

Your third edition

RISE

YOUNG WOMEN'S CLUBS



LET'S TALK
about
SEX!

And:
Your body:
what's going on
down there?

Singing
for body
and soul

Your club, your App!



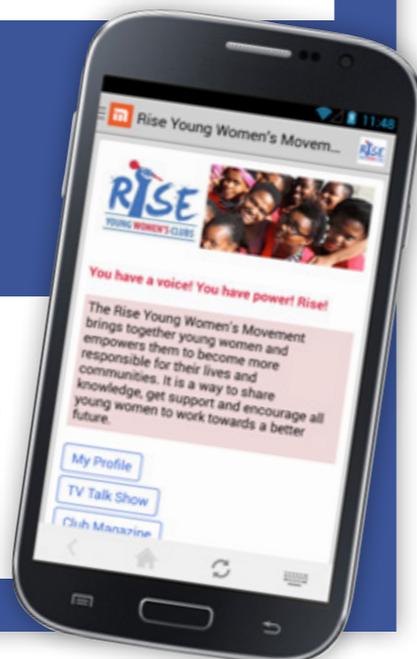
Rise Reporting Tool app

This app is for Rise Club members only. Your membership number activates the app which you will use for registering your meetings and updating Soul City on what you will be working on.

As a Rise Club member you can submit projects and tasks through the app and communicate directly with the team at Soul City Institute.

An app manual is included in your toolkit. If you have any questions contact Lovemore at Soul City via email: lovemore@soulcity.org.za or phone 011 771 7935.

DOWNLOAD



Rise Young Women's Movement (MXit app)

This MXit app is for all young women in the country. Anyone with an Android phone can download it. It features a chatroom for questions on love, relationships, pregnancy, etc. and weekly polls for you to share your opinion on various topics.

Use this app to see Rise interviews, news and events and communicate with other young women and experts in various fields.



Answer the questions below, take a picture of this page and send it to us using the Rise Reporting Tool app. Refer to the App user guide if you are not sure about how to do this or contact Lovemore at Soul City via email: lovemore@soulcity.org.za or phone 011 771 7935.

A lucky club will be selected from all the entries and get a surprise!

Name of your club:	How many members:
Age group:	Province:
How often do you use MXit?	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> A lot
How do you prefer to communicate:	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> MXit <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook <input type="checkbox"/> Rise app <input type="checkbox"/> SMS
Tell us what you enjoy most about your Rise club	

Welcome to your magazine!

A warm welcome to your third edition of Rise. In this issue, we bring you the conversations women shy away from because of the myths around them. I'm talking about sex and menstruation.

As a young girl, I knew nothing about the changes that women go through as they grow up. And being raised by my grandmother did not help the situation. When I got my period I hid myself from everyone for a good three months, using newspapers and old cloths as sanitary pads. With nobody to talk to, I was afraid I had done something terribly wrong.

Luckily I had an older cousin to help. She assured me that everything happening was normal and she gave me pads.

It was then that I made a decision to find out more about menstruation and started encouraging my friends to talk about it.

This issue is packed with features that I know will encourage as well as educate you. Have a read and pick something.

Until next time, keep rising!

Mapula

on behalf of the Rise team



Mapula Tloubatla

Rise editor

Let Rise hear what you have to say.

Contact us on the Rise Young Women's Movement app or on the Rise Reporting tool.

If you have questions about how to do this contact Lovemore Manjoro at lovemore@soulcity.org.za or phone 011 771 7935.

On the cover:
Our team visited the members of Rise YWC called The Rising Stars, in Phumla on the East Rand.



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SINGING for Life

Looking for a fun way to get healthy? Just sing!

