S11E10 - Hey, This Is For You: Girls - Age 10-13

Before we start, a quick word.

This episode is made for young people, specifically for girls around 10 to 13. It talks about bodies, puberty, periods and growing up, the whole thing. All of it is honestly... it's warm. None of it should make anybody cringe. And if you are a parent listening first, great idea.

Have a listen, then share it with your daughter, or listen alongside her if that feels right. Either works perfectly. In a car, on a journey, the two of you works amazingly well. They can ask questions on the way. But whatever you decide to do is entirely up to you.

And if you're a young person listening on your own, brilliant.

This one is for you. Let's get to it.

Hello. I'm really glad you're here.

So if someone's pointed you towards this episode, maybe it's a parent, maybe you found it yourself, maybe it just appeared on a device and you were curious. However you got here, welcome, 'cause this one is genuinely made just for you. It's not watered down. It's not dressed up in weird adult language, not embarrassing in that way sometimes those conversations can be.

It's just honest, useful information about your body because you deserve to know what's going on with it. We're gonna talk about puberty. We're gonna talk about what's either happening or about to happen, and we're gonna talk all things that are completely normal but sometimes nobody always remembers to mention to you.

And we're gonna talk about a few things that are worth knowing that will make the whole thing less confusing.

Ready? Let's go.

The first thing, and I mean this, is that your body is not a problem to be managed. It's not something to be embarrassed about. It's not something that needs to be hidden or apologized for or dealt with quietly.

Your body is yours. It completely belongs to you, and what it's doing right now, or what it's about to do, is completely normal. I know that puberty doesn't always feel normal, and it can feel like your body has decided to do, oh, approximately 17 things all at once without asking permission. And some of those things can be really inconvenient, some of them just really confusing, and some of them are things you look at and think, "Is this just me? Is this okay? Is this what's supposed to happen?"

The answer is almost always certainly yes.

And no, it absolutely is not just you.

So here's what's true.

Every girl goes through puberty at a slightly different pace. Some of your friends might have already started it, some might not have started yet. Some of you might be listening, might be right in the middle of it all. All of that is normal.

There's no right time for this to begin, even though sometimes it feels like it. It feels like, "Why am I not... Why have my boobs not started to grow? Why am I the last one to start periods?" Your body will do it on its own timeline, doing what bodies do. It makes so much more sense when somebody explains what's actually going on, and that's what we're gonna do right now.

So let's talk about what puberty actually does. Puberty is your body changing from a child's body into an adult's body, simply put. It's driven by hormones. Hormones are chemical messages that your body starts producing in bigger amounts. You've always had them, but bigger amounts during puberty. Think of them as like instructions for the body sends itself.

Notifications, if you like, all day. And when those instructions arrive, your body starts to make changes. Quite a few of them. Not all at once, but actually over the course of a few years.

So here's what you can expect.

Breast development. This is usually the first sign of puberty in girls. Small, sometimes tender areas develop just under the nipples, and we call them breast buds. They can feel a little bit sore at first, and they develop gradually. They will not be the same on both sides to begin with, which feels a bit odd, but it's completely normal and very common. Everyone's breasts are different size and shape. All of it is normal. There is no one shape, despite what media, social media, or magazines will tell you.

Now, I know it sounds like a lot, but here's the thing: the amount of blood that actually comes out is much smaller than it seems. On average, it is about three to five tablespoons across the whole period, and it can look like more because of how it mixes with water and stuff like that. But in reality, that's all it is.

Now, how long does a period last? Usually between three and seven days, and again, this kind of varies from person to person. If we was talking averages, probably five days.

How does it feel? It's one of the most common questions I get asked. Some people barely notice them. Others experience slight cramping, or a dull ache, or a tightening feeling in your lower abdomen, stomach area, in the days just before or during their period.

And this happens because the uterus is contracting to help shed that lining we were just talking about. A warm heat pack on your abdomen can really help with cramps. So can gentle movement. It's very easy to think, "Oh, I'm just gonna lie down. I'm just gonna get in bed." But actually,

movement really helps. And if the cramps are severe enough to stop you doing normal things, that's worth telling a trusted adult about because there's help available, and you shouldn't just push through it.

Some people also notice mood changes in the days before their period. Feel a bit more emotional, more tired. Dare I say, more irritable. Happens to us all. This is caused by hormonal fluctuations, and it's real. It's not you being dramatic. It's just your hormones shifting, and it's worth noticing so that, when it happens, you have a name for it.

You know what's happening.

Okay, what do you actually use?

There's a few options, and it's worth knowing about them. It's worth trying them as well to find what's best for you.

So there are pads, sanitary pads, that's what we usually call them. They're worn inside your underwear, and they absorb the blood as it leaves the body.

