

GrowUpSmart

Storybook for Girls

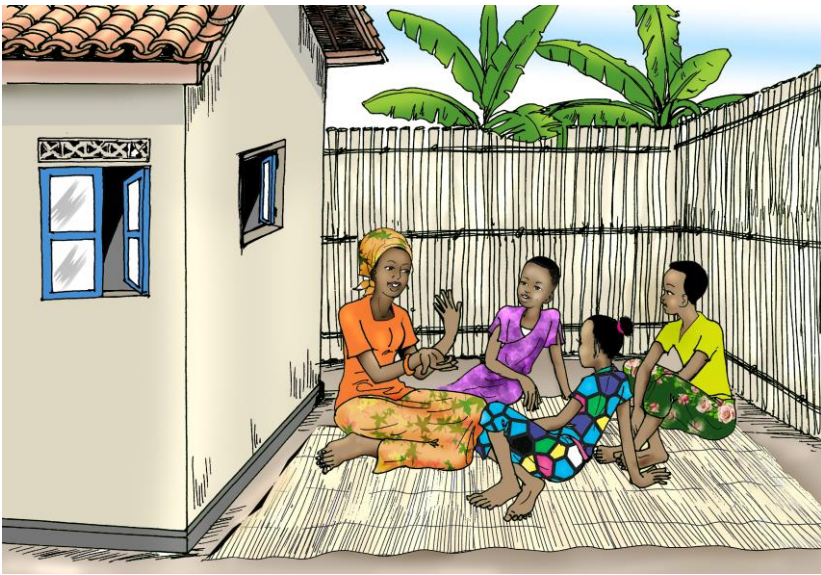


MINISTRY OF HEALTH



**Institute for
Reproductive Health**
Georgetown University

This storybook has been adapted from the flipbook from the *Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (GREAT) Project's Scalable Toolkit* and original work in northern Uganda with collaborating partners Pathfinder International and Save the Children with support from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of Cooperative Agreement No. OAA-10-00073. All illustrations are original work by Jean de Dieu Munyurangabo.

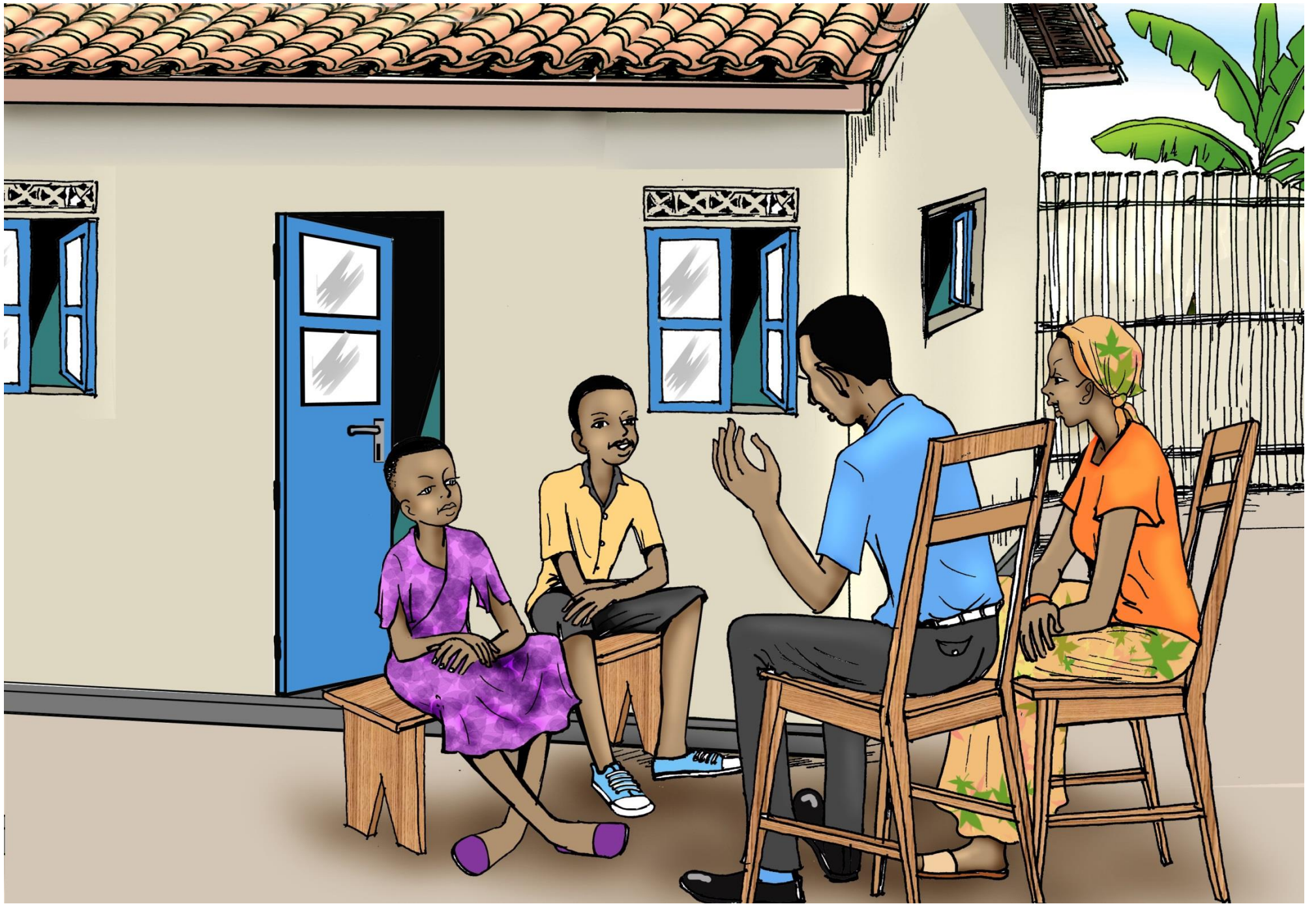


Background in brief for storytellers

The beginning of adolescence, between ages 10 to 14, is a time of changes in the body and mind. Younger adolescents sometimes feel confused and need to seek guidance from trusted adults. Parents, aunts and uncles, older siblings and leaders, such as club matrons and teachers, have an important role in guiding younger adolescents to grow up healthy. This set of stories is intended to help trusted adults talk with younger adolescents about what happens during puberty, decisions they may face and how to navigate their place in our community. The stories centre on advice from the girl's mother.

Instructions for use by storytellers

1. This storybook is intended for use with groups of girls between the ages of 10 and 14. It can be read to a group with girls and boys of the same age. It helps girls and boys become knowledgeable and develop mutual understanding and respect for each other. Girls can also take the storybook home and read it with a parent, older sibling or another trusted adult.
2. The storybook can be used in any setting, including school clubs, religious groups, community meetings, or at home.
3. There are three short stories. Each story is expected to take up to 30 minutes. The storyteller can choose to tell one story or more than one story in the same session.
4. The storybook can be held by the storyteller, placed on the ground or set on a table. The left side of each page is a picture to show the adolescents. The right side of the page has the text to be read by the storyteller. It also contains suggested questions to ask and discuss.
5. Begin by showing the image to the adolescents and asking them to describe and explain what they see in the image.
6. It is recommended that the story be told in a dramatic fashion, using character's voices and actions. The storyteller can choose to read the story and questions as written, or add local experiences and questions. Real experiences and local details about the differences between girls and boys can help to spark reflection and discussion with the younger adolescents.
7. A list of common questions and answers about puberty is found at the back of the storybook. This list can assist you to answer questions that adolescents may ask.





This is a picture of a family from a town called Nyagatovu. The girl is named Mutoni. She and her brother stay with their parents Kantengwa and Kalisa. Mutoni is 12 years old. Each day Mutoni wakes up early to fetch water before going to school. After school, Mutoni does chores at home such as tending the garden, collecting firewood and cooking. At night, she sometimes finds time to revise her lessons by lantern light, but not always.

Mutoni's favourite time is when she learns dances and hears stories from elders. She feels so happy to learn these stories about her culture.

Questions to discuss for the group:

- What special activities do you enjoy with your family, such as hearing stories or making special foods?

Story 1



Story 1 Growing Up



Mutoni enjoys learning about science. In the future, she would like to become a doctor and work at the health clinic in her community.

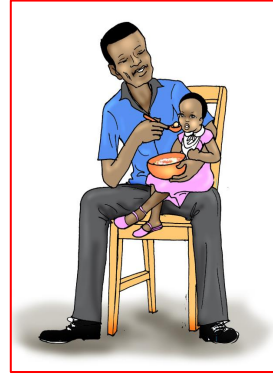
Mutoni would also like to be a wife and mother with a peaceful and happy home when she grows up. She wants to get married to a man who is caring, is easy to talk with and treats her with respect. Her ideal husband should not use violence and not bring home other women.

She does not know many women professionals. She often wonders how she can finish her studies and also have a family.

Questions to discuss:

- What kind of person do you want to be in the future?
- What characteristics would you want in a partner? Why?





As Mutoni grows older, she does more and more household chores. She is happy to help the family and she loves when her mum teaches her how to do things around the house. Mutoni is proud to learn the skills valued by her family to become a woman.

But she is puzzled when she looks at what the women in her community do and don't do. Mutoni thinks that her mum has many interesting and useful things to say at home. People often come to seek her mum's advice. But, like the other women, her mum stays silent at community meetings. Why is this, she wonders?

Sometimes Mutoni has seen women and men do unexpected things. Men may care for and feed young children and women may speak at community meetings or become politicians.

Questions to discuss:

- What unexpected things have you seen women do?
- What unexpected things have you seen men do?





Mutoni's brother is 13 years old. When younger, Mutoni and her brother used to have similar daily schedules and chores. But now Mutoni has more housework while her brother still has time to do homework and play with his friends.

One day Mutoni asks her brother for help. Brother, will you grind the sim-sim today? I have too much to do," says Mutoni.