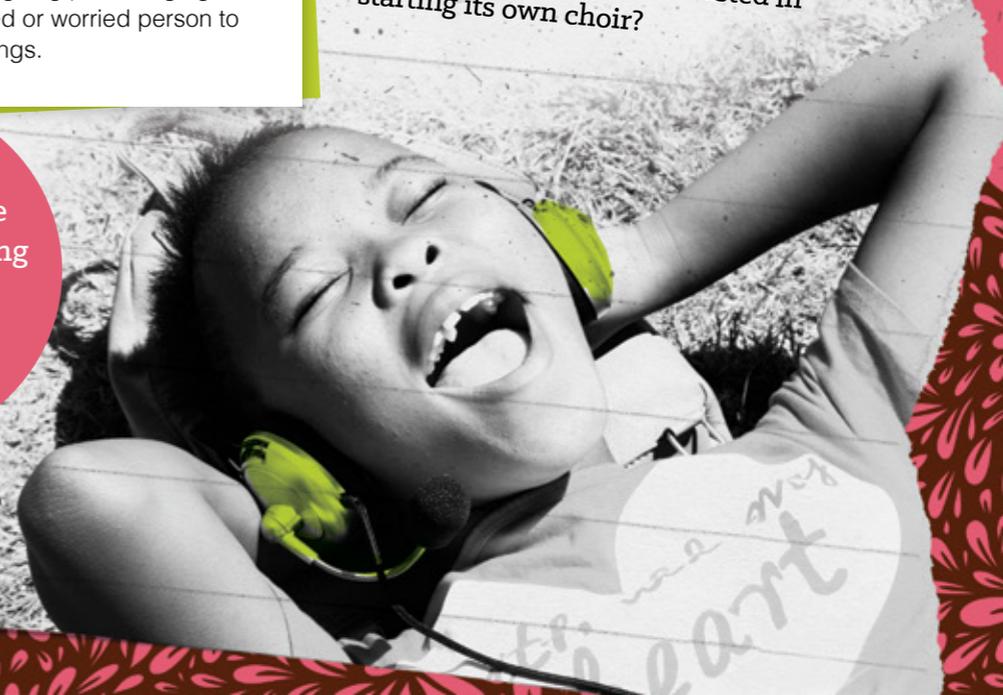
Singing in a choir doesn't just feel good – it's got health benefits too. One study found that when people are singing together, their heartbeats slow down and beat to the same rhythm, bringing about a calming effect. Another study even found that singing in a choir can make us live longer.

Singing has also been shown to boost our immune systems and to reduce stress levels. It strengthens our lungs and trains us to breathe better.

Singing can also help us when we're sick. One report found that singing helps people to deal better with ongoing pain. Singing can also help a depressed or worried person to open up to their feelings.

- Club discussion:**
- Do you sing? What's your favourite song to sing to yourself?
 - Would your Club enjoy singing together? If so, could you start or end Club meetings with a song?
 - Would you like to make up a song for the Club?
 - Are you part of a choir? If so, can you encourage other club members to join you?
 - Or would the Club be interested in starting its own choir?

See the back page for a photo of Rising Stars YWC!
#clubactivity



Being club secretary

Viva Young Women's Club, viva!

Taking minutes

Ask the meeting to agree that the style of the minutes will be action notes. This means that the secretary does not have to write down every word everyone says. She records:

- the item being discussed
- the decision that is made
- who is responsible for doing what
- by when the task must be done.

Minutes are important because they:

- are a record of your meeting
- tell the history of your club
- remind members what they have to do after the meeting
- are what you use to start your next meeting
- help your club
 - remember its decisions
 - keep a check on its progress
 - be efficient and effective
 - move forward.

Club secretary is an important role. The skills you learn are also useful in the workplace. The tips below can also be applied to a job.

A club secretary

- Helps to make sure meetings run smoothly.
- Arrives early, writes the agenda and sets up the venue.
- Writes minutes so that decisions and plans are recorded.
- Reminds members to write down the tasks they have agreed to do, and by when they must do them.
- Sends out the minutes to each club member. Email or text message reminders to members. If you can't do this, don't worry. You can read out the minutes at the beginning of the next meeting.

You must

- Listen carefully and concentrate all through the meeting.
- Have the confidence to ask the chairperson if you are not sure of a decision the club has made.
- Ask the chairperson to summarise the decisions at the end of each item you discuss. This helps you write accurate minutes.
- Make sure you record exactly what was said and decided on.
- Check your minutes with the chairperson.

An example of an agenda:

Agenda

1. Welcome: club song
2. Apologies and who is present
3. Agree on agenda
4. Accept or amend previous minutes
5. Matters arising from the previous minutes
 - 5.1 Rise T-shirts
 - 5.2 Women's Day event in August
 - 5.3 Business skills workshops
6. New items
7. Thanks

2. Write the names of the members who have said they can't attend the meeting. Write in your minutes the names of everyone who is at the meeting.

1. Brings all the members together. Starts the meeting in a positive way.

4. If you can't give everyone a copy of the minutes, then read them out. One member needs to 'propose' that the club accepts the previous minutes. And another person needs to 'second' her proposal.