They come in different sizes. Lighter ones for the beginning and end of a period, when the flow is lighter, and heavier ones for the middle days. They have a sticky strip that keeps them in place, and you change them every three to four hours.

Tampons are inserted into the vagina and absorb the blood before it leaves the body. They usually come with an applicator. You can get them without, but they're fiddly. They have a string, so you can pull them to remove them. Using a tampon does not affect your hymen, which is a thin membrane that partially covers the vaginal opening. And despite what you might have heard, you can use tampons from your very first period if you want to.

But, word of caution, I would ask a mum, a carer, a female carer, somebody, another female who you trust, if you want to start using them, just to explain how they work. There is lots of chat around tampons, particularly with the Tampax brand, so please make sure you check them out before you use them.

Tampons are not for everybody, and they can, if they're not inserted right, feel uncomfortable. So I'm just giving you... they're an option. But often, not always, girls will wait till they're a little bit older, till they've got used to having periods, before they start using them.

Period pants are underwear with a built-in absorbent layer. You wear them like normal underwear, wash them, reuse them. They're comfortable, reusable, and are getting more increasingly popular.

Menstrual cups, now these are getting more popular. They are small, flexible cups made of silicone that are inserted into the vagina. They collect blood rather than absorb it. They can be worn for a longer period of time, and they're washable and reusable.

However, warning, they do take a bit of practice. But once you use them properly, many people find them great. There is no right or wrong option. I would say try a few, find out what works for you.

Most people start with pads or pants because they're the easiest go-to, and then they figure it out from there.

So good luck with those.

What if your period comes unexpectedly?

At some point it will for almost everyone, even us adults. A period arriving when you're not expecting it, at school, a friend's house, or somewhere inconvenient, is one of those things that sounds mortifying in advance and is almost always completely manageable in reality.

Here's what to do.

Go to the bathroom. If you have nothing with you, which we'll talk about, just get some toilet paper, fold it up, pop it in your underwear as a temporary fix while you sort something out. You can ask a friend, a teacher, or a trusted adult. Every school is required to have period products free and available.

So go to the office. Go to a school nurse. Sometimes they have them in their toilets anyway. People will help. Nobody's gonna make it weird for you. As women, we have all been there.

Carrying a spare pad, or whatever you're gonna decide to use, whether that's a tampon or period pants, in a little bag in your school bag, with a change of underwear and maybe some sensitive wipes, from around the age of 10 or 11, is a completely reasonable thing to do, just in case, for you or a friend who might need them too.

A word on what's normal and what to mention to an adult.

Most period experiences are completely normal. They do not need medical attention, but these are things worth mentioning to your trusted adult or a doctor.

If periods are so painful they stop you doing everyday things.

If your bleeding is extremely heavy, which is rare, but can happen to the odd, very, very odd person. It's not the usual. It'll be very unusual. So what I mean by bleeding extremely heavy is soaking through a pad every hour, completely, for several hours.

Periods that have not started by the time you're 16. Now, what we do know is that girls who do a huge amount of sport, sometimes theirs can be delayed. Usually by 16 it all kicks in.

And periods that were regular, then stop for three months or more.

None of these necessarily mean anything's wrong, but it's just worth getting checked out. You and your body, how it feels, really matters.

So keep a check on it. It's very easy to let your period come and go and not notice those kinds of things.

Just keep a little check on it, whether you put it in Notes on your phone, whether you download an app for your periods. But if it's any of these, speak to a trusted adult, okay? Ask for help.

One last thing about periods before we move on.

They're not shameful. They're not disgusting. They're not something to whisper about, hide, or refer to in code.

They are just biology. Remarkable biology, actually. Your body's doing something sophisticated and cyclical that it will do for several decades, so it's really worth understanding it properly. You deserve to understand them, not just the basics, but the details.

Now, what I would say to you is think about keeping a note of them.

And periods are your superpower. You will be able to, when you're older, grow another human being. How amazing is that?

If you have boys taking the mickey or talking about it, tell somebody about it because any boys who do that don't understand. They think it's funny, but they don't understand. And also, what I would say to you is most boys who are mature just realize that's what it is.

Growing up, my dad used to go and get pads and Tampax from the shop for us. I got a sister as well. He would go, and it would not be a big thing. He was never embarrassed. He used to work in the medical profession. He was just like, "Oh, that's what it is." So it's no big deal.

I have a son and a daughter. It's no big deal for him. We explained to him what periods are just as much as we did the daughter. So do not take any rubbish from boys about this.

Okay, so let's talk about the stuff nobody usually tells you.

First of all, your vulva.

I want you to make sure you know the correct words for your own body.

