

SHAME AND PRIDE

Year Groups 7-11

"Women are often shamed within their cultures for speaking about [sex]"
Year 12 Student, Sheffield

"My school instilled fear into students. "We had no power. Not at all empowering... Sex was demonised and categorised alongside drugs" Former pupil of faith school, Midlands

"It's important to talk about shame. If this was presented in lessons [someone experiencing shame] could relate to it, and share it"
Year 12 Student, Sheffield

"School made me feel shame. The school culture was prudish and old fashioned". Former pupil of faith school, Midlands

While there's lots of things about bodies and relationships that we can be proud of, young people say there are some issues which can be 'embarrassing' or taboo and may cause feelings of shame and stigma. These issues might be avoided in lessons to avoid embarrassment, but this lack of conversation can mean people feel unequipped and unsupported in navigating their personal experiences and are unable to make informed decisions relating to their bodies and relationships.

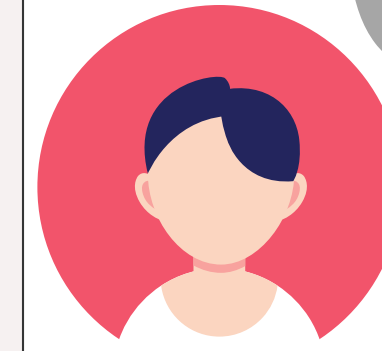
Embarrassment and shame can relate to culture and faith. Relationships between shame, culture and religion can be complex and must not be generalised. This exercise allows students to think about shame and pride. While some cultures and religions do adhere to traditional understandings of shame and honour, important differences within and between cultural and religious groups mean that it is wrong to generalise. Embarrassment and shame have multiple origins, ranging from religious teachings to the customs of a particular community or family, the culture of a particular school and the atmosphere in its classrooms. The ex-pupil in the West Midlands, quoted above, illustrates this last point. She felt shamed by the culture of her school – the kind of problem that teachers have opportunity to solve.

This creative writing activity is designed to build upon the learning from the Body Mapping exercise. Before starting the activity, briefly establish what your students define as embarrassment, shame and stigma.

Classroom Activity

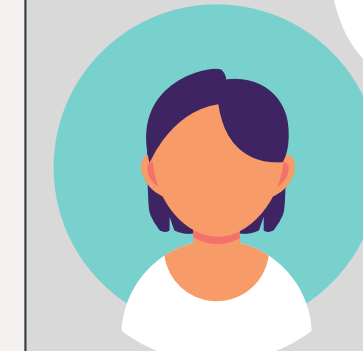
Scenario Cards

Topic: Puberty - Body Hair



"I'm starting to grow body hair"

Topic: Menstruation



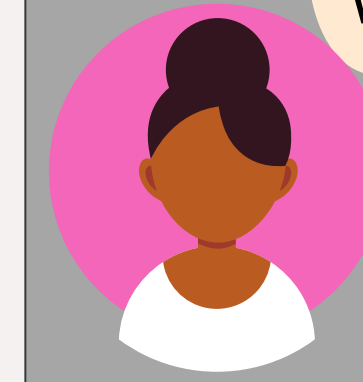
"I have just started my period and I don't know what to do"

Topic: Accessing Contraception



"I want to buy condoms"

Topic: Dating



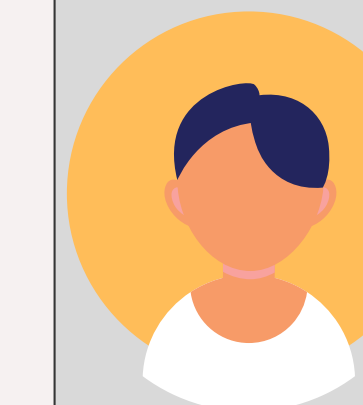
"I'm meeting up with someone and don't want to tell my family"

Topic: Having Sex



"Everyone is judging me for having had sex"

Topic: STIs - Herpes



"I'm nervous about going to the clinic"

Classroom Activity Using Scenario Cards

1. Split your students into groups and give each group a selection of the Scenario Cards. **Note to teacher: Select scenario cards appropriate to your age group.**
2. Ask the group to discuss: **How might this young person feel in this situation? For instance, is it exciting? Might it feel embarrassing? Might it make you feel nervous? Or perhaps proud?**
3. **Is there anything else that might influence your feelings in this situation? For example, your background, prior experiences, faith or religion?**
4. **What might help this person on the card to experience this situation without shame or embarrassment?**

Teacher's Notes

1. It's important to distinguish with your class what they consider as shameful, and what they consider as embarrassing. It's likely the two will be different. For example, accessing contraception may not be considered shameful, but the process of doing so may be embarrassing. It is useful to discuss their differences between shame and embarrassment: embarrassment is often about what other people think of you: shame is more about what you think about yourself.
2. It is also helpful to distinguish the sources of embarrassment and shame. Does embarrassment always come from inside, or do other people make us embarrassed? Consider, for example, family, friends, teachers, GPs, pharmacists, receptionists etc?
3. Consider how people may experience pride and embarrassment differently in relation to body hair? It may be helpful to consider factors such as gender, race and age. Note that in some Western societies, body hair is often perceived as 'unhygienic' or 'unsightly', especially for women. How might those who can't grow body hair feel?
4. When referring to a religious or cultural group, it is important to speak of 'some' communities, or 'some' individuals rather than generalising.
5. Some people might not want to talk about menstruation. Some communities celebrate periods, as they are a symbol of transitioning from childhood into adulthood. It is important to remember that just because a young person has started their period, this does not mean they are ready to take on adult responsibilities or engage in sexual relationships.

Additional Resources

- **Halal Dating**

This video, made by a group of young British Muslims, explores their own understandings of 'dating'.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_I9bHRgttqs

- **Menstruation and Religion**

This online menstrual health education guide, aimed at young people, includes interviews exploring menstruation within their religion.

www.redcloudproject.co.uk