3. Have an agenda written so that everyone will know what they are going to discuss. This will help club members to stick to topic.

5. The chairperson opens discussion, following the agenda. Here you will discuss items that arise and need to be followed up from the previous meeting.

7. The chairperson will end the meeting, making sure that the date, time and venue for the next meeting is decided.

6. These are new items that you haven't discussed in matters arising. Discuss these issues in order. These will also come up again as matters arising in the next meeting.



Working towards the future

Three ambitious Rise Club members in Port Elizabeth are taking part in a mentoring scheme.



CLUB ACTIVITIES



I am Lithalethu Gosani

Her friends say she is "humble, approachable, stylish, polite ..." and they also discovered she is a Dragon-Ball Z fan!



I am Thembisa Puwe

Her friends say she is "funny, pure at heart, crazy in a good way, confident, very sweet" and a whole lot more!



I am Chulumanco Hela

Her friends say she is "disciplined, a lady, very kind, spiritually gifted, has an amazing smile" and much more!

Aiming high

Lithalethu is aiming for a bachelor's degree in tourism management, Thembisa has her sights on a national diploma in business management, while Chulumanco hopes to become a lawyer.

The three matriculants at Ndyebo Senior Secondary School in the PE township of Motherwell have big dreams. With the help of an organisation called Vision4 Women they believe they might achieve their dreams.

Mentors

Vision4 Women is a programme that pairs matric girls with businesswomen who offer advice and support. The young women meet with their mentors in one-on-one sessions throughout the year, and also take part in three weekend camps which encourage personal and career growth.

Graduation

The PE Club members have just been to their first Vision4 Women camp, and have taken part in a "fast forward" graduation ceremony. This was a pretend graduation ceremony: the girls were awarded the degree they are dreaming of, to help them imagine achieving their goals.

Chulumanco's story

Rise Club member Chulumanco Hela is thrilled to be part of the Nelson Mandela Bay Vision4 Women mentor scheme. The 17-year-old has a businesswoman to support her through to the year-end exams.

Chosen

"My teacher selected me out of 57 girls in my class, she said that she saw potential in me," says Chulumanco. "I failed my Grade 10 and it was so, so, so bad, but I told myself, I can do better. I was so happy when my teacher told me that she had put my name down for Vision4 Women."

Chulumanco plans to study law at UCT or Fort Hare after she finishes school.

Goals

"The camp really helped me to know my goals. We're the first girls from our school to go on the Vision4 Women mentoring programme," says Chulumanco, beaming with pride.

Chulumanco is the second-born in a family of seven. Her parents will not be able to afford university fees. "I will apply for a bursary," she says, keen to be the first in her family to go to varsity. "It's so exciting."

A mentor is a trusted person who offers advice and support, often to someone younger or less experienced.

What makes a sister?

Rise spoke to some young women relaxing in the Union Building Gardens in Pretoria. We asked them to tell us what they loved most about the woman closest to them. #sisters

This is what they said:



Anna Luemba, 25, Ivory Park

I love my best friend because she is friendly and kind. She likes to share everything with me and she's funny all the time. All in all, she's perfect for me.

Shineas Hitekani, 23, Limpopo

She is honest, intelligent and ambitious. The thing I like most about her is that we share everything. We don't have secrets from each other and I love it.

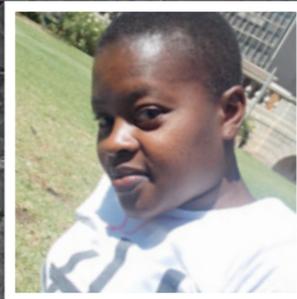


Dineo Nyaphodi, 19, Capital Park

My best friend is my sister. She's the one I share my problems with. When I need advice about the things that I cannot approach my parents with, then she steps in for me. She knows me inside and out, she knows when I'm happy and when I'm sad.

Kabelo Mmako, 20, Mamelodi

The person I consider my best friend is my sister. I tell her everything. I love her because she guides me, supports and encourages me all the time.



Keitumetse Sebola, 19, Mamelodi

My best friend is my mom because I can talk to her about anything. If I have problems I can reach out to her and she gives me advice. She is open with me, even about problems regarding boys, and that helps me to be the best I can be.

Forgiveness Doboro, 20, Soshanguve

My friend is my grandmother. She has been the one since I was a little girl. She understands me, she sees the best in me at all times. When I have difficulties in life she motivates me. She encourages me every day about the importance of education and hard work in life. I cannot imagine life without her.



