



@JaneHardwickeCollings

Gundungurra Country

www.JaneHardwickeCollings.com

22.02.2022

Dear Dad,

How a girl's father meets her at her menarche, her rite of passage into womanhood, is part of what teaches her, informs her, about how her culture, and family, value womanhood. And this in turn teaches her how to behave to be accepted as a woman.

Her experience of her menarche includes many factors –

- * her mother's reaction/response
- * her father's reaction/response
- * her siblings' reaction/response
- * how prepared she is or isn't
- * how safe she feels at home to ask questions
- * how she has observed you and her mother around her mother's bleeding
- * and of course all the mainstream pop culture influences and especially her peers and more....

All these factors combine to formulate a message that is implanted into her psyche and that influences everything from her perspective of her own body, how she will behave sexually, how her menstrual cycle will function and even future situations including how she will give birth and how she will experience her menopause.

One rite of passage leads to the next.

Menarche has been a traumatic experience for many women.

I have heard thousands of women's stories about their menarche experience and mostly they are an initiation into menstrual shame and they don't even realise that.

At this time in our culture, we are (hopefully) collectively and personally healing from the menstrual shame we have all inherited from our culture and our family's generational trauma.



Menstrual shame leads to body shame, body shame leads to low self-esteem, low self-esteem leads to all manner of wounded behaviours including self harm, eating disorders and risky and dangerous sexual decision-making. Menstrual shame is known as one of the main organizing principles of the patriarchy that maintains the oppression of women. Menstrual shame, a worldwide, cross-cultural phenomenon causes all that, and is preventable.

We must banish menstrual shame.

A girl is hardwired to expect during her puberty, before her menarche, that her mother, or mother equivalent, will teach her about the menstrual cycle, not just the anatomy and physiology, much more;

like the way you have to organise your life around it, the transformational power and magic of it, and how to look after herself throughout the cycle. Mostly this does not happen and rather it is an initiation into menstrual shame – hide it, don't draw attention to it, act like nothing is happening, and whatever you do don't leak (or you will shame us all!).

And sadly, many girls don't even know what it is when their blood arrives: it's a shock, and many report thinking they were dying.

Many, many times I have heard from women about the role their fathers played, or didn't, and the effects of that – disappointment, fear, embarrassment, and often shock if they ignored it or acknowledged it. And mostly I hear from women that they felt lost, alone and embarrassed at their menarche. For some it was/is a positive experience, but that unfortunately is rare.

In my opinion the best thing a dad could do around his daughter's menarche (or stepdaughter's or niece's etc) is to meet the girl/young woman in a very non-sexual way.

Everything you say and do will be stamped on her forever.

Welcome her to womanhood in a non-sexual way. It is at this point in a girl's life where generational trauma is handed down and also the place where this can be healed. And what you say and do will be part of either – re-wounding, or healing. So choose the healed way here and do your own inner work to be able to meet her in a clear, open and real way.

I imagine that might include some inner work around how you are carrying menstrual shame, for the last thing you want to do is pass that on to your daughter.



@JaneHardwickeCollings

And I also hear from women that after their menarche their father treated them differently and they felt like they'd lost their relationship with their father and they could no longer be daddy's girl.... This is of course actually the truth, and what needs to happen, however watch that you don't withdraw from her. You can still be her Daddy, still be giving her cuddles and all of that but just make sure it's all non-sexual. And you could talk about this with her. The thing is that what a girl/young woman feels around her menarche is a lot, however she basically feels the same as she did the day before and whilst she's changed in your eyes, she doesn't particularly understand the reason for any changes in your behaviour towards her.

So I would recommend that you carry on as you always have in a safe healthy family way and be very mindful of the shaming potential for anything you may say or do. Don't make any jokes with your daughter about the menstrual cycle or blood or anything like that. This could potentially backfire by creating internalised beliefs for her like – he's making fun of me, he doesn't think this is important...etc. Use encouraging words and compassion and no comparison with other women or girls. Let her know if she needs you for anything to ask and be sure you mean that.

And actually, Dear Dad, I call on you to be the man the Earth needs now, the father the Earth needs now and embrace and support and nurture and love and care for the feminine in all ways – within yourself, with your daughters, stepdaughters, nieces, sisters, mother, grandmother, great grandmother and especially the Earth.

Going through a conscious menarche with your daughter may bring up memories of your own puberty and growing up around girls, your sisters etc. with the menstrual cycle. Be with these memories in a compassionate way and observe where you need to update your beliefs and attitudes about girls, women and the menstrual cycle – inner work 101.

And update your knowledge so you understand the cycle and can more easily live with it, because you will be influenced by the menstrual cycle of everybody who lives under the same roof as you!

May you be the man and father the Earth needs now, as we collectively usher in a positive menstrual cycle culture.

With love and respect and encouragement,

Jane Hardwicke Collings