So the vulva is everything on the outside: the labia, which are the folds of skin on either side, the clitoris, the openings of your vagina, and the urethra.

Now, the vagina is the internal kind of canal, the internal tube, if you like. These are not the same thing, and knowing the difference really matters.

Your labia are completely normal, whatever they look like. They might not be symmetrical. They might not look the same as everybody else's.

And you might see images online, right? But that's not what they usually look like, and I would not Google it if you haven't. Don't. It's not worth it.

The clitoris.

This is the part of the body that exists entirely for pleasure, just yours. It's small, sits at the top of your vulva. And for a very long time, a very long time, it was left out of anatomy textbooks entirely. So doctors didn't even... It didn't really have a name, wasn't really put in even for doctors, which tells you a lot about how seriously female pleasure has been taken historically.

It is there. It's yours. And knowing it exists is really important.

So during puberty, you might find yourself curious about your body, touching it, exploring it, figuring out what it feels like, what feels what. This is all called self-stimulation or masturbation. It's often talked about a lot with boys, but not about girls. And I want to be really clear: it's normal, it's private, does not harm you, and it's absolutely nothing to feel ashamed of.

This is your body. You should know about it. It's less talked about for girls than boys, and that gap in itself is worth noticing, 'cause it sends a message that female pleasure matters less. It does not.

Your body and how it feels belongs to you. Full stop.

Third, let's have a look at the feelings around this.

So puberty is not just physical. Your emotions go through it as well. You might find that your feelings are bigger than they used to be, that you feel things more intensely: really happy, really sad, huge frustration, rage. And they come on faster than they used to. You might feel things you can't name.

You might feel fine one minute and completely overwhelmed the next and not know why.

All of this is neurological. It's your brain rebuilding itself during puberty. The part that handles emotional regulation, deciding how you feel about what you feel, is the last part to be finished, and it won't be done until your mid-20s, which feels like forever. But just know this: boys, their brains don't finish developing until their late 20s, early 30s.

What this means practically is your feelings are real. Sometimes they're very big. Sometimes they might feel too big for you.

It's just biology. We have to roll with it.

When that happens, find somewhere to put it: movement, music, writing, talking to somebody, any of those things.

Talking to someone is an option. Do it.

I know it might feel like the hardest one, but one person who you can be honest with about how you're doing is worth everything.

So find that trusted person. It might be a parent. It might be a carer. It might be a teacher at school, a nurse at school if you have one. It might be a sports coach or somebody at Guides, things like that.

But it might be a grandma. And you'd be surprised. What I find with grandparents is they're much more open than you think they are because, A, they've had that experience. They've taken your parents through that experience. And actually, they've come out wiser, softer, more gentle, and more loving, usually.

Okay, so a few things worth knowing.

Your body is yours. Nobody has the right to touch it in a way you don't want. Not a peer, not a friend, not an adult, not anyone.

If something ever happens that doesn't feel right or feels uncomfortable, if someone makes you feel like you have to do something with your body you don't want to, tell somebody you trust as quick as you can.

You're not in trouble. You will be believed.

What you see online is not what real bodies look like.

This is really important.

If you've spent any time on social media, you will have seen a lot of images of bodies, and almost none of them are real in the way that you think they are. They are filtered, edited, lit, posed, sometimes completely altered, and the range of what actual bodies look like is enormous.

Whatever your body looks like, it is in that range. It is normal.

What you are comparing yourself to is not real, so please remember that.

Periods are not something to be ashamed of. If you get your period at school or somewhere unexpected, you will not be the first girl this happened to, and you will not be the last.

Ask a teacher, a friend, or an adult. People will help. Women particularly will help.

Try not to be embarrassed. This is just biology, and you deserve support when it happens. We've all been there. We've all been there when a period has started and we haven't got anything with us.

You are allowed to have questions about all of this. Maybe about things I might not have covered. About things you're thinking that you're not sure are normal.

They most certainly will be.

And the adults in your life, if they've shared this episode, are trying to be the people you can ask, so let them try.

Okay.

That's it. That's most of it.

I know that's a lot, and some of you might have already known some of it. Some of you might be new to it. Some of you might feel it's a bit strange to hear it out loud.

All of that's true, and all of that is stuff you deserve to know about your own body.

This is what I want to leave you with.

What is happening to you is normal. The body stuff, the feeling stuff, the confusing stuff, the stuff you thought was just you, it's not just you. It's every girl going through this at her own pace and figuring it out.

You're not going through it alone, even if it feels like you are right now.

And if you have questions, ask them. Don't try and figure this out by yourself. Don't try and Google them because you won't get the right answer, probably.

And your body is not a problem. This is your body. It is strong. It is remarkable.

Really remarkable.

And you've absolutely got this.