

# 10 PRACTICAL MALE INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES



## 1. CREATE MOTTOS FOR BOYS AND MEN

**JUSTIFICATION.** Mottos serve as a reminder of the main message, are catchy and easy to memorise. Used during the activities, mottos can help to create the feeling of togetherness. Written on visible platforms and displays, they attract people's attention and provoke their thoughts.

**APPLICATION.** 1. Employ the mottos during the training to engage the audience, make them more relaxed, and positive. Say the motto several times before the or after a breaking-point during the activity and ask your audience to repeat it with you. 2. Ask the participants to create a motto themselves. Divide them into groups, let them present their mottos and vote for them. (See the annex for examples.) Mottos can be placed on school message posts, t-shirts, stickers, handouts, or in spaces used by men.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, fathers, husbands, male teachers.

**ACTIVITIES.** Training on SRH and MHM with boys; info sessions with boys and youth; community initiatives for men; social events, campaigning and other awareness-raising initiatives.

## 2. PREPARE FATHERS FOR A MENSTRUAL EMERGENCY

**JUSTIFICATION.** Sometimes the father is the only person present when a girl experiences her menarche or other problems related to her menstruation. Many fathers do not know how to act in such situations and how to assist to their daughters. They would like to learn how to cope with it so that both the girl would receive the needed support, and the father would handle possible confusion, stress, panic or fear.

**APPLICATION.** Prepare a mini-training for the fathers. Include: 1. The benefits of being ready for an emergency situation. 2. How they could prepare themselves psychologically, trust themselves, and avoid panicking. 3. How they could talk to their daughters. 4. Practical step by step advices for each situation.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Fathers.

**ACTIVITIES.** Information meetings for parents before and during intervention support; parents' gatherings in schools, sensitization at men's workplaces, community initiatives for men.

## 3. DISCUSS SIGNIFICANCE OF FATHERS' ROLE DURING A CHILD'S PUBERTY

**JUSTIFICATION.** Many programs emphasize the importance of children talking to their parents, both fathers, and mothers. However, there is often little discussion with fathers about their role during puberty, it's significance, necessity, positive influence, and methods of parents and children's interaction.

**APPLICATION.** Talk with the fathers about how important it is for them to show interest and support for their children during this time. Also talk with the children, and discuss: Should they talk to their parents about the changes they experience? When? Whom would they talk to? How do they think their parents would react? What could be the positive outcomes of it? What challenges could the children face? What if the parents do not want to listen? How could the children show a response to their parents when the latter try to approach them and talk about puberty, when their parents show an interest in their lives or they even feel monitored by their parents?

**TARGET GROUPS.** Fathers and mothers, boys and girls.

**ACTIVITIES.** Sensitization meetings for parents before and during intervention implementation, training on SRH and MHM with children; info sessions with boys and youth.

#### **4. DISCUSS MALE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MENSTRUATION**

**JUSTIFICATION.** Boys and men have many misconceptions about menstruation, which influence their behaviour and attitude towards women. Discussing the most prevailing misconceptions with them would dispel myths, improve communication and women's situation in a community in a long-term.

**APPLICATION.** Enquire about and discuss misconceptions with the boys and men. Start with those that are culturally specific and found in that region. Some of the common misconceptions: 1. Menstruating girls are ready for marriage. 2. Menstruating girls are going to be moody all the time etc. (See the annex.)

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, fathers, husbands.

**ACTIVITIES.** Training on SRH and MHM with boys; info sessions with boys and youth; community initiatives for men; sensitization meetings for parents.

#### **5. UTILIZE SPACES USED OR ACCESSED BY MEN**

**JUSTIFICATION.** Common spaces can be used to serve as a reminder of activities, knowledge and skills. It is also a learning space for those who do not dare to ask or do not know where to look for information.

**APPLICATION.** Create "youth" or "male corners" in schools, universities or other settings where males hang out, and leave a quiz or an activity for a competition, give project participants hand outs, which they can fill in and hang up, or create an interactive board or a poster with key questions. If possible, identify a project participant who can share monthly updates or new monthly topics in the space.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, fathers and partners.

**ACTIVITIES.** Training on SRH and MHM with boys; info sessions with boys and youth; community initiatives for men; social events, campaigning and other awareness-raising initiatives; advocacy.