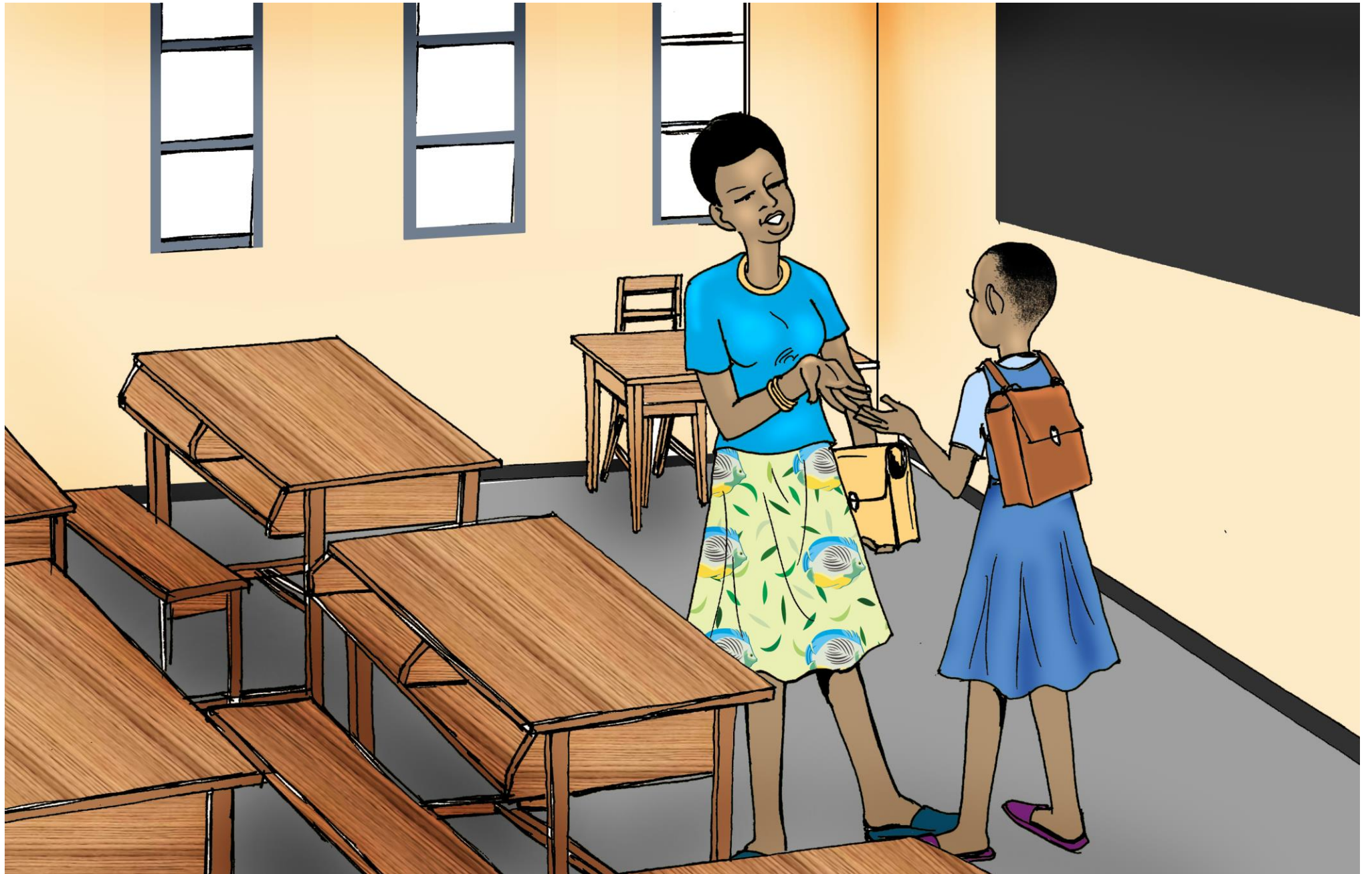
Her brother's friends hear this. They laugh. Her brother replies, "Since when have you seen me do that?" Her brother and his friends walk away.

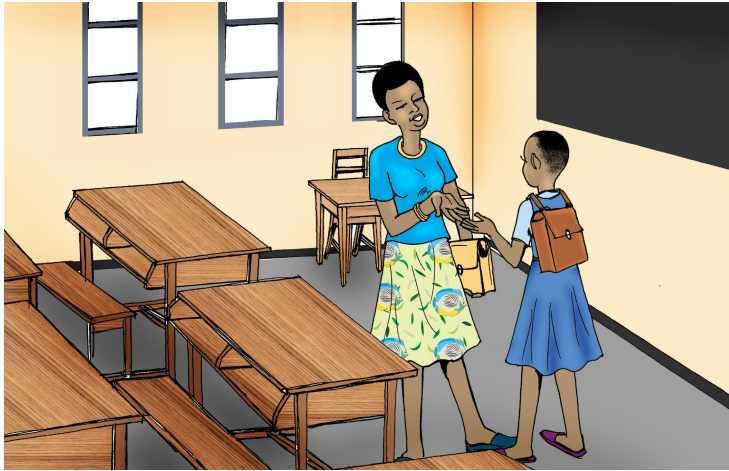
Mutoni is confused, and says to herself, "I know my brother loves me and we used to do the chores together. But these days it seems like he is trying to impress his friends instead of me. I wonder if he still wants the best for me."

It seems like there is an invisible wall that separates Mutoni and her brother now. This wall cannot be seen, but it is there. Mutoni can feel it.

Questions to discuss:

- What chores do you usually do? Are chores the same or different for girls and boys?
- Do you think this is fair? Why?





One night, Mutoni overhears her parents saying that the money intended for her school books and other fees has been spent on other things. Mutoni may have to leave school until they find more money, although her brother can continue. Mutoni is sad. The whole night Mutoni lies awake wondering how she could stay in school. She really wants to finish school! The next day, Mutoni tells her teacher, “Teacher, my parents are having difficulty paying fees this term. Could you discuss it with them?”

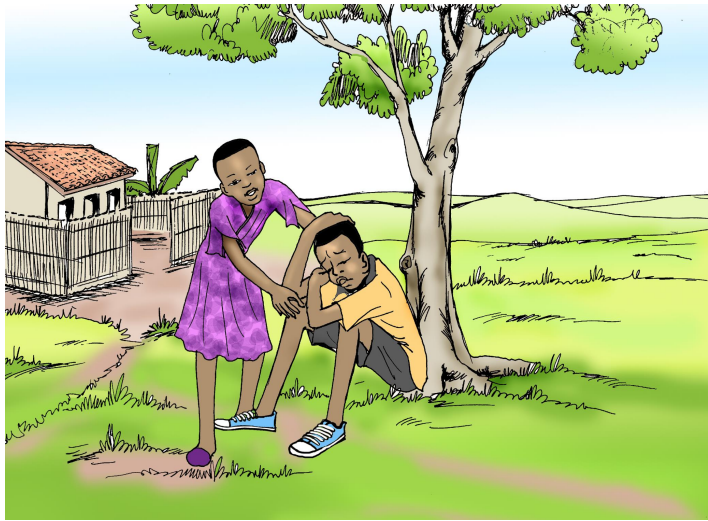
Mutoni’s teacher agrees. She talks with Mutoni’s parents, and they find a solution. Mutoni is relieved!

The next day, Mutoni’s friends say that she looks more beautiful. Mutoni did not change her hair or clothes. She wonders, “What is different?”

Questions to discuss:

- What did Mutoni do to stay in school?
- What could you do if there is a chance you may not finish school? Why?
- Why do you think Mutoni’s friends said she looks more beautiful?





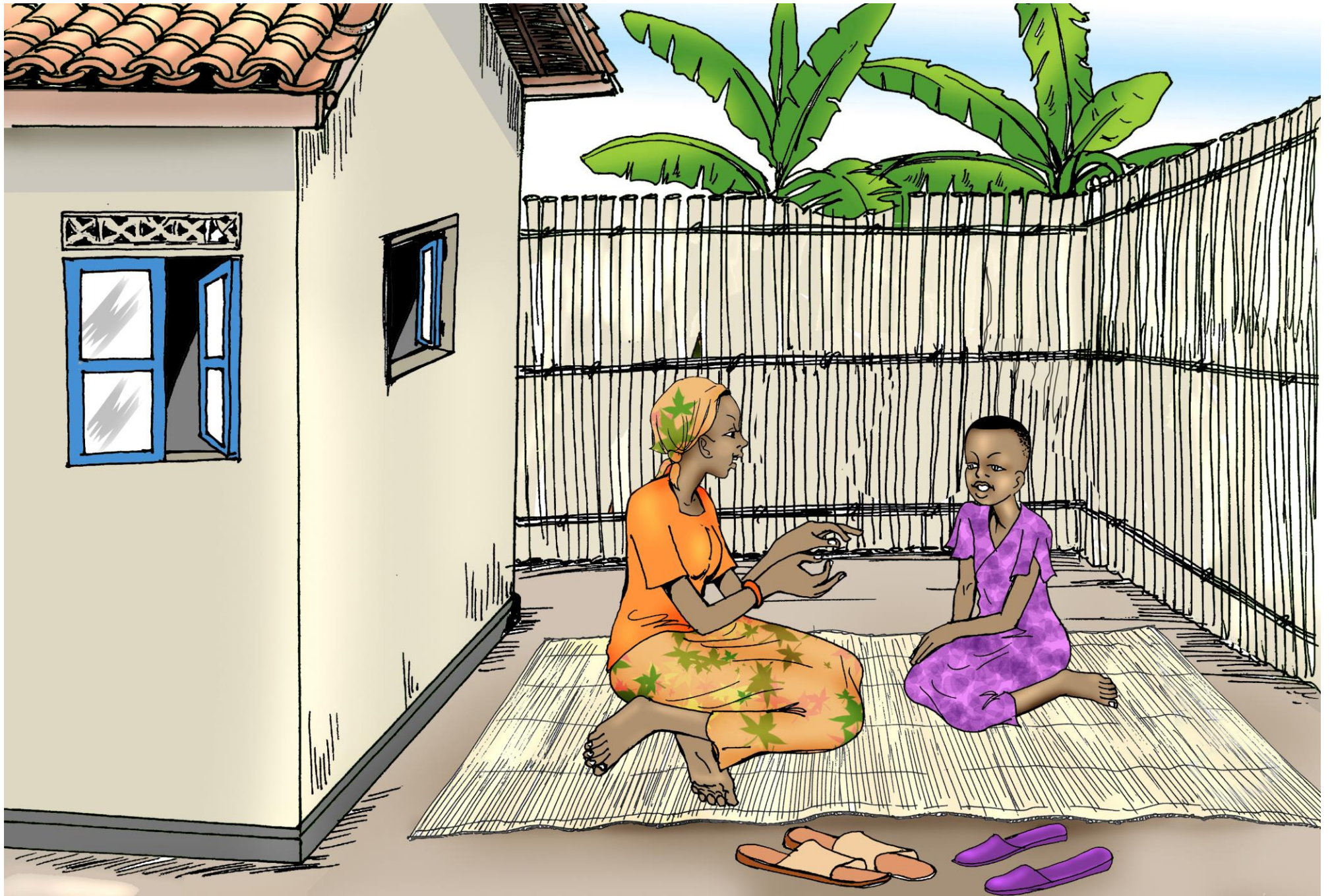
Mutoni comes home one day to find her brother under a tree with his head in his hands. She thinks he is crying and rushes inside. It upsets Mutoni to see a boy cry, especially her brother, because people say that boys should not cry.

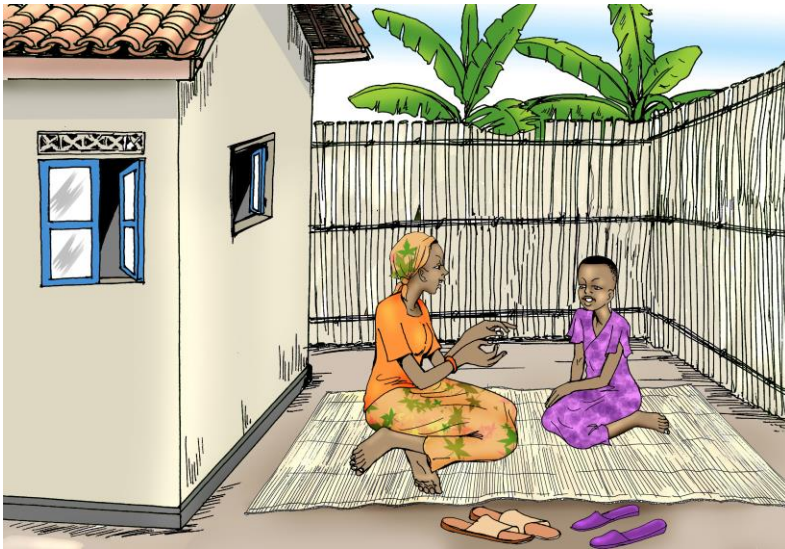
Then Mutoni stops to think. She wants to help her brother feel better. She also does not understand why boys should not cry. She slowly approaches her brother as she gathers her courage. Mutoni finally asks, “Brother, what is the matter?”

Her brother looks up, startled to find his sister standing there. He says, “Sister, you are a girl. You cannot understand the pressure we boys have to learn to provide for the family and always be tough.”

Mutoni comforts him, “You are my brother and I love you. We girls have challenges too. Tell me about yours and I will tell you about mine. They talk, and her brother feels better. They decide to fetch water together that evening.