Tiisetso Makua, 23, Laudium

What I like about my friend is that we share everything, she understands me and she's always there when I need her. She comforts me in good and bad times. She gives advice without judging me. She's the one person that I know my secrets are safe with.

Kabelo Ngoepe, 19, Rankuwae

What I like about my friend is that she's loving, supportive and caring. When I go through tough times she's always there for me. She is like family to me and I believe she loves me unconditionally.



Is there a woman in your life who has a strong influence on you?
Tell us about her on the Mxit app! #sisters

Ask Sis Lebo

Send your anonymous questions to our team on the *Rise* app, if you need some advice. #sislebo

Dear Sis Lebo,

I have been dating my boyfriend for some time now. But recently I found out that he is writing about another girl on social media. I made a decision to end our relationship but every time I talk to him about us being over he threatens to kill himself. Please help. I don't want to be responsible for this guy's death.

Mxit user (Jilted Lover)

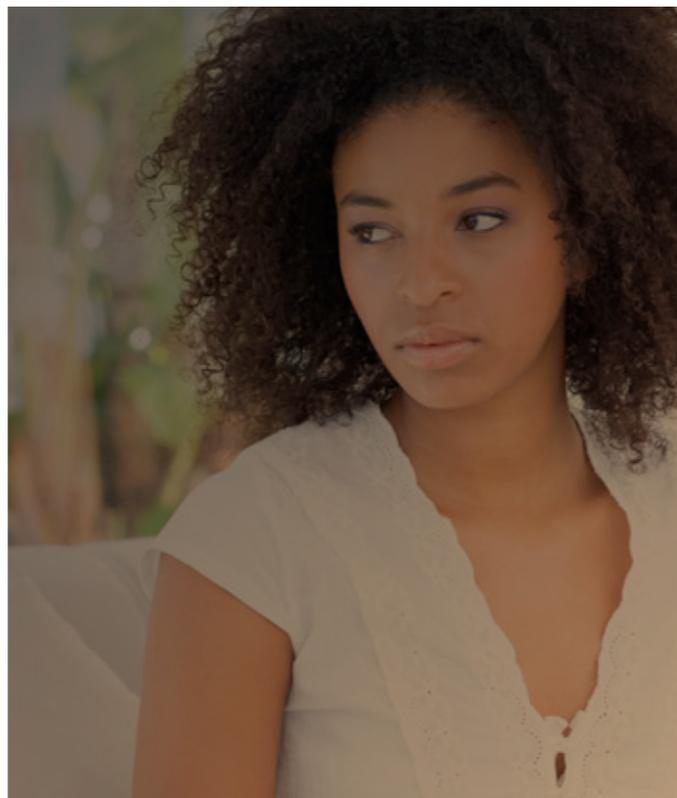


Lebo Ramofoko is the head of Soul City. She also hosts the *Rise* TV talk show. Write to her with your problems and she will try to help.

Dear Jilted Lover,

If this guy wanted to kill himself he would have done it without any announcement. People who kill themselves are depressed and depression is a serious illness. Depressed people show symptoms such as low energy or pulling away from friends and family, etc. They struggle with simple tasks like taking a bath and getting out of bed. Your boyfriend is manipulating you and he is getting the result he wants because you feel you are responsible for keeping him alive. You are not. He has not been sensitive to how you felt when you found out that he was talking about another girl on social media. You did not threaten to kill yourself. Instead you did the right thing by deciding to end the relationship and you should not be with him because he manipulates you into staying with him.

Sis Lebo



Dear Sis Lebo,

I am a 17-year-old girl and I was in a 3-month relationship with this guy about seven months ago. We broke up a few days before our 3-month anniversary. I really loved this guy and ever since that I can't seem to be happy again. Please help.

Heartbroken

Dear Heartbroken,

I am sorry that your relationship with a guy you really loved ended. Sometimes when we meet people we have so many fantasies about spending the rest of our lives with them. When things go wrong we get disappointed. But that is real life. Often things do not work out as we imagined. It is ok to be disappointed and feel like you cannot be happy. But think about before you met this guy. I am sure you were happy. I am also confident that the way you feel now is temporary. Allow yourself time to be disappointed and then meet other people.