#### **6. MALE AMBASSADORS & ROLE MODELS**

**JUSTIFICATION.** Role models are important, both for boys and men. Engaging respected male role models with similarities to the target group can be a powerful way of convincing and engaging the target group. They can also be a continuous source of info in the community and reinforce messages.

**APPLICATION.** Explore with project & school managers and local leaders who in the community would be powerful role models. Approach the individuals and convince them to champion the issue. Incentives could be making a difference for the community, capacity building on the issue and a certificate or badge appointing the person as an ambassador. Also, use male trainers whenever possible.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, male teachers, local male leaders (formal & informal).

**ACTIVITIES.** Design phase of the project.

#### **7. SHARE FACTS ON MHM IMPORTANT TO MALES**

**JUSTIFICATION.** Males usually want to protect their female counterparts. However, as they are often not involved, males often do not know important MHM facts, such as how much a woman can spend on pads, advantages/disadvantages of different methods, that some girls don't go to schools during their periods, or that girls sometimes exchange sex for pads. These simple facts can be very convincing. Also, men need to feel that their concerns have been considered and that they are addressed respectfully.

**APPLICATION.** Get their attention by starting conversations and trainings with these facts. Prepare in advance for the questions and concerns that males usually have.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, fathers and partners.

**ACTIVITIES.** Info sessions with males; campaigning and other awareness-raising initiatives; advocacy.

## 8. SHARE FEMALE PERSPECTIVES WITH MALES

**JUSTIFICATION.** Sharing women's perspectives about MHM, SRH, and men's roles in a non-aggressive way provides men with an opportunity to see how women understand MHM interactions with men and male behaviour. This can encourage males to expand their understanding, feel empathy, and reflect on their own behaviour.

**APPLICATION.** Choose the perspectives relevant to your info session or sensitization meeting (for example, men not wanting to see menstrual blood). Introduce them to the male audience. Ask their opinion, explore why they agree or disagree. Ask whether they would like to change anything. Why? What? If it is an open and vocal audience, consider developing the activity into a discussion between the two genders or role-plays presenting to each other their perspectives.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, husbands, fathers.

**ACTIVITIES.** Info session with youth; community initiatives for men; social events, campaigning and other awareness raising initiatives.

## 9. ADD LOCALLY-SPECIFIC MALE INTEREST TOPICS TO THE TRAINING

**JUSTIFICATION.** To make the training even more relevant to men, training topics can be adjusted to reflect priorities uncovered in conversations with males, or other local challenges to males reproductive health. This can include sexuality, male circumcision, bullying and links to reproductive health issues, harassment, rape and abortion, body changes and other sexual and reproductive health aspects.

**APPLICATION.** During the project design phase, explore with representatives from the male target group and project managers whether other topics not covered by the training curriculum should be included. Include the new topics in accordance with the national guidelines.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Boys, youth, fathers, husbands.

**ACTIVITIES.** Training on SRH and MHM with boys; info sessions with boys, youth and fathers.

## 10. POSITIVELY ENGAGE WITH NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

**JUSTIFICATION.** During the sensitization meeting, men are often willing to listen and agree. However, the *so what?* or *it does not concern me* attitude may be present in the audience. Positively engaging with and deconstructing these attitudes is more effective than just listing "the right" attitude, behaviour or perspective to the audience.

**APPLICATION.** As a facilitator, be open to emerging negative opinions and allow the participants to express them. Prepare yourself to discuss opinions such as: 1. It is a sensitive issue for women, why should men discuss it? 2. I carry financial responsibility. Menstruation is not my concern. 3. Women are weaker that's why they can't bear menstrual pain etc. It may also lead to a discussion of men's misconceptions or introduction to women's attitudes to men.

**TARGET GROUPS.** Youth, fathers, husbands.

**ACTIVITIES.** Community initiatives for men; social events, campaigning and other awareness-raising initiatives.

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## ANNEXES

### I. SUGGESTED MOTTOS FOR BOYS AND MEN

- You don't need to menstruate to support your woman. Just care.
- Your voice means a lot to her. Be there for her period.
- A stain is not a shame. Blood on the skirt is not dirt.
- Men help when they listen and understand!
- My wife and I talk about menstruation. Do you support her as well?
- My girl, my period. Are you a supportive dad?
- Period happens to your daughter too. Are you ready?
- Listen. Talk. Act. Get ready for your girl's menarche.