Her friends at school the next day ask, “Mutoni, what has changed? You look even more beautiful today!”





Mutoni wonders if what she did when she talked to her brother when he felt sad, and spoke up for herself to stay in school are appropriate for girls to do. She is also curious why her friends say she has become more beautiful. The next day Mutoni decides to seek advice from her mum.

Mutoni shares her concerns with her mum and asks, “Mum, I have not changed my hair or clothes. Can you see anything different about me?”

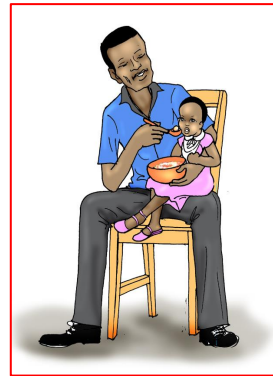
Mutoni’s mum smiles. My daughter, I think I understand what happened. Do you know that beauty comes from the outside, and also from the inside? Every person is beautiful in her or his own way. We all become more beautiful by being our best selves. You were always beautiful. Now you are becoming a great beauty by being brave, listening to your heart and breaking down invisible walls between boys and girls.”

Mutoni feels so happy.

Questions to discuss:

- What happened to Mutoni?
- Do you think that beauty comes from outside and inside a person?
- How can you get great beauty and be your best selves by breaking down walls?





Mutoni's mum continues, "My dear, you have noticed that there are difference between girls and boys. Let's talk about this. What makes someone a girl or a boy is their body. For example, men's parts and women's parts are different. These physical differences in our bodies are fixed by nature.

You have also seen that girls and boys, and women and men, often do different things. We are taught to do different chores at home, wear different clothes and express ourselves differently. But these differences are not fixed by nature. These are roles taught to us by society all around us. But, we can change roles that are taught, especially when they will make our lives better.

Changing men's and women's roles does not change the differences in our bodies. So, women who do unexpected things, such as become leaders and own land, are still women. Men who do unexpected things, such as care for children, fetch water, or even cry, are still men."





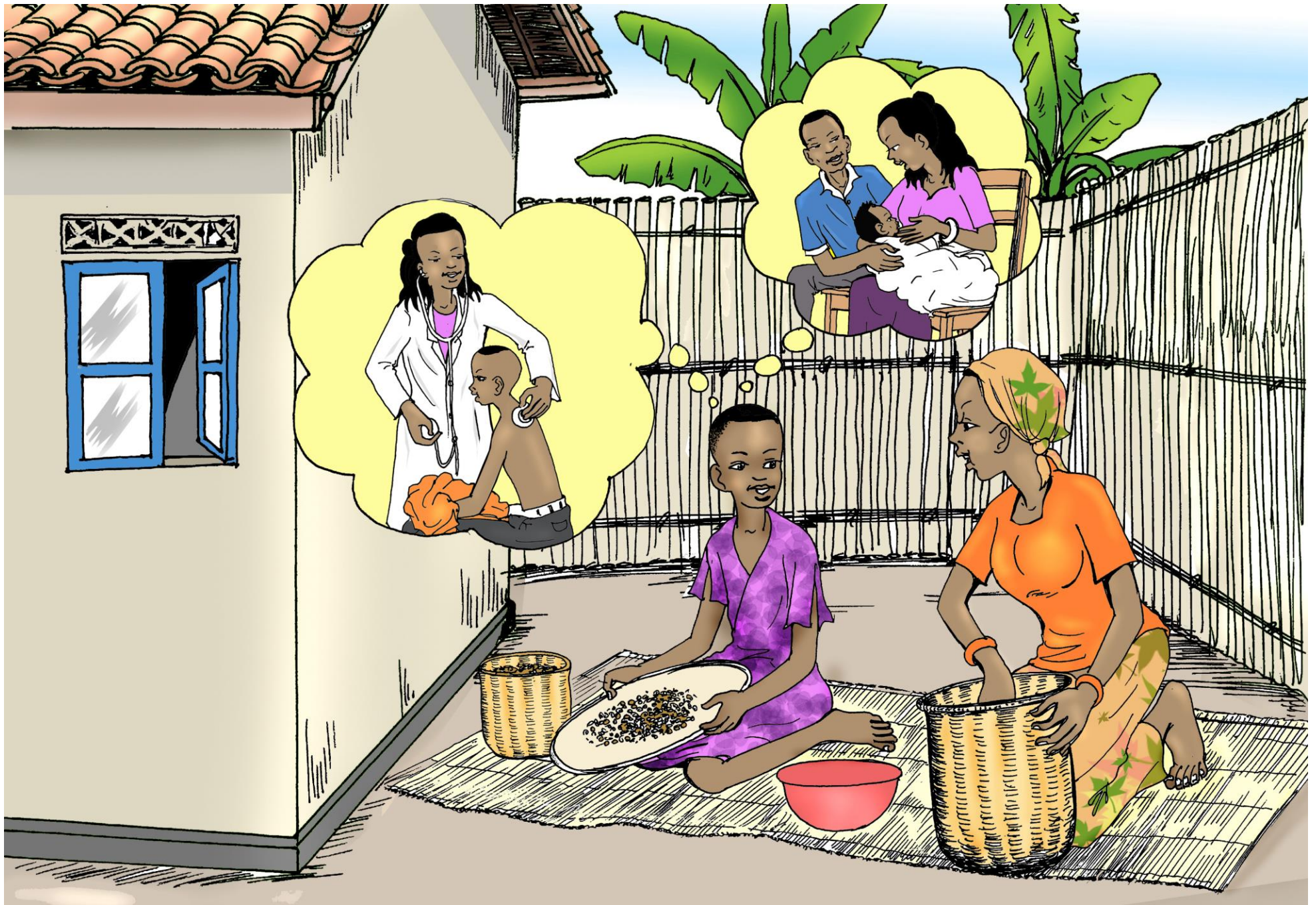
Mutoni's mum continues. "Being a girl is just different than being a boy. It is not better, or worse. You may not always see it, but actually boys face challenges just as girls have challenges."

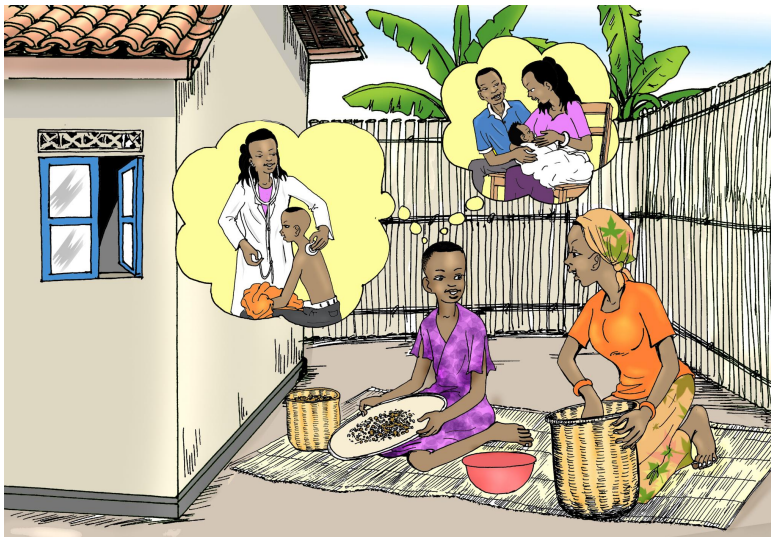
In fact, we are born equal with many similarities. Girls and boys have healthy bodies and intelligent minds. Girls and boys have blood and bones. Girls and boys have hopes for their futures. Girls and boys deserve the same opportunities to become their best selves.

This is why we must break down the invisible walls. Start with simple and small steps, just as you did, and never stop. Stay true to yourself to be your best self.

Questions to discuss:

- What is a difference between girls and boys? Is this fixed by nature or taught by society?
- Can giving equal opportunities to girls and boys help the family and community get stronger and develop more? How?





Mutoni's mum says, "My dear, now you know you are creating great beauty. Let me also hear about your hopes for the future. Share your hopes with adults so we can help you achieve them. So tell me, what would you like to be in the future?"

"I want to be respected. I want to be a wife and mother with a peaceful home. I want to become a doctor," says Mutoni.

Mutoni's mum replies, "I am glad to know. This is the time of life to make a plan, work hard and continue developing your great inner beauty every day. It is this inner beauty, your kindness, your courage and your perseverance, that will help you achieve your hopes."

Questions to discuss:

- What kind of person do you want to be in the future?
- What kind of work do you want to do in the future?
- Who will you talk to about your hopes?
- What did you learn from Mutoni's story?

Story 2



Story 2 Puberty



One day Mutoni feels pain in her stomach. And then she realizes that something feels wet in her underwear. When she goes to the latrine, Mutoni finds that there is a little blood coming from her woman part. At first she thinks she may be hurt or sick, and feels scared! Then she realizes that this must be what her mum has told her about, monthly bleeding.

Questions to discuss:

- Is Mutoni sick?
- Do you know anyone who has experienced this?





That evening, Mutoni's mum finds her in bed very early. Mutoni tells her mum what happened.

Her mum comforts her. "My dear, it is all right. I will explain more about this to you, and tell you all about growing up. I remember going through these changes myself! When I was young, we did not talk about such things, but I want you to be knowledgeable and prepared.

Remember when we talked about how one day a girl starts to have her monthly bleeding? This is what you are experiencing. Monthly bleeding is the normal, healthy shedding of blood and tissue from the womb. The bleeding usually lasts between three and seven days each month.

Monthly bleeding means that your body is growing and preparing for the future. It is a sign that you have entered a special time of life called puberty. Puberty starts at different times for different children. Some girls start as early as age 9, while others start by age 14. Growth will continue until you are 19 years old. During puberty your body and mind are growing and changing fast.

During this time of puberty you are no longer a child and not yet a woman. You have much to achieve in life before you become a woman."

Mutoni feels relieved and comforted.





Mutoni's mum continues to share advice. "My child, you never need to miss a day of school due to monthly bleeding. I never did, and I want the same for you."