Sis Lebo

Dear Sis Lebo

I am a 13-year-old girl and I have a big and embarrassing problem for my age. I think I might be addicted to masturbating (fingering myself). What can I do to stop this bad habit? I need advice urgently.

Self-pleasure

**Masturbation
is very
normal**

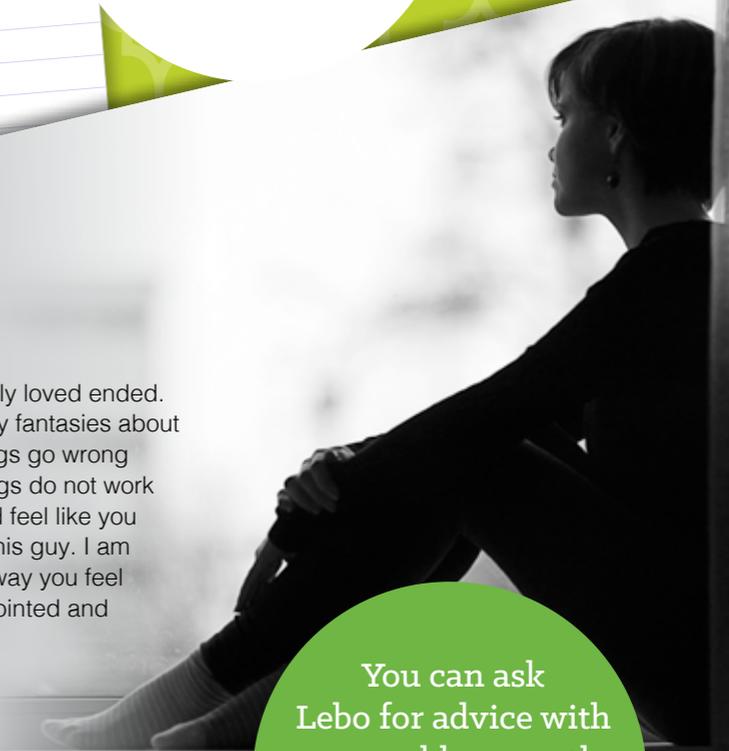
*It's okay
to be
disappointed*

You can ask
Lebo for advice with
your problems on the
Rise Young Women's
Movement
Mxit app.

Dear Self-pleasure,

Masturbation is the cleanest and safest way of enjoying yourself sexually. It is also a way of exploring your body. At 13, you are becoming a young woman and you will have sexual feelings. This is very normal. It is so much better than having sexual intercourse at your age because – while you have sexual feelings – your body is not yet ready for you to have sex. So have fun and enjoy exploring your body. It is not a bad habit. We all do it. Me too.

Sis Lebo



Do you love dancing?

If so, imagine being able to do it for a living. That's what Thoko Sidiya does. She is also a choreographer, meaning she works out the dance steps for herself and other dancers.

Early interest

Thoko was born in Soweto and now lives in the Vaal triangle, near Johannesburg. She first became interested in dance when her elder sister taught her all the Brenda Fassie moves. She took dance classes at the Soweto Dance Theatre, and then was accepted at another dance company, Moving into Dance. Her work has taken her all over the world.

Thoko Sidiya's most recent performance was a dance called "5 Hats" (see the pictures on the right). She worked together with her close friend, Sonia Radebe, to come up with a fun dance about the many different roles women prefer.

Humour

Thoko says they tried to look at the humorous side of things, and then to put that into their dance. "Imagine yourself ironing a shirt and now try and make a movement out of that," she says, moving around the room.

Thoko prepared for "5 Hats" as she does for all her performances, with daily dance classes.

My mother-in-law supports me to meet my challenges

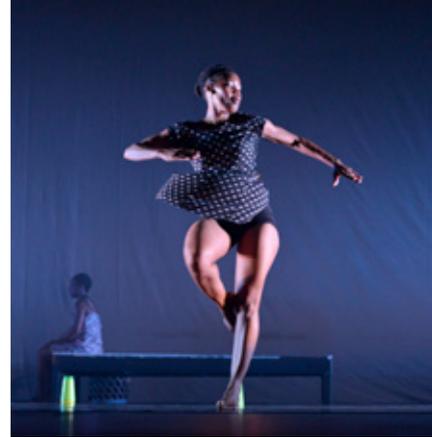
"It's the elders in my community that inspire me," Thoko says. In particular, her mother and her mother-in-law are her role models. "My mother-in-law supports me to meet my challenges."

