

In some societies menstruation is perceived as unclean or embarrassing. In some, even mentioning menstruation in public and private among men is considered taboo. Many traditional religions consider menstruation ritually unclean.

Different cultures view menstruation differently. The basis of this is either ignorance, or the belief that menstruation should be hidden. But the truth is, menstruation is not taboo, and shouldn't be treated that way, either.
so i can have conversations about menstruation?

Why, of course you can! Think about it. A woman's body has the uterus, which is the womb when she is pregnant. Imagine if the uterus wasn't around, imagine if she didn't menstruate: how would the human race reproduce?

It's okay to talk about sweating, right? It's okay to talk about taking a dump or peeing, right?

Menstruation, when you come to think of it, is the body discharging fluids. And it's perfectly okay to talk about it, too.
but... what if people around us don't?

Well, you can always keep the channels of communication open and let them know that they should also feel free to speak up about it.

From your side, it's a great idea to adopt means to break the silence and the shame around menstruation. Do you go to stores to find them wrapping a pack of sanitary pads in black or brown? How about starting there to tell them not to stereotype menstruation with taboos?
references

Planned Parenthood
Menstrupedia