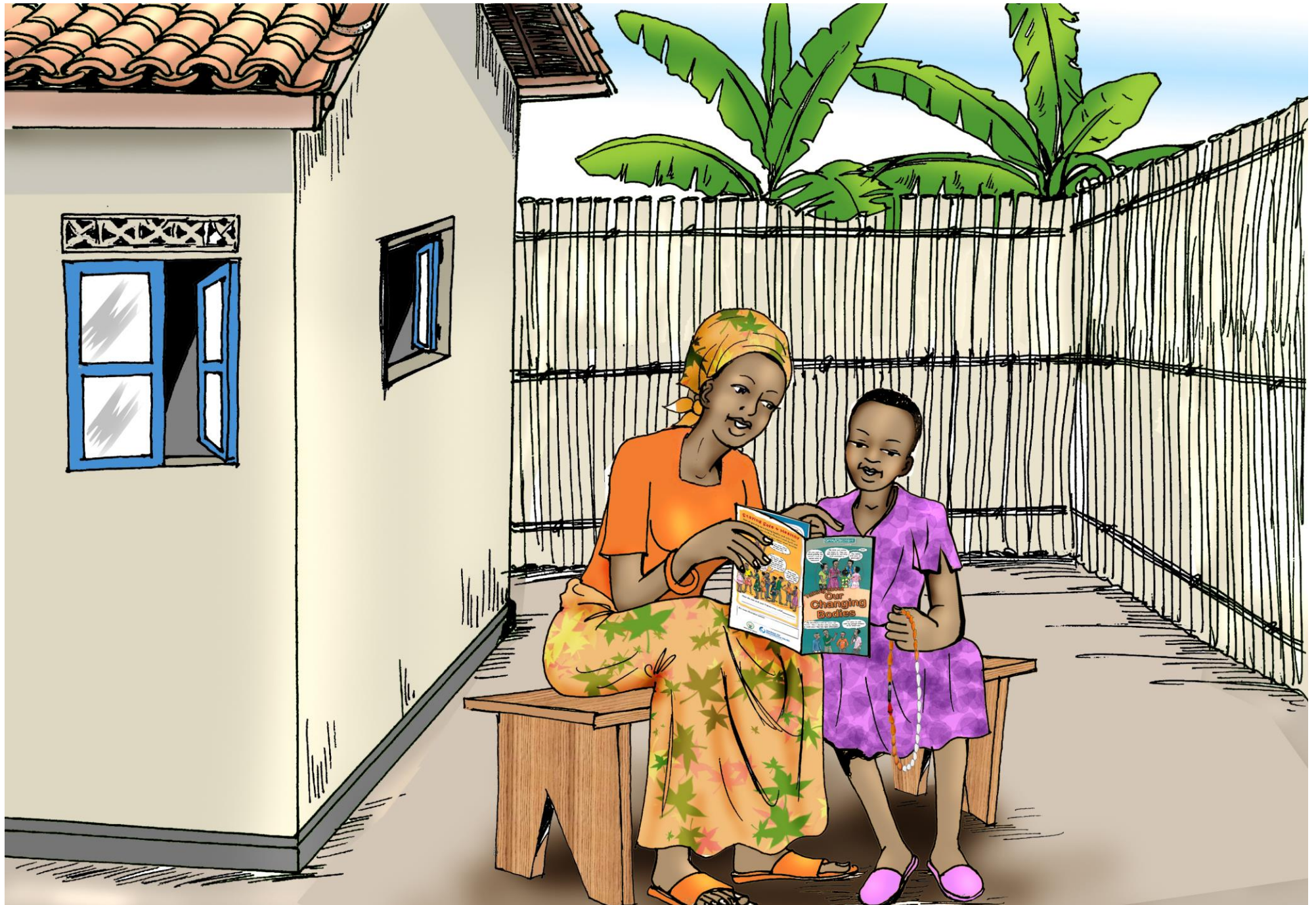
To keep your underwear dry, use clean cloth, cotton or pads which will soak up the blood. Change the cloth or pads every few hours. If you use reusable pads, wash and rinse them when you get home and hang them up to dry. When you go to school, take extra cloth in a small bag and change it regularly. In case there is a leak onto your skirt, tie a sweater or some other type of cloth around your waist. If you get pain in your stomach or lower back, place a hot water bottle where it aches or drink a cup of hot water or tea. If the pain is bad, ask me for pain reliever or ask the head female teacher or another trusted adult like your aunt or older sisters.

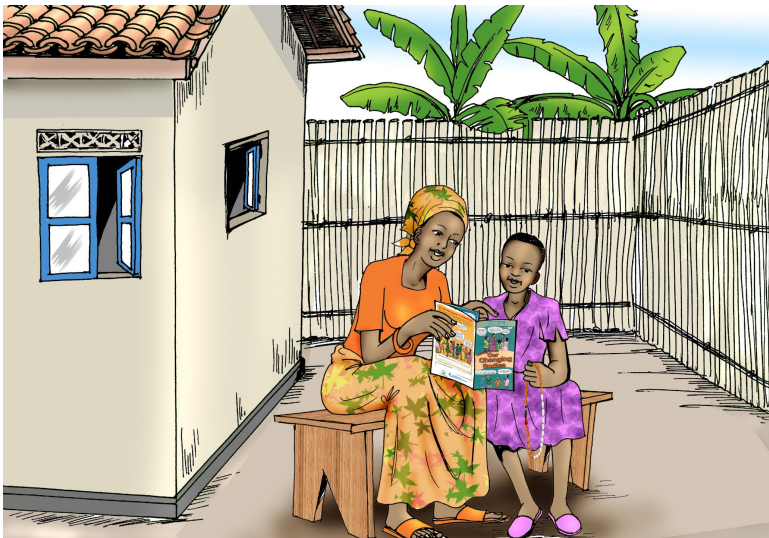
My dear, I can also tell you that some girls feel irritable, sad or angry a few days before monthly bleeding starts. Some girls get swollen and sore breasts. You may only notice these bothersome feelings for a few days.

All of this is natural and normal. Feel confident to go to school every day."

Questions to discuss:

- What advice would you give Mutoni to feel confident to go to school during monthly bleeding?
- Who could you ask if you have difficulty finding cloth during monthly bleeding?





The cycle of monthly bleeding is the time from the first day of bleeding until the day before the next monthly bleeding. Since this happens regularly, it is called a cycle.

The length of the cycle differs for each girl and woman. For some, the cycle can be 21 days or shorter. For others, it can be 35 days or more.

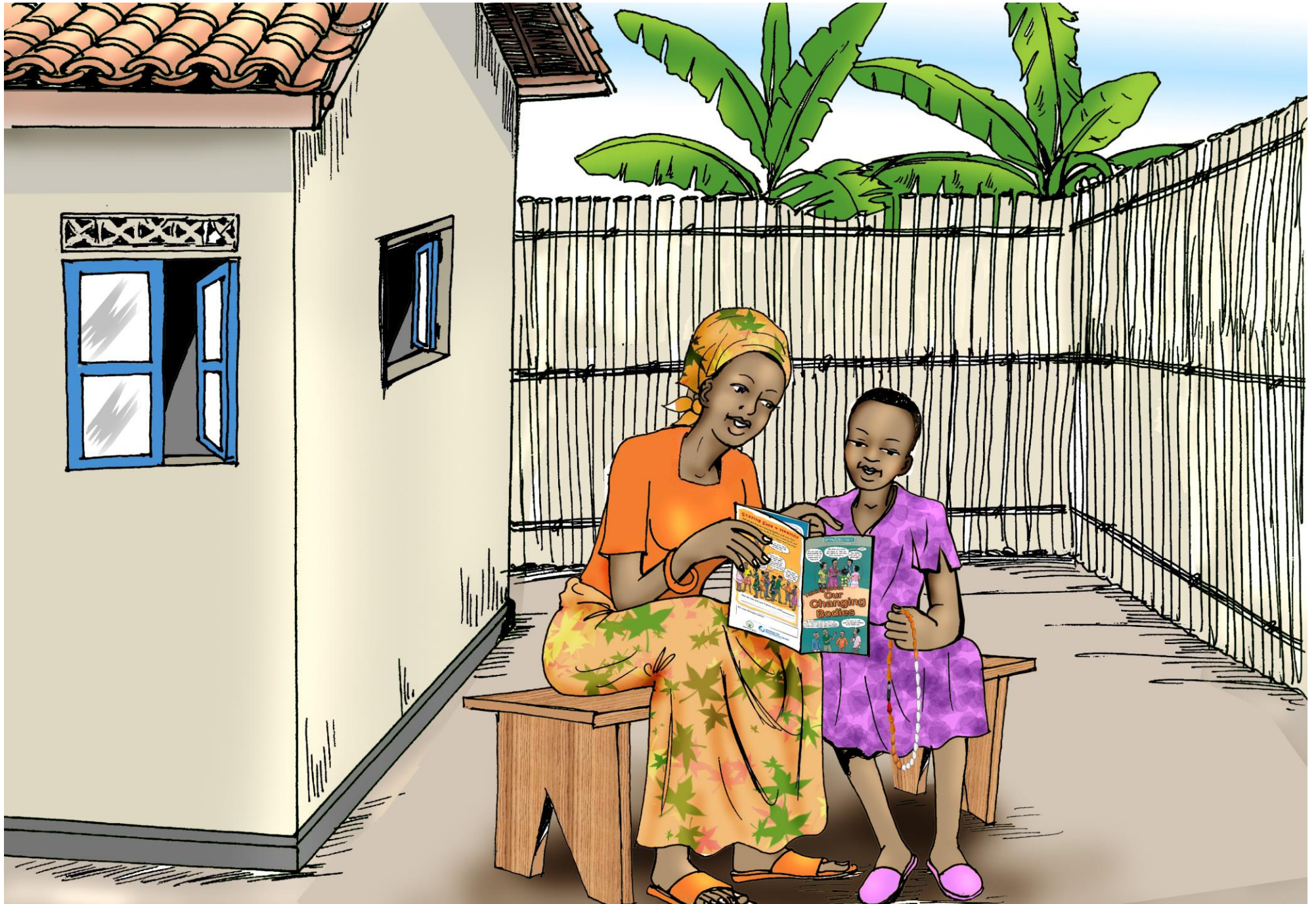
A girl's monthly bleeding can come sooner or later than a month apart, and that is normal. Over time many girls notice that monthly bleeding does come about a month apart. Sometimes a girl can see some spotting of blood for a day or two in the middle of the cycle. This is usually nothing to worry about. Also, you should know that monthly bleeding stops when a woman is pregnant.

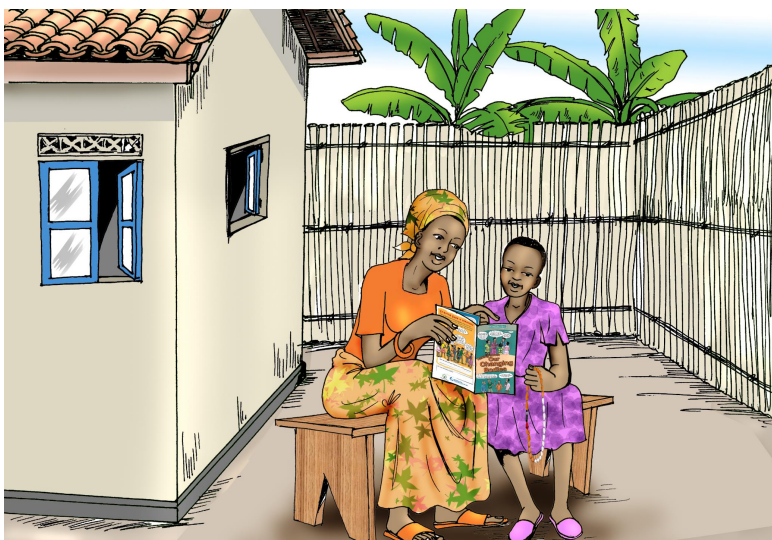
I want you to know this information so you can keep track of your cycle. Look at these CycleBeads (in Mutoni's hands) you can use CycleBeads to learn about and keep track of your monthly bleeding. It is very easy. On the day that you start your monthly bleeding you put the ring on the red bead. You can also mark your calendar on this day. Then move the ring one bead each day in the direction of the arrow. Check where the ring is when you get your next monthly bleeding. Often this will happen when the ring is somewhere between the dark brown bead and the arrow. Most girls can start expecting their next monthly bleeding when the ring is approaching that dark brown bead. This helps you to be prepared.

If you know about when your monthly bleeding will start, you can have supplies with you so that you are not surprised!

Questions to discuss:

- How could you use CycleBeads or a calendar to keep track of your monthly bleeding?





Mutoni asks, “Mum, my friend said that some days she finds something wet on her underwear that is white and sometimes clear. It is not urine and not blood. Is that also caused by monthly bleeding?”

Mutoni’s mum replies, “These are called secretions. All women have secretions, but not all women notice them. Secretions are part of the cycle, and may be felt or seen in the middle of the cycle, between one monthly bleeding and the next. Secretions are a sign that a woman is fertile, meaning that she can become pregnant if she has sex. Let me explain more,” her mum continues. “When a man and woman have sex, the man may release fluid into her woman parts. This fluid contains millions of tiny sperm, the male sex cell. A woman’s secretions help sperm travel through the woman’s body to meet her egg for fertilization.