Together with her husband who is also a dancer, Thoko has set up the Luthando Art Academy. Their aim is to train young girls and boys in dance. Thoko wants to learn more about business in order to grow her training Academy.



Thoko's tips for a career in dance:

- Watch and do dancing whenever possible. Make up your mind about what you want to do and then focus all your energy on that.
- Work everyday on what you want to become and don't give up.
- Find good role models – they exist!





FEEDING THE CHILDREN

Rise Clubs in Free State Province are making a difference in their community.

Who is involved?

Sixty Rise Club members in Thabong East, Welkom, come together every Thursday to provide nutritious meals for hungry children. They feed youngsters from child-headed households, struggling homes and children born to teenage mothers. Once a week children as young as toddlers line up to receive their free meals. The feeding scheme is run by three groups under the Rise Young Women's Club umbrella: Matebele, Future Leaders and Go-Getters.

Matebele group

Mpho Peter (21) is the chairperson of the Matebele group. She says the feeding scheme was first started by the Reabetswe Youth Centre in 2008. "I joined Reabetswe Youth Centre when I was 6 years old and in 2010 I got involved with the feeding scheme," she says. Mpho joined Rise Young Women's Club in 2015 and immediately formed the Matebele group of 20 young women. "Reabetswe (the founder of the Reabetswe Youth Centre) suggested that we take over the feeding scheme as part of our programme. She helped us with the transition and organisation."

Go-Getters group

Philliswa Mkaya (20) is the head of the Go-Getters group, which also has 20 members. She says money to support the kitchen is sourced from local businesses but support is drying up. "Currently Reabetswe is helping us to raise funds for the feeding scheme but we have applied for sponsorship from Rise Young Women's Club central office," says Philliswa.

Beneficiaries in the feeding scheme were identified prior to Rise Young Women's Club's involvement. Philliswa says they are disadvantaged children in the community ranging from four to thirteen years old.

Future Leaders group

Makgotso Maria Likhetho (27), chairperson of the Future Leaders group, says sponsorship is the biggest issue but running the scheme is also a challenge. "We have only been involved in the feeding scheme since February this year and learning about and refining some of the operations has been an enriching experience with its challenges" she explains. "We've learnt the importance of nutrition through running this feeding scheme and you can see a change in the children after they've had a meal."

All three chairpersons say they would love to run the feeding scheme more than once a week. "I wish we could feed the children every day because I grew up in the same situation as them and I understand what they are going through and the challenges they face," says Mpho Peter.

What can you do?

15-year old Rise Young Women's Club member, Nkeletseng Moloa, says her advice to other clubs looking to do something similar is to get organised and to identify problems in the community. "It doesn't need to be a feeding scheme; it could be related to education or even entrepreneurship. What is important is that you organise, plan and see through your execution; also get the community and local leaders involved."





Jennifer Brown, from Wits University, looked at how Grade 11 learners talk about sex. She found different standards for young women and men.

The Grade 11s we interviewed said that the boys in their class spoke freely about their sexual experiences but when the girls did it they were called “bitches”. One learner said that she feels like everyone looks at her because they know she is sexually active. Another said that only the guys in her class are allowed to talk about sex.

as women, we think about it but are not allowed to speak about it

So let's talk about sex. Let's talk about why, as women, we think about it but are not allowed to speak about it. Let's talk about if we want sex. Let's talk about what we know, and what we don't know about sex. Let's talk about what we feel before, during and after sex.

It is extremely important to abstain until we are ready to have sex. It is also very important to use condoms to prevent STIs, HIV and unwanted pregnancies. These factors are all necessary elements of having a healthy sex life. But those should not be the only conversations we have about sex.

Creating and exploring

Sex is about far more than preventing things from happening, it is about creating things. It is about understanding what is acceptable for girls and women in relation to sex. It is about creating that moment where all you can think about is the other person, a safe space where you are able to tell your partner what you want and what feels good.

Sex is about exploration of our own and our partner's bodies. It's about the feeling of intimacy and vulnerability that you get when you can't hide behind your clothes. It is about defining your sexuality on our own terms, rather than our partner's terms, and being unafraid to speak about the issues that matter.

creating a safe space where you are able to tell your partner what you want and what feels good

The more open and honest we are about our thoughts and feelings about sex, the more likely we are to have enjoyable and fulfilling sex. Because that's what it is about – enjoying ourselves! It is time we, as women, stopped being ashamed of our sexual feelings and started celebrating them.