### II. MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MENSTRUATION AMONG MEN

**1. A menstruating woman is dirty. Others should not use the same household items which she uses during her period.**

EXPLANATION: If a girl or a woman washes herself and her hands during her period, she is not dirty. Everything she uses during her menstrual period is also clean. Men can use the same things as menstruating women, sleep together in the same bed. Interacting with a man who does not wash his hands after using the toilet is riskier to one's health than interacting with a woman during her period who practices good hand hygiene.

**2. You can catch diseases when touching menstrual blood.**

EXPLANATION: Menstrual blood on a cloth or pad outside of the body is not infectious. That means that touching a menstrual blood stain on a cloth cannot transmit or spread any disease or infection. Having unprotected intercourse with anyone increases the risk of catching a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV. Men with small abrasions or cuts on the skin of their genitals could contract HIV by having unprotected intercourse with an HIV-positive woman, whether she is on her period or not.

**3. During her period, a woman needs to bathe 3-5 times a day and after every bathing she should change her clothes.**

EXPLANATION: During one's period, usual bathing for a girl or a woman is enough. It is important that girls and women know their flow and monitor it to be able to change their menstrual cups or pads on time. It is recommended that girls and women wash themselves once a day if they have access to water and a private place. There is no need for girls and women to change their clothes every time after changing pads because the clothes are clean. They need to change clothes if they get stained.

**4. Menstruation is a sickness. Women and girls who have their period should not do any work and house chores, and should simply rest.**

EXPLANATION: Menstruation is not a sickness. It is a normal process that every woman experiences. If girls and women experience some pain or nausea during their period, they just need to know how to manage them. In fact, doing house chores and exercising during a period is healthy. Some women may want to rest if they don't feel well, but physical activity often relieves symptoms associated with menstruation. Girls and women should keep moving and exercising both for their physical health, and mental state since exercise improves mood. Exercising can also reduce cramps. If a girl or a woman knows that during her period she has

severe cramps, she could prepare for her period by improving her nutrition before her period starts. For moderate to severe cramps, a woman can use painkillers such as *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (Ibuprofen)* or *acetaminophen (Paracetamol)*. Women with stomach ulcers should not take *Ibuprofen*.

**5. If a woman menstruates, she will be in a bad mood or moody all the time.**

EXPLANATION: Menstruation causes hormonal changes in a girl's or a woman's body. Therefore, she may be more sensitive to issues in her life. But that does not mean that all girls and women will be always moody during their periods.

**6. If a girl gets a blood stain on her clothes during her period, she is disorganized and messy.**

EXPLANATION: Although it is possible to track one's menstrual cycle, periods are not always regular. From the time of a girl's first period, it can take a few years until her period becomes regular. In addition, a period can start earlier or later than expected for many reasons, such as stress or malnutrition. The blood flow may also differ. Depending on how a woman chooses to manage her period, the risk of leakage could be greater. Therefore, even the most organised girl can get a blood stain on her skirt. Even then, she should stay confident and assertive.

**7. Period starts after rape.**

EXPLANATION: Girls begin to get monthly period during puberty, when their bodies experience normal hormonal changes that prepare them to eventually carry a pregnancy. No outside event (such as rape) is needed for them to begin to menstruate and produce blood.

Girls and women who survive rape might bleed because of tears, cuts and other injuries to the vaginal tissue caused by the forceful insertion of the penis. This bleeding is not related to their menstrual cycle. A woman's monthly cycle does not change because of rape unless they become pregnant.

**8. Girls menstruate because they had an abortion.**

EXPLANATION: Girls begin to get monthly periods during puberty when their bodies experience normal hormonal changes that prepare them to eventually carry a pregnancy. No outside event (such as abortion) is needed for them to begin to menstruate and produce blood.

After an abortion, girls and women may have bleeding up for up to six weeks as the uterus sheds its lining and returns to its smaller, pre-pregnancy size and shape. This bleeding is not related to menstrual bleeding. Once a woman stops bleeding after a pregnancy, she will resume her normal menstrual cycle within 1-3 months.

**9. Girls menstruate for 3-4 days. On the 5th day, if the girl has an intercourse, she will get pregnant.**

EXPLANATION: Not necessarily. Firstly, not all girls and women menstruate for 3-4 days. A period can last between 3 to 7 days.