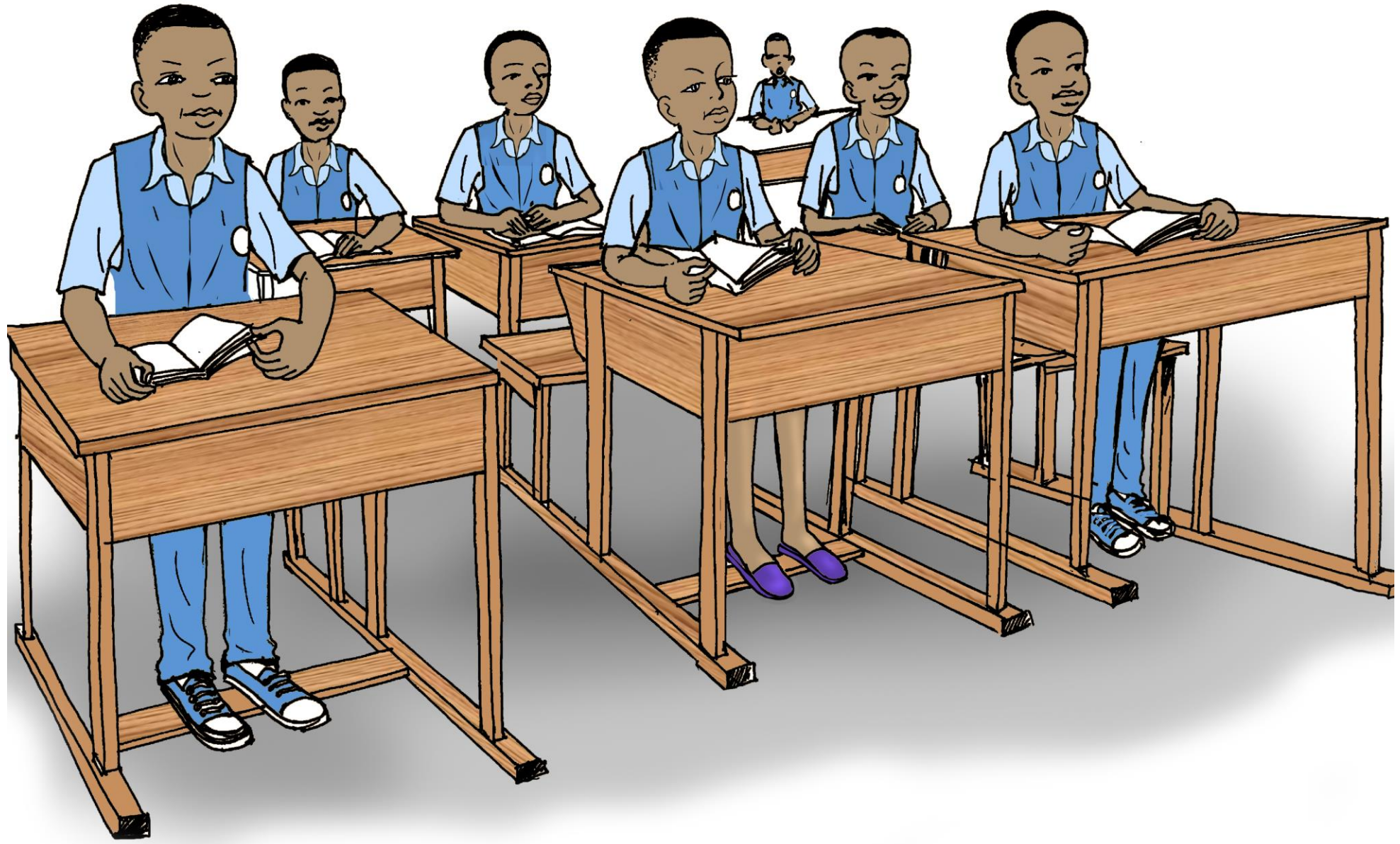
The time of the month when a girl or woman has secretions is the time when her body produces an egg and is more likely to get pregnant. The ability to become pregnant begins around the time when she has her first monthly bleeding as a young girl and continues until she stops having her monthly bleeding altogether, when she is much older.

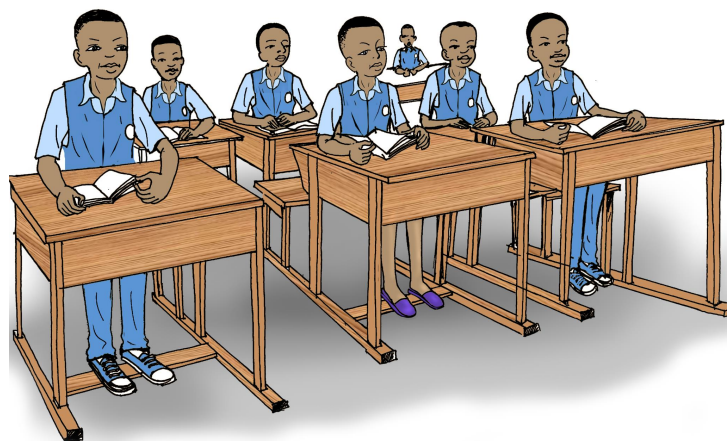
Pay attention to when you see or feel secretions. Healthy secretions are not smelly or itchy. You should not wash them out of the vagina or dry them up with herbs or powders. Secretions are supposed to be there.

Knowing what is normal for your body helps you recognize things that are not normal. If you ever have secretions that smell bad or itch, this could be a sign of a health problem, and you should visit a health provider.”

Questions to discuss

- What are secretions?
- Have you ever noticed secretions?

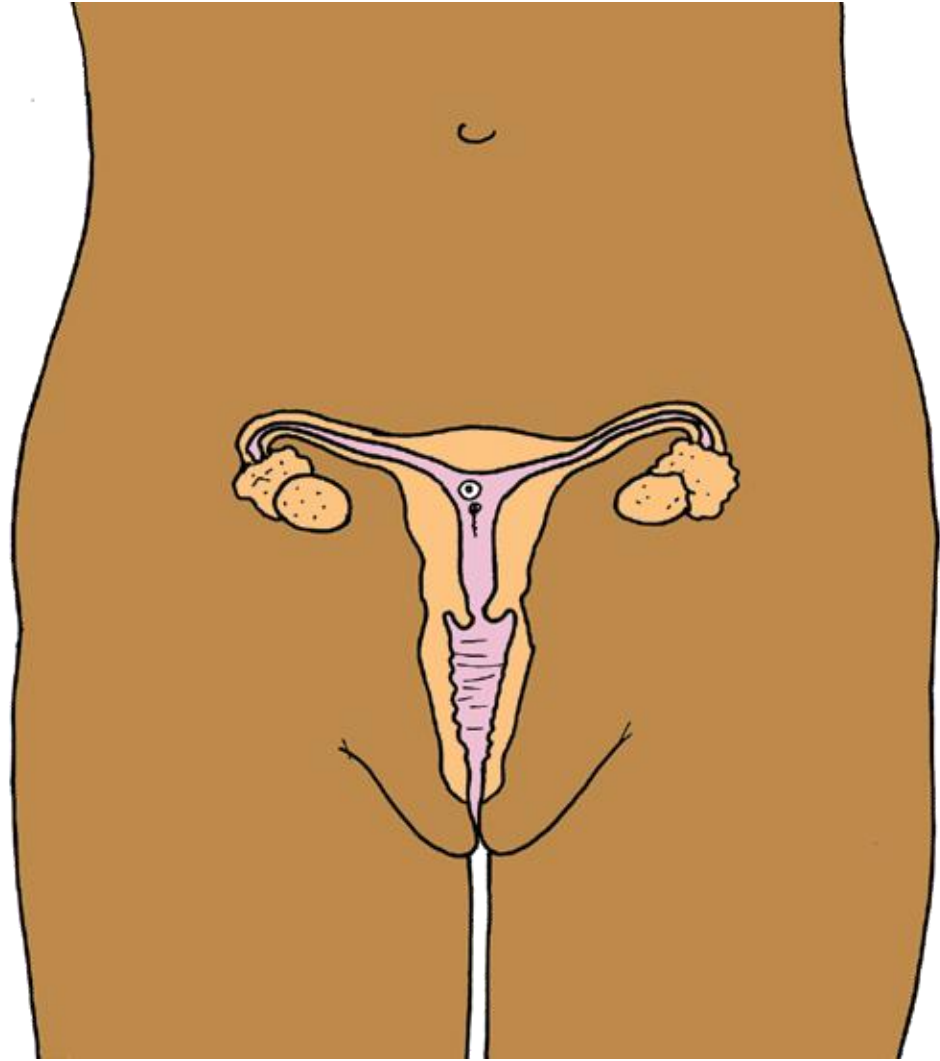
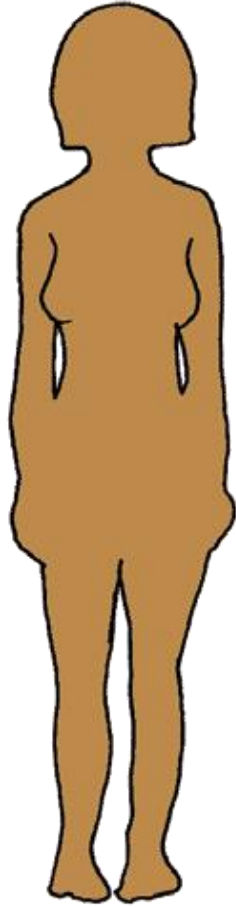


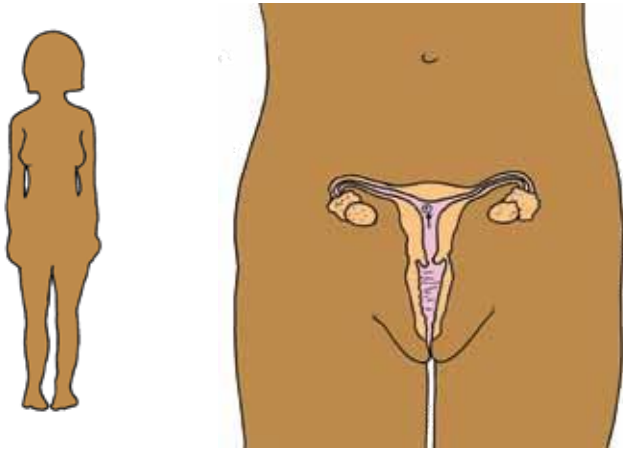


Mutoni's Mum continues, "As you grow older, you may start to feel attraction toward boys. But acting on such feelings is a big responsibility. I want you to wait until you are older or talk to me first, if you feel ready to act on these feelings. For now, you should be knowledgeable about the changes that boys experience in puberty so you can understand them, too.

Unlike girls, boys do not get monthly bleeding, or grow breasts or wider hips. During puberty their man parts grow bigger. During this time they will experience erections. An erection is when the man part fills with blood and becomes hard and straight. An erection can happen when boys think about sexual things or sometimes for no reason at all. Many boys also experience wet dreams. This is when their man part releases fluid while sleeping. This causes the boy's underwear or bed to be wet when he wakes up. Erections and wet dreams are completely natural and normal, and usually cannot be controlled. These are not signs that a boy needs to have sex or release the fluid. If he waits, the erection will go down on its own without causing any harm.

Once a boy's man part starts to release fluid, if he has sex, he can get a girl pregnant any day. A boy or man has the ability to father a child from his first release of fluid for the rest of his life."





Mutoni's mum asks, "Do you know how a woman gets pregnant? When I was growing up no one told us and this caused difficulties for some girls and boys." Mutoni listened closely. She always wondered how that happens.

