



# Menstrual Policy

Last revised August 2017

## 1 Introduction

The menstrual cycle has long been a taboo subject in societies around the world. This has resulted in a widespread culture of menstruating staff being afraid of the consequences of being open about their menstrual symptoms and needs in the workplace, in case of being deemed weaker or less employable than non-menstruating employees. The suppression of the menstrual cycle in the workplace has meant that menstruating staff experience shame and unnecessary suffering (including endometriosis, dysmenorrhea) whilst their colleagues are left feeling uncomfortable to address the topic and/or offer support.

Coexist has been witness to a number of menstruating staff suffering significant physical discomfort at work during their menstrual cycle. This led Bex Baxter, former People Development Manager (PDM), who herself had suffered with dysmenorrhea for over 25 years, to pioneer the idea of a menstrual policy to support menstruating staff.

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## 2 Natural Cycles Policy

Coexist holds a long term aspiration to create a natural cycles policy that recognises all human life as cyclical and introduces cyclical thinking (as distinct from linear thinking) into the workplace.

Coexist commits to focusing on the menstrual policy as a primary example of how working with natural cycles enhances wellbeing and contributes positively to an organisation. The policy is an experiment that openly explores with staff and the wider public the pros and cons of a menstrual policy in the workplace.

A broader natural cycles policy would acknowledge circadian and seasonal cycles whilst investigating cycles intrinsic to Coexist; e.g. busier and quieter periods in our events department; marketing deadlines, or annual budgeting.

There is also a long term aspiration for Coexist to acknowledge individual employee's personal cycles relating to mental health or other cyclical illness.

## 3 Menstrual Cycle Policy Implementation

### *3.1 Opt in and out*

Coexist aspires to support all employees of any gender to speak openly about the menstrual cycle, to encourage the historical 'taboo' to be broken and to develop learning. Therefore all menstruating staff are auto- enrolled to 'opt in' to this policy. However, Coexist recognises the importance of difference and debate, therefore should an employee not wish to take part in the policy, they can request to opt out with no judgement or discussion.





### ***3.2 Our trust ethos***

Coexist operates within a culture of trust. Should you need time away from work, it is assumed to be a genuine request, and that we are working together towards our collective core purpose and approach.

### ***3.3 Honouring the cycle: Taking time away from work***

Coexist acknowledges that staff taking time away from work inevitably impacts the business and its other members of staff. Any time taken off for menstrual flexibility is allowed on a trust basis. Such leave is openly communicated as 'menstrual leave', not 'sick leave' - the purpose of bringing more awareness to the cycle, including communicating about it more openly, is to help minimise the adverse effects experienced which in time greater supports the employee, and therefore Coexist.

### ***3.4 Contingency for shift workers***

Our initial six month trial for the policy highlighted the needs of our shift workers regarding menstrual flexibility. Non shift positions at Coexist entail mostly office based work that takes place during normal office hours, with infrequent and low-pressure connection with the public. In contrast, all shift positions at Coexist involve considerable front-facing work with members of the public. For these workers it is more difficult to take time off, than for those in non-customer facing environments. Our front-facing roles are in front-of-house, wellbeing, events, and community kitchen.

In order to support our shift workers and give them the possibility to feel at ease without judgement or guilt in taking time off, a strong contingency plan is in place which the whole of Coexist has adopted within its culture. By this we mean taking responsibility to follow the contingency plan, and be collectively accountable to it.





We encourage affected members of staff to do their best to plan ahead for their work around their cycle and to avoid planning shift work during the time in their cycle when they know they are likely to find front-facing work overly taxing. However, it is not always possible to plan ahead in this way. When sudden changes in personnel presence become necessary, contingency staff are available to take over whenever possible.

## **4 Taking time off**

This includes anything from an hour or so away from work to rest briefly, up to one day paid menstrual leave. For more than one day away from work, this will then form part of our statutory sick pay policy (SSP), but there is also the choice to discuss other options with your peer leader- working from home, or making up your hours on another day. In any instance, any time off or alteration to your hours must be communicated and signed off with your peer leader or another member of Coexist management.

### ***4.1 Working from home***

Some roles can allow menstruating staff to have the option of working from home or alternatively to use a quieter space away if preferred. This can be discussed with your peer leader to clarify the best options.

### ***4.2 Making up time lost***

This policy means that shift workers are not expected to make up their time lost. For many staff, this is difficult to do for two reasons; firstly, shift working has fixed hours which can be complex to 'make up' and secondly, some staff work full time which means that there isn't enough time in the week to make up hours.





However, it is up to the individual and their peer leader if they choose to make up their time, e.g to minimise stress, due to losing work hours. A good example of utilising their cycle would be for staff to make up hours at the time in their cycle that they are at their optimal level of energy and wellbeing.

## **5 Training**

All staff receive an induction to Coexist's Menstrual flexibility policy. This includes an information pack consisting initially of The Red Schools Menstrual Cycle Awareness ebook and chart for mapping the cycle, and a menstrual work calendar to help departments and individuals plan around their cycles. Coexist has a growing library of books on menstruation for staff to borrow to further their learning.

Tracking your cycle can be the answer to making this policy really work, especially for menstruating staff who have irregular cycles or who would like to plan ahead for their work effectively.

Coexist management of all genders receive guidance in how to discuss the menstrual cycle with staff, and how best to support and assist menstruating staff. This is supported by discussion of the policy and how it works for all staff at Coexist's weekly management meetings.

## **6 Ongoing support and expectations**

### ***6.1 Individuals***

Menstruating staff who opt in are entrusted to respect their cycle and take responsibility for their own wellbeing. If you opt in, you will





need to check in with your peer leader or department manager regarding your individual wellbeing requirements. This is important as taking leave during menstruation can affect rota's and the operational management of departments, and will therefore need to be communicated and agreed.

## ***6.2 Communication***

All Coexist employees are invited to openly discuss their menstrual cycle, whether they opt in or not. This includes casually, in and around the office and or privately with peer leaders or trusted colleagues. It is understood that at the time of menstruation, staff may feel the need to call upon time away from work. There is clear permission to share these needs with their peer leader, with the emphasis being on self-management and the investment in themselves, and therefore, Coexist.

## ***6.3 Planning***

Working in unison with their department team, whether it be shift or rota planning, meetings, physical work or anything else, Coexist encourages menstruating staff to plan for their menstrual cycle effectively to support the balance of the business needs with their wellbeing.

## ***6.4 Support***

Queries of any kind are to be taken to ..... and any employee has the right to take matters further should they wish, to the Board of Directors.