Pregnancy depends on men's sperm coming into contact with an egg that is released from the woman's ovary. Ovulation happens once each menstrual cycle, usually between days 10-14. However, sperm can survive in a woman's body for up to 5 days. Therefore, if a woman has intercourse on day 5 and ovulates on day 10, there is a small chance that she could become pregnant. The most important determinant of pregnancy is the time of intercourse relative to ovulation, not a period.

**10. A menstruating girl cannot stay with her father anymore. She is ready for marriage.**

EXPLANATION: Girls can start menstruating as early as 9 years old. They are not ready for marriage and are still developing physically, psychologically and socially at this age. Every person under the age of 18 is

considered as a child. Both boys and girls, need many years to get ready for a marriage physically, psychologically and socially.

**11. A man discussing menstruation with other men is mad and stupid.**

EXPLANATION: Menstruation is a natural process that happens to every woman. Menstruation is a necessary part of the same cycle — that means women can conceive and produce children. Mothers gave birth to men because they were menstruating. Therefore, talking about menstruation, menstrual health and hygiene is a totally normal thing. If boys and men did not talk about it, how would they know what menstruation is, and how could they contribute to improving the way women experience menstruation? If they did not share their knowledge and experience, how could they stop stigmatisation and harassment of girls and women who menstruate?

**12. Menstruation was, is and should stay an issue only for women.**

EXPLANATION: Women's menstrual health is an issue for the whole community. First of all, women can only produce children because they menstruate. Therefore, men should be also involved into their menstrual health issues. Secondly, boys and men often stigmatise girls because they lack knowledge about menstruation. Thirdly, if a woman or a girl experiences some difficulties due to menstruation and she is alone, she cannot get any help if she is not allowed to approach her husband, brother or a male friend. Last but not least, menstrual health is an essential aspect of a woman's whole wellbeing. A healthy woman is more productive and beneficial not only to a family, but also to a community.

**13. The woman is supposed to be available for sex immediately after her period.**

EXPLANATION: Some women enjoy sex during and after her period and some others do not. A woman can decide when she is ready for sex. If she does not feel ready for sex just after her period, a man needs to wait until she will feel ready and do not press her.

**14. Girls cannot get pregnant having sex during their menstruation.**

EXPLANATION: Girls and women can get pregnant if they have intercourse during their periods. Because male sperm can survive for up to five days inside a woman's body, a girl may become pregnant if she ovulates within five days of intercourse. Some women ovulate during or immediately after their periods.

**15. Girls should not prepare food and sit with their fathers during menstruation.**

EXPLANATION: If a girl practises a good hand hygiene, she can engage in the same daily activities she normally does every day, including all types of social interaction. There is no reason for a girl to interact less with her male and female family members. Her menstrual status does not influence the quality of the food she prepares either.

**16. It is not a man's responsibility to take care of menstruating women or girls and he should not buy pads for her.**

EXPLANATION: A woman's or a girl's menstrual health is a concern for the whole family and the whole community. If a woman or a girl cannot manage her period in a safe, hygienic, healthy, and dignified way, it could interfere with her daily activities and relationships with others. Girls will miss school, and their academic performance could suffer; she might even avoid associating with others. The woman produces children for the family and contributes to the family work and other matters in many ways. Therefore, her health and wellbeing are also her man's concern. A man in loving relationship should want to help his girl to feel happy, safe and comfortable.

### III. COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS & CONCERNS BY MALES

Health related questions:

- 1) Is it safe to use for young girls?
- 2) Will a girl remain a virgin after using the cup?
- 3) Will the vagina expand after using the cup?
- 4) Have any women/girls developed allergies after using the cup?
- 5) Have any women/girls gotten infections because of the cup?
- 6) Has it been tested on African women or only white women?
- 7) Has the cup been approved by national health authorities in Uganda?
- 8) Has the cup been approved by local health authorities/local chairmen?

Economic aspects:

- 9) Can the cup really be used for 10 years?
- 10) You only need the cup and no other methods, such as pads, to manage the menstruation?
- 11) In a cost-comparison to other methods – how much cheaper is it?

### IV. MAIN ADVANTAGES TO BE EMPHASIZED TO MALES

- 1) Using MC saves costs (*present cost comparison of 1 years spending on pads or cloths versus one menstrual cup*);
- 2) This protects girls so that they will never have to exchange sex for pads
- 3) The woman or girl can work or go to school freely without having to worry about the risk of leaking;