Sex positivism

Across the world, a new movement is growing called 'sex positivism'. This is a campaign that encourages women to celebrate their bodies and their sexuality.

Next time you hear a classmate talk about her sex life, don't immediately think that she must be a slut. Instead think about it in a positive sense. If young women speak out about their sex lives – if we talk about what we do and don't like, what we are worried about and what we get excited about – then practicing safe sex also becomes easier.

If you can confidently tell your partner what turns you on then that confidence will help you to ask him to wear a condom, or to explain to him that you do not want sex, but would like to take things slowly.

Sex positivism isn't something that is going to happen overnight. Speaking openly about our sex life isn't always easy. But doing so will help us to understand more about our bodies and our feelings, and will result in more fulfilling relationships.

Breaking the Silence

Lebo Ramafoko is the head of the Soul City Institute, and a Rise TV Talk Show host. We asked her about herself, and about the new Rise show.



Q: Tell us about Lebo. Who is she when she is not at work?

A: I am a mother of 4 kids. My work and my family are the most important aspects of my life. I also have a close group of friends. I love eating out and my favorite food is any Asian food. I also love travelling.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Munsieville, a small township in Krugersdorp, Mogale City.

Q: Do you have brothers or sisters?

A: I am the eldest daughter, with 2 younger sisters.

Q: Who was 15-year-old Lebo and how has she changed?

I was an enthusiastic teenager who got involved in every activity I could, except sport. I loved debating and was very good at it. I also liked revising my school work by teaching others. I remember things I have taught someone else more easily.

Q: Give us a brief outline of your journey before joining Soul City?

A: After I matriculated I went to university to study Education. I completed my degree in 1993, just before our country's first democratic elections. I knew that I wanted to do something big to help build the new South Africa. I didn't think I should go and teach.

I wanted to do something big

My break came a week before I graduated: I saw an advertisement for a scriptwriting course. I applied and landed at a not-for-profit organisation called OLSET. I learnt how to develop radio scripts for education. I knew it! This was what I wanted to do and at the end of the course I refused to go. I volunteered at OLSET and after a week of nagging they employed me as a scriptwriter, writing stories for teaching English as a Second language in Grade 3.

I worked for another not-for-profit organization involved in education before I saw an advertisement for a job vacancy at Soul City. I jumped at the opportunity. It has been my most rewarding place of work ever!

Q: What has been a highlight of the Rise TV talk show for you?

A: I have loved helping young women to break the silence around a number of issues that affect them.

Q: Who or what has been the biggest influence on your life?

A: My dad. He was my best friend and number one supporter. He loved me unconditionally and that support was especially important when I could not love myself, or when I felt not worthy of love. He also role modelled for me what is important in parenting.

Q: What does freedom for girls and women look like to you?

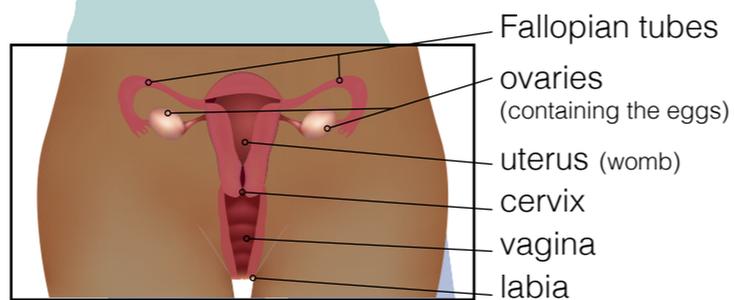
A: Freedom means that women can say what they feel and need without fear. It is when women have a supportive environment in which to achieve anything they want to. It is when women can wear whatever they want without fear of being judged, bullied or attacked. Freedom is when women can have the best sex in the world because they want to, with whoever they want to, and not get infected by disease or be labelled as a slut because they have sexual feelings.





Inside story

Here are the facts about menstruation.
Empower yourself. Know how your body works.



1. Lining grows

A lining grows in your uterus. The lining is made of blood and tissue. It is called the endometrium.

The endometrium prepares your uterus for a baby, in case you fall pregnant.



3. Menstruation

If the egg is not fertilised by sperm during sex then after two weeks the endometrium (lining) comes away.

The menstrual cycle is part of your reproductive health. Reproduction means being able to have a baby. Women are truly special this way.