Her mum continues, "Hold up your right hand and wave it back and forward like a worm. This represents the sperm in men. Hold up your other hand like a fist. This hand represents the egg inside the woman. Repeat after me:

"I was conceived when my parents had sex and the sperm from my father (wave the right hand like a worm or sperm) and the egg from my mother (fist the left hand) came together (join your hands) and created me."

My dear, you should know that once your monthly bleeding starts, if you have sex, you can get pregnant. But that does not mean you are ready for sex or pregnancy. When you have finished growing, you will be better prepared to be a mother and have a family of your own.

In the future, when you are in a relationship with the right person, and you both decide and agree that it is time, visit a health worker. Talk with your partner about when you want to have children. The health worker will tell you about many options to plan for pregnancy and avoid unintended pregnancy and diseases. Will you do this for yourself and your family?"

Mutoni agrees.





Questions to discuss:

- What are some body changes that girls experience during puberty?
- Have you experienced any of these changes yet? How do you feel?

Now Mutoni feels confident to ask her mum about something else she is concerned about. “Mum, the other day my friends and I were collecting firewood. My friends teased me because they have developed breasts and hips although I have not yet. Why is that?”

Mutoni’s mum says, “These many changes may happen sooner for some girls than for others. It is normal.

The changes come from chemicals called “hormones” which are produced in your body. In addition to menstruation, you will experience many changes as your body grows and develops. You will grow taller and your feet will grow bigger. Like your friends, your breasts and hips will also grow. Your voice will change. Hair will grow around your woman parts and under your arms. You will start to sweat more. Your face might become oily which can cause pimples.

Just like girls, during puberty boys grow body hair under their arms, get deeper voices, sweat more and get taller. Boys may also get pimples.

Actually, girls often develop a few years sooner than boys. But each girl and boy develops at a different pace. It is normal for some girls and boys to be less developed than others. It is also normal for some to be more developed than others. Everyone is normal for themselves. Feel secure in your heart that you are very special and beautiful. Be proud of your strong and healthy body.”





Mutoni asks, “Mum, my friend is acting different. Things upset her more these days. On the last market day, she saw shoes she would like to buy, but as usual, we did not have enough money. She was sad, and we spent a long time to comfort her. I nearly reached home late. Why does she behave like this now?”

Mutoni’s mum says, “Her reaction could be partially caused by emotional changes that come with puberty. You may also notice changes in your own feelings during this time. Sometimes you may feel confident and happy. Other times you may feel sad or frustrated, or just misunderstood.

This is all normal and natural. You will become more comfortable with your new self soon.”

Questions to discuss:

- What did you learn from Mutoni’s experiences with puberty?
- Who will you talk to when you have questions about puberty and growing up?

Story 3



Story 3 Making Great Decisions



Mutoni and her younger cousin go to the borehole to fetch water in the mornings. One day her cousin confides in her. “I heard that I will get bad stomach pains in the future. Should I be afraid?”

Before talking with her mum, Mutoni would have been embarrassed to share experiences with her cousin. But now she thinks about what to do. She decides to share her experiences. It is an easy decision.

Mutoni explains that this is monthly bleeding. She said, “Do not be afraid or embarrassed about body changes. Ask me or a trusted adult anytime you have a question or concern.”

Questions to discuss:

- What advice would you give to a younger relative or friend about growing up?





One day, Mutoni is walking to school with two friends. A boy calls out, “You girls! Meet us on the school yard under the tree tonight. There will be a full moon and we will play a fun game.”

Mutoni’s friends laugh nervously and walk faster. But Mutoni feels confident with the information from her mum. She says loudly, “Do not confuse us! We are not ready to have sex or to get pregnant. It is not a game.” The boy replies, “Hey, you are still young. You will not get pregnant at this age.”

Mutoni encourages her friends to keep walking. She tells them what her mum told her. “We are still growing up, and our bodies and minds are not yet ready for sex. We have the right to say “No!” if a boy wants to have sex. We could get pregnant or diseases like HIV if we have sex, even the first time. When a couple decides it is time for a relationship and sex, they need to talk with a health worker to make plans about when to get pregnant or not in order to achieve life goals. There are many safe methods available to prevent pregnancy.”

One of Mutoni’s friends says, “Wow, you are so brave and beautiful! I want to walk to school with you every day.”

Mutoni thought it was an easy decision to refuse those boy’s advances and protect her friends.

Questions to discuss:

- Do you agree with what Mutoni did? Why?
- Do you think that it is acceptable for boys to pressure girls? Why?

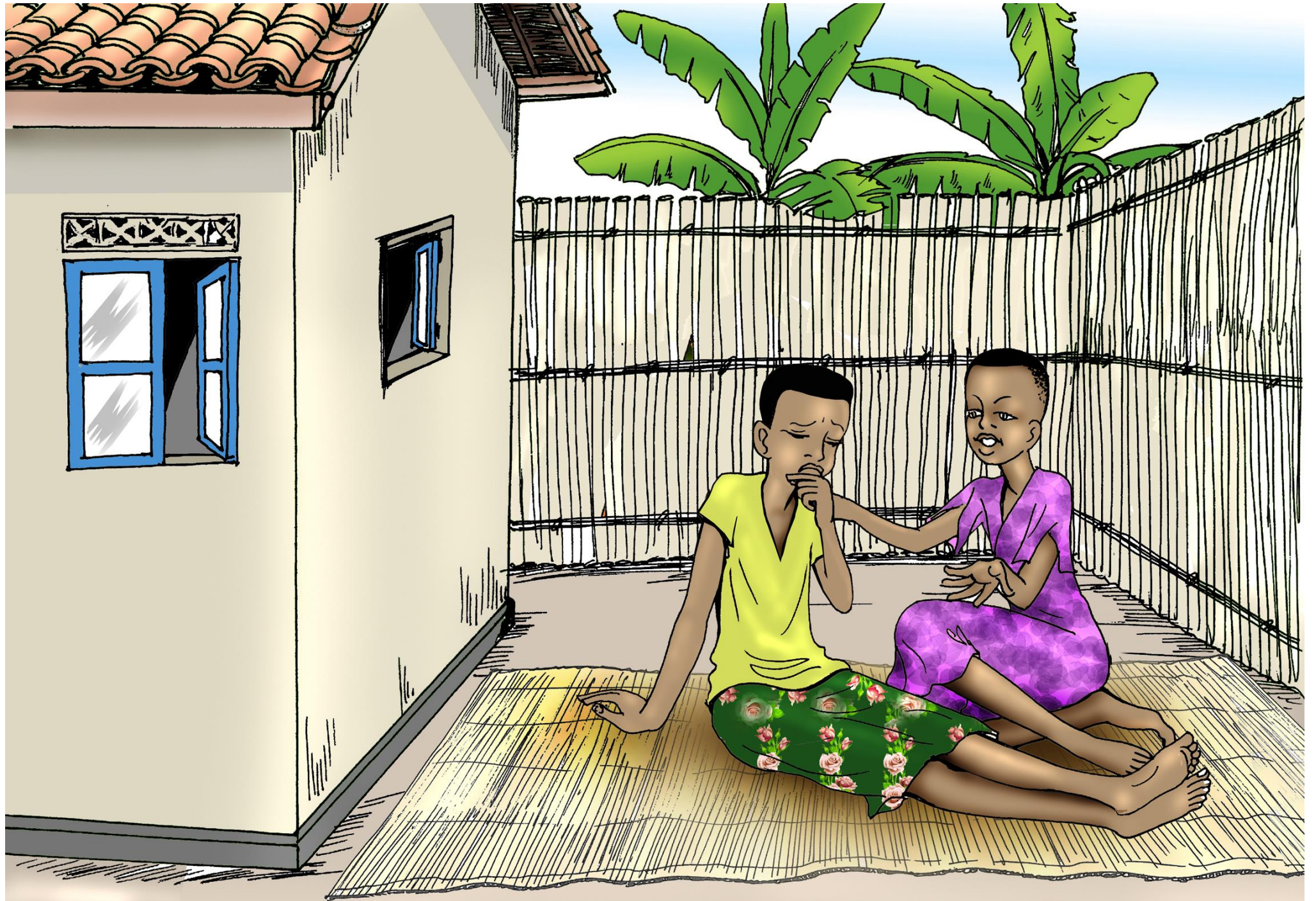


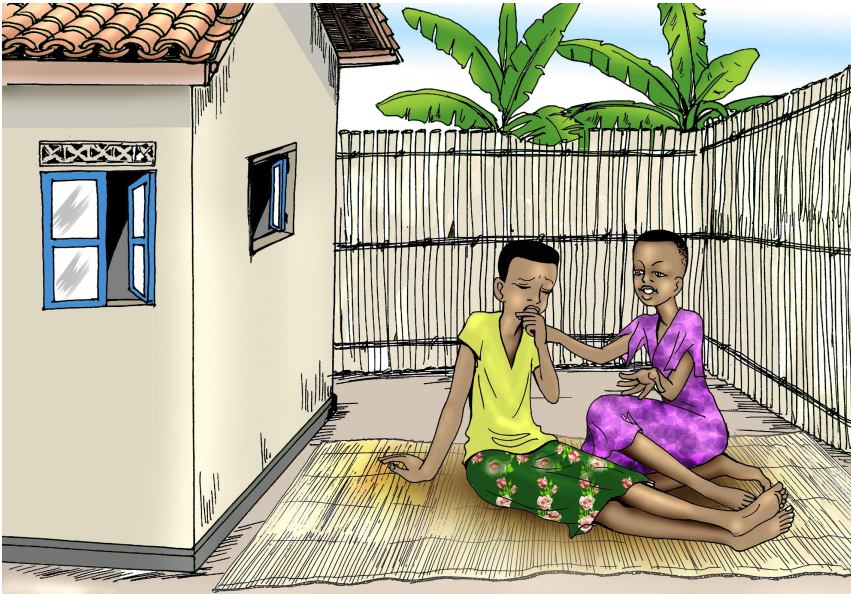


One day Mutoni's chores take longer than usual, and she still needs to fetch water and it is becoming dark. She knows that it is not safe for girls outside at night. She considers her choices. She could go quickly, and hope she will be safe. Or, she could ask her friend to go together. Or, she could ask her brother to fetch the water.

This decision is challenging. Mutoni wonders what to do.

Mutoni decides to explain the situation to her brother and how she feels unsafe. Her brother never realized that girls felt this way! Her brother says, "I will go with you tonight, and any day when it is too late for you to return while still light outside." Mutoni smiles and replies, "Thank you, brother!"





Mutoni's friend comes to Mutoni's house. Mutoni can see that her friend is upset and asks, "What is the matter?"

Her friend confides, "It is that man, the shopkeeper in the next town. He gave me a dress last month. Now he has invited me to his house. What should I do?" Mutoni decides to seek advice from her mum. Her mum listens to the girl and then says, "My child, I am glad that you came to me; you made a great decision! Always seek help from an adult whom you trust for you or another young person in case of a problem. In this case, I will return the dress and talk with this man."

