

Start your own menstruation celebration group

By Illysa Foster

The girl with the flowing red dress glows with joy and confidence as she passes beneath a floral arch that represents the threshold of becoming a woman. Gazing around our circle, I see that my eyes are not the only ones glistening with happy tears. This beautiful coming-of-age ceremony was just what we'd hoped for when we created Moonsisters, our mother-daughter group to honor our daughters' menarche and provide a supportive community to guide them through puberty.

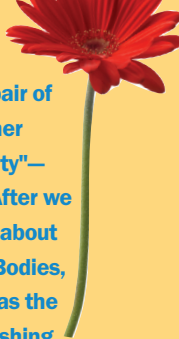
When I describe the gatherings of our Moonsisters group to other mothers, the most common reaction is an excited request: "Can my daughter and I join?" I can't blame them—I wish my first period had been honored with a Moonsister gathering. But if we expanded our Moonsisters group with every request, it would likely lose the intimate quality that creates the space for girls and women to share and talk freely. Providing mentorship for new groups is a promising way to offer this experience to others.

Here are a few things we've learned about the elements of a successful menstruation celebration group:

- When forming your group, consider inviting daughter-mother duos who've already bonded through common activities. Our group grew out of a homeschool cooperative, whose existing friendships gave the girls a comforting emotional base that continues even though few of the Moonsisters remain in the co-op.

- Encourage members—especially moms—to bring all their visions to the table. For example, in our group, some moms wanted ceremonies with a spiritual tone while others preferred a more festive approach. While this and other differences were challenging at times, the process of incorporating diversity helped model conflict resolution for our girls. We found that rotating leadership for each ceremony helped our members express their preferences, build group trust, and further a sense of ownership.

- Adopt a few group traditions. Our Moonsisters look forward to the "red tent," where mothers share private pampering time with their daughters just before the ceremony, and the honored girls love walking through an arch entwined with seasonal flowers to announce their female lineage. Other options could include a song or two that's always sung, candles, and garlands or head-dresses for the girls.



When our daughter got her period, we gave her flowers, took her to lunch, and took her to buy her first pair of "dangle" earrings. Then we invited her friends and my friends to a "Red Party"—red food, red flowers, red clothing! After we ate, we gathered to read selections about our cyclical natures from *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*. What followed was the most unanticipated, open, and refreshing exchange between my friends and my daughter's friends. I cannot articulate how empowering this rite of passage was for my daughter. And when my friends realized that we had never received our own initiation into womanhood, we threw ourselves a Red Party!
Lisa Sanchez, Austin, TX

- Create a common symbol to reinforce the mission of your unique community. A resourceful mother made beaded bracelets for everyone, with stones added to symbolize each step of the female journey, from pre-menstrual "maiden" to post-menstrual "crone." Girls might like making T-shirts, scarves, or pins with a common group design.

- Harness the group's synergy to educate girls about sexuality, positive body image, relationships, and other issues important to them. It's easy to tailor discussions to girls' needs—at times we divide our Moonsisters into a younger set who focus on topics like personal hygiene, menses, and breast development, while the older girls delve into issues such as dating and media images. Girls appreciate the space to share and ask questions with trusted adult mentors.

Raising girls is an honor. Groups that create spaces for girls to celebrate their cycles and explore the process of becoming a woman provide a fun and memorable forum for a girl to learn to always honor herself.

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Share your menstruation celebration with other parents at the Body Issues area of the *Daughters Community Forum* (www.daughters.com).