

Just imagine.

A girl is in the bathroom at home and she notices something different. She hasn't seen it before. She calls out to her parents, urgently. They come to the door and ask if she's okay. 'I am,' she says, wavering a little 'I think I've got my period.' It's here. She was prepared for this, and now, after much anticipation, it's really happening. There are happy tears, on both sides of the door.

A flurry of activity: grabbing supplies, hugs, lots of hugs, planning tonight's dinner, thinking about gifts, congratulations, reassurance, calling aunties, grandmas, cousins, who all want to celebrate. She knows what's happening to her is normal and natural, but it's also important and momentous. She is a little apprehensive about her life changing now, but she's also proud, excited and can't wait to tell her friends.

Her home is like many others, where well-informed parents teach their children openly and warmly about managing periods and self-care. School is also a safe and supportive place, free of judgment and stigma, where menstrual wellbeing is imbedded in school policy and practice, and positive menstrual education and culture is for everyone. She grows up to work in environments with modern attitudes towards women and others who menstruate, many with menstrual and menopausal policies in place to ensure that all workers are supported to be their most productive, creative and whole selves.

When she needs it the healthcare system provides holistic and effective treatment, underpinned by an understanding of menstrual wellbeing as a key factor in overall health and quality of life. Advances in science, due to adequate and fair funding, have enabled the development of sophisticated knowledge about the menstrual cycle and related health.

She understands the lifestyle and environmental factors that help her to support her hormonal balance and if she experiences period pain or other cycle related distress she's respected when reporting symptoms, and diagnosis and therapeutic intervention is swift and clear. In this setting she understands that it's not menstruation or the menstrual cycle that is the problem but specific conditions that, when identified, can easily be treated.

While it feels a long way off for her she sees this dignity and care naturally extend to the people in her family and community who are peri-menopausal and menopausal – they do tell strange stories though about the olden days, when there was a menstrual taboo!

Adapted from About Bloody Time, Jane Bennett and Karen Pickering, © 2021