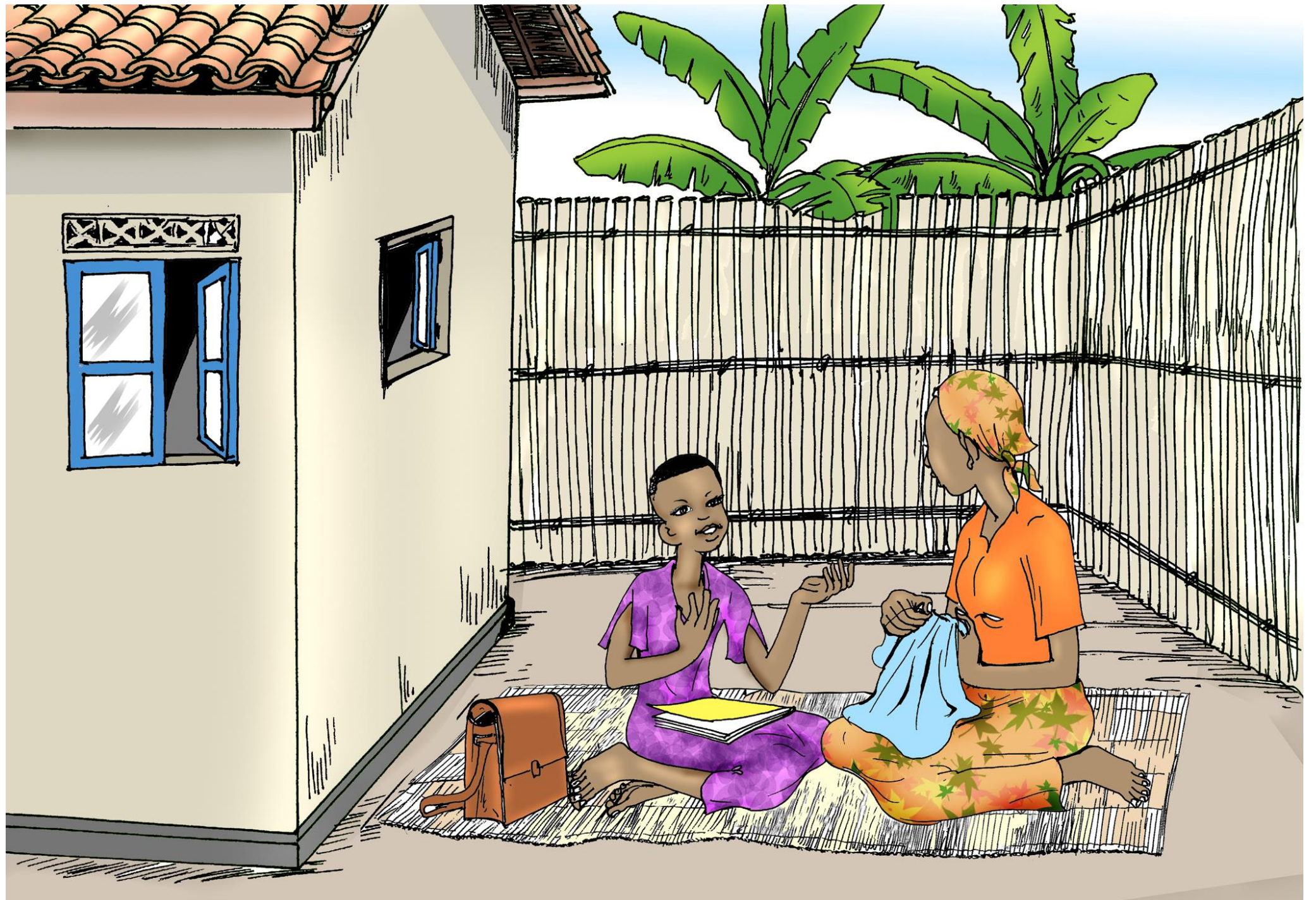
Your body is your own, and no one should touch your private parts in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. In the future, here are things I want you to do to stay safe:

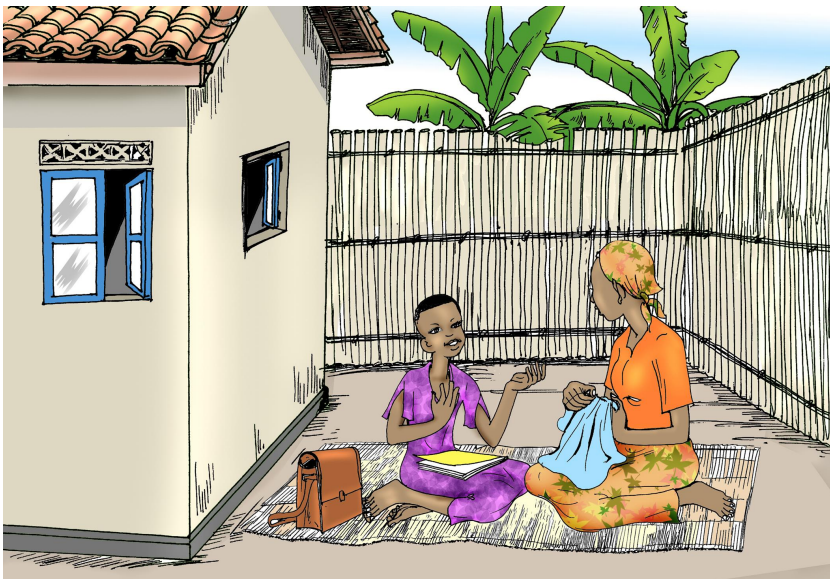
1. Do not accept gifts from a boy or man without your parent's permission.
2. If you are ever uncomfortable, say "no" firmly and directly.
3. Ask your parents or another trusted person for help or advice.
4. Keep talking to as many people as necessary until someone takes action.
5. Go to a safe place.

Can you remember and do these things? Your safety is so important! We adults must make our community safe and responsive to everyone, especially girls."

Questions to discuss:

- Do you think Mutoni can follow this advice? Why? Can you?
- Who is a trusted elder you can go to in case of problems with boys or men?
- Where is a safe place you can go?





One day when Mutoni is waiting to meet a friend, she hears older girls talking about their boyfriends. One of the girls confides, “My boyfriend is demanding. But he is the boy, so I just follow what he tells me. I just hope I do not get pregnant.”

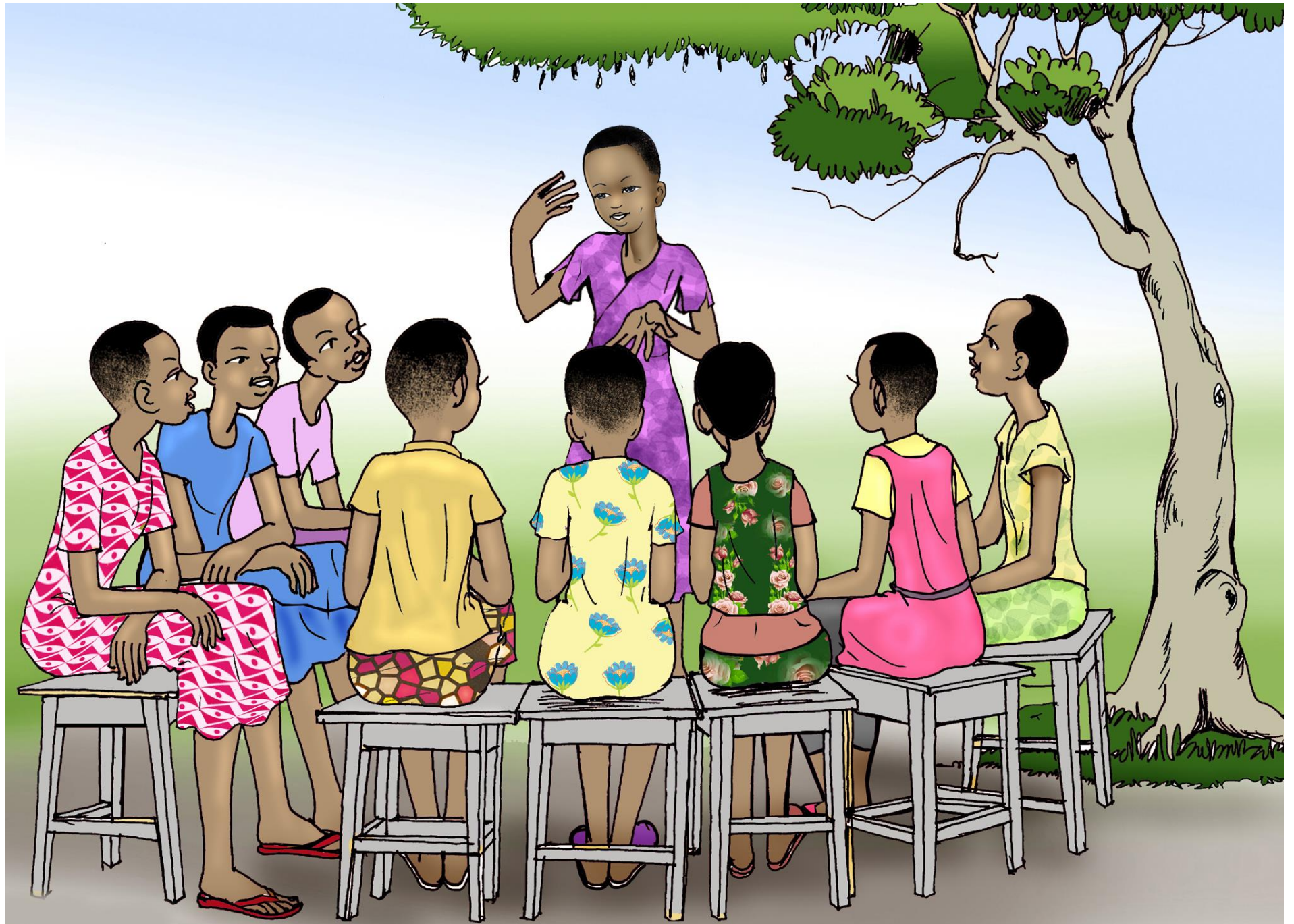
Later Mutoni tells her mum. “Mum, I am not ready for a boyfriend. I do not want to be confused by a boy! I want to finish school. But in the future I may want one. Can I have a boyfriend who respects and listens to me, and does not force me to do things I am not ready to do?”

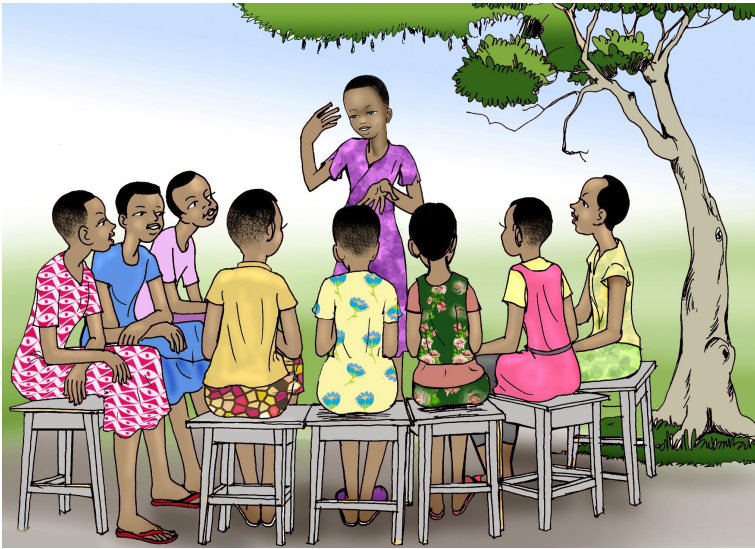
Mutoni’s mum replies, “Oh yes! Consider your parents and friends. You love them, don’t you? You show them love in different ways. This is the same for boys. When you find someone who respects and trusts you, and you him, you can express your feelings to each other in many ways. You can write letters and poems. Share secrets and stories. Sing songs.

As you grow older, you may feel attraction to a boy. This is normal. But acting on that attraction is a big responsibility. It is best to wait until you are older, have a caring partner and can decide for yourself what type of relationship you want. You are a special and beautiful girl, who can make great decisions!”

Questions to discuss:

- Do you show love to your family and friends? How?
- Can someone express love to a girlfriend or boyfriend without sex? How?
- What are some questions you would ask yourself before deciding to enter into a relationship? Where is a safe place you can go?





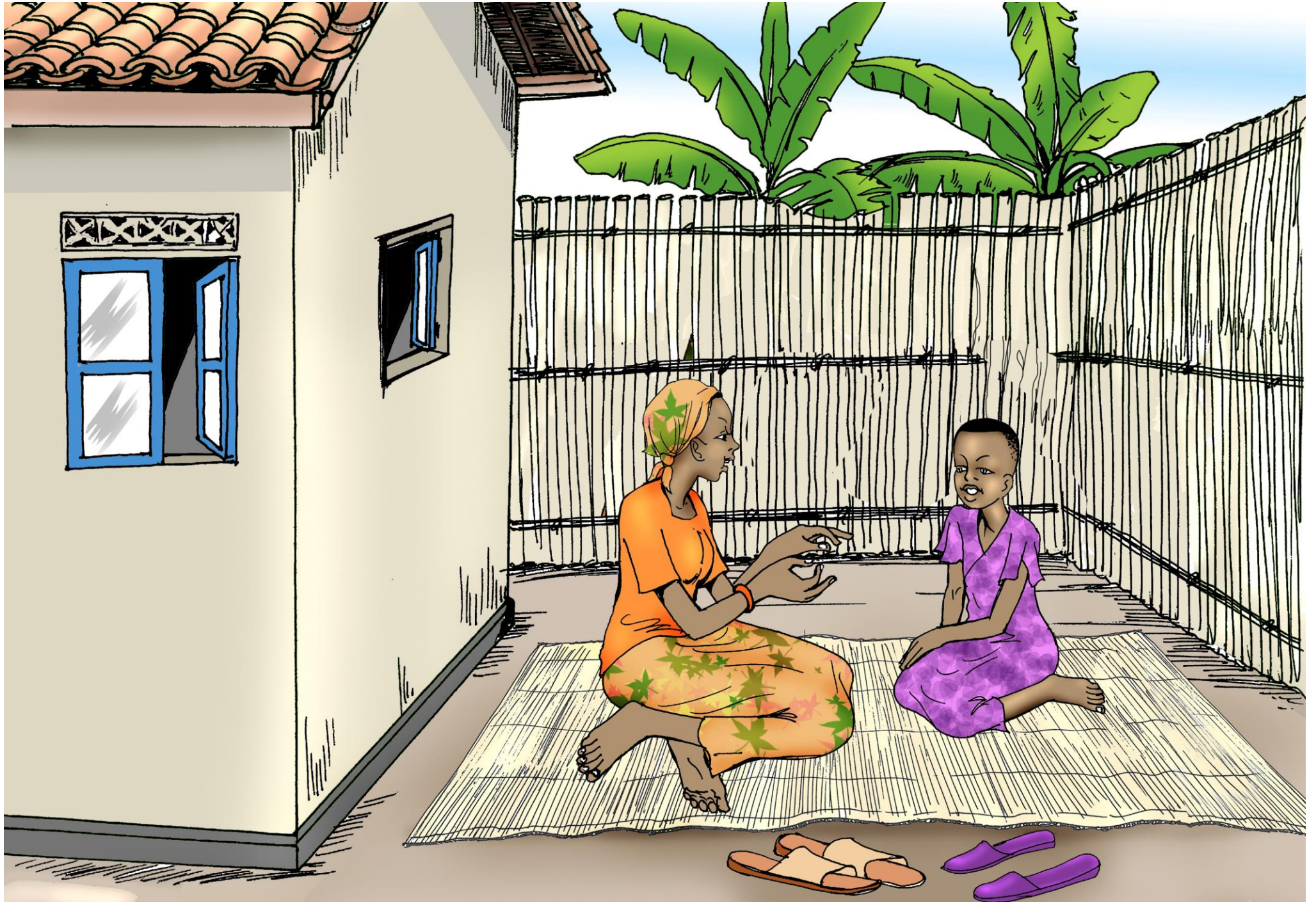
The next day Mutoni hears that her friend's sister must leave secondary school to get married. The girl's parents want her to marry so that her brother can bring a wife home. Mutoni feels sad because she knows that the girl wants to finish school and become a teacher, before getting married.

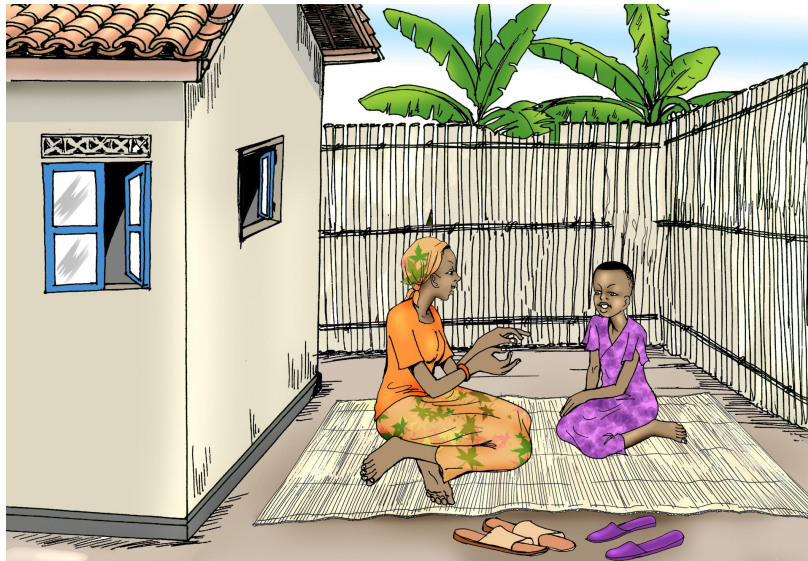
Mutoni and her friends decide to meet and talk together. Maybe there is something they could do to help.

The girls discuss for a long time. One girl believes that there is nothing that can be done for a family matter. Another suggests that they conduct a community drama to advocate for girls to finish school. Mutoni offers to talk with her uncle, an LC1, to discuss this with the girl's family.

The girls decide to try both ideas: they prepare and perform a drama and seek help from the LC1. They explain to the LC1 that girls' education benefits the whole family and community. Girls who finish school raise healthier and better educated children and contribute to the family development.

Their plan works! The family allows the girl to finish school. The girls are happy to work together to make an important change.





Mutoni's mum says to her, "I am proud of you. You have been thinking about your choices and decisions. You are learning to make great decisions. You are growing up, but not yet a woman. There are many things ahead of you in life."

"You are so special. Believe in yourself. I believe in you!"

Questions to discuss:

- Will you do anything differently after hearing Mutoni's story? What?





Mutoni grew up great! By trying hard, Mutoni became a health worker and role model in her community.

Mutoni married a man whom she met in school. She admired how he respected his younger sisters, always encouraging them to finish school. She knew he would do the same for his future daughters and sons one day. She also enjoyed talking with him. Even after many years of marriage, they still talk together often.

When Mutoni and her husband first married, his family wanted them to have a baby right away. They discussed their plans with his family to wait for two years, and they agreed after hearing a clear plan. Over time, Mutoni and her husband had two children. They decided that their family was complete with two children, so they visited a health centre to learn how to stop having more children.

Mutoni makes sure that her daughter and son have the same opportunities to go to school and learn. Every night, Mutoni says to her daughter and son,

“You are so special. Believe in yourself. I believe in you!”

Common questions & answers

What is puberty?

Puberty is a time when children are no longer young children and not yet adults. During puberty the bodies of girls and boys physically change. Their bodies grow bigger and taller, genitals mature, and hair often starts growing in new places on the body. During puberty, a girl becomes able to get pregnant and a boy becomes able to father a child, although they are not yet ready to have a child and care for a family

At what age do boys and girls go through puberty?

Puberty describes all the physical changes that children go through as they grow into adults. Girls usually begin changes earlier than boys. Most girls notice that changes start between 8 to 13 years old, and boys notice that changes start between 10 to 15 years old. It might be sooner or it might be later. Each person is a little different, so everyone goes through puberty at their own pace. Changes in mind and body continue until 19 or even 20 years of age.

Is it normal for some boys and girls to mature earlier than others?

Yes. Some boys start puberty as early as 10 years old, others not until they are 15. Some girls start puberty as early as age 8, others not until they are 13 or later. Each person is normal for themselves. However, if a girl does not start menstruating by the age of 16, she should consult a health provider.

What is monthly bleeding?

Monthly bleeding, called menstruation or a period, is the normal, healthy shedding of blood and tissue from a girl or woman's womb (uterus). It usually lasts between 3 to 7 days each month. It is a sign that a woman can possibly become pregnant if she has sex.

What is the menstrual cycle?

The menstrual cycle is the period of time beginning on the first day of one monthly bleeding until the day before she begins the next monthly bleeding. Since this happens regularly, it is called a "cycle."

When is a woman or man “fertile” or able to get pregnant?

Being fertile means a woman is able to become pregnant. A woman is fertile for several days in a row around the middle of each menstrual cycle. These are the days when she can become pregnant. A woman is fertile for several days each cycle from her first monthly bleeding until she is much older. A man has the ability to father a child from his first release of fluid (semen from his penis) for the rest of his life.

What is ovulation?

Ovulation is the periodic release of a mature egg from the ovary. This usually happens around the middle of a woman’s menstrual cycle.

What are secretions?

Girls can sometimes see secretions on their underpants or experience a feeling of wetness. These secretions are a whitish or clear liquid. Girls often get secretions around the time of ovulation, when the body is ready to receive and nurture a fertilized egg. Secretions help sperm travel through the uterus to meet the egg for fertilization, so when a girl has secretions, she knows that this is the time when she is fertile.

Should girls put something in the vagina to keep it smelling nice?

No. Washing the outside of the vagina (woman parts) with soap and water each day is enough to keep it clean. Putting something inside the vagina will cause dryness, irritation, or infection.

From what age can a girl get pregnant?

When a girl starts having monthly bleeding it means that her reproductive organs have begun working and that she can become pregnant if she has sex. It does not mean she is ready to have a baby, only that she is physically capable of getting pregnant.

What is needed for pregnancy to occur?

Although pregnancy does not occur with every act of sex, it is likely to occur when three things happen: 1) an egg must be present in the woman’s fallopian tubes, the tubes that carry the egg to the womb where babies grow; 2) sperm from the male must join the egg to fertilize it; and 3) the fertilized egg must attach itself to the lining of the woman’s womb (uterus).

Can a girl get pregnant during monthly bleeding?

Yes, it is possible although very uncommon. It depends on the length of her cycle, how many days her monthly bleeding lasts, and when she has sex, because the male sex cell, the sperm, may live several days in her body.

Can a man get a woman pregnant if he removes his penis from her vagina before he releases fluid?

Yes. It does reduce the risk of pregnancy, but pregnancy is possible. Some men do not pull out in time and some men may have a tiny bit of sperm in the fluid around the tip of the penis before he ejaculates. This is called pre- ejaculate.

How can pregnancy be prevented?

When a man and a woman want to have sex without having a child, they can use a method of family planning to prevent pregnancy. There are many types of methods including condoms, oral contraceptive pills, injectables, intrauterine device (IUD) and natural methods. Talk with a health worker for information about the methods available. When a couple is using a method correctly, this means they are “protected” from pregnancy. When they use a condom in addition to another method of family planning, it means they are “protected” from both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections like HIV. The best way for girls and boys to prevent pregnancy, and to prevent infections a person can get from having sex, is to not have sex. If you or someone you know needs a family planning method or protection against sexually transmitted infections, see a health provider.

Why are there some women who cannot get pregnant?

Infertility—or not being able to get pregnant—may be caused by: problems in the man, woman, or both; blocked fallopian tubes; low sperm count in the man; or older age. Sometimes doctors cannot determine the cause of permanent infertility. However, if a woman does not get pregnant after having sex this does not necessarily mean she is infertile. Sometimes a woman may not get pregnant for a while, and then she does become pregnant.