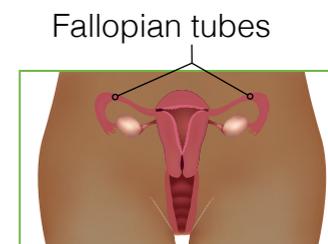
This lining and the egg then bleed away out of your vagina. This is menstruation – your monthly bleed.

2. Ovulation

The ovary lets go of the egg. The egg then travels into your uterus or womb, via the fallopian tube.

If you have sex then the egg may be fertilised by the male's sperm. If so, the fertilised egg will plant itself into the lining of your uterus and begin to grow into a baby.

If the egg is not fertilised, it passes straight out of the body but is so tiny no-one notices



Q: At what age should I start my periods?

A: Your period can start anywhere between the ages of 11 and 16 years old. It can take a couple of years for your periods to become regular.

Q: How many days should my period last?

A: Anything from 3 to 7 days long. If your period is longer than 7 days, see a nurse or doctor.

Q: How long is a normal menstrual cycle?

A: Between 21 and 35 days.

Q: How do I work out how long my menstrual cycle is?

A: The first day of your period is day 1 of your menstrual cycle. The last day of your cycle is the day before your period starts again.

The circles on the calendar, opposite, show when the woman had her period. How long was the woman's cycle in? January __ days; February __ days; March __ days; April __ days.

It's your turn to start your menstrual calendar! Use this calendar for the rest of 2015. Then get a calendar in 2016.

Q: How do I know if my bleeding is not normal?

A: See a nurse or doctor if you:

- have to change your sanitary pad or tampon after only 1 or 2 hours
- you have periods that last for more than 7 days
- you have blood clots bigger than the inside of your cupped palm. Smaller blood clots are normal. Clots are like thin jelly, and can be dark red in colour.

Q: How do I know if my cramps are normal?

A: You get menstrual cramps when the muscles of your uterus tighten to help loosen the lining (endometrium) from the wall of your uterus. If you suddenly start to have much more painful cramps than before, see a nurse or doctor.

Q: What can affect my menstrual cycle?

A: Your menstrual cycle will change if you:

- take the pill as a contraceptive – your period will become regular, and you might have lighter bleeding
- use a contraceptive injection – your periods could become irregular
- are pregnant – your periods will probably stop completely
- are extremely active in sports – your periods might stop for a long time.

Q&A

Questions and Answers about your period

If you have any questions about your cycle, ask our experts on the Mxit app. #menstruation



2015

Use this calendar to mark off with a tick the days when you have your period. Your calendar is part your body's reproductive health record. Take it with you if you need to see a nurse or doctor about your reproductive health.

JANUARY

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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FEBRUARY

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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31						

SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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27	28	29	30	31		



The story of my Period

Moleshiwe Manga was tricked by two people she trusted. She is telling her story to *Rise* in the hope that it will help other young women.

The naughty thing with boys

As a child, my friends told me that girls start bleeding when they begin doing the “naughty-thing-with-boys”. I learned that it was a shameful thing and that asking questions about it was not allowed.

So you can imagine that when I started my periods I was terrified of what my mother would say, even though I hadn’t done the “naughty-thing-with-boys”.

Luckily on that morning my young aunt was there to give me the whole talk of “... now you are grown, and sleeping with boys will get you pregnant!” Confused, I accepted the incomplete story about my periods.

I kept my questions to myself for fear of being suspected of knowing about the “naughty-thing-with-boys”. By the way, I didn’t even know what this naughty thing was.

Silence

My mother had no idea how to talk to me about the changes in my body. This was because of her own lack of knowledge, because of the shame and silence around sex, and because she herself had been a teenage mother. So she sought advice from our family doctor.

Misled

Together they decided to mislead me into coming to the doctor every 3 months, for what they explained to me was a new treatment for my asthma.

Soon after I started taking this “asthma injection”, my new menstrual cycle – which I hardly understood – became irregular. Sometimes it didn’t come at all; sometimes it came as continuous, heavy bleeding that lasted for weeks. I was too scared to ask anyone at home questions about

what could be happening to me. Some of my school friends were boys and my mother didn’t like that, so I didn’t want her to think I had been doing naughty things with my friends from school.

Girly things

One day, out of the blue, a female teacher called all the girls my age into a classroom and asked the boys to leave because she was going to talk to us about girly things. She was one of the nicer teachers, she liked me, I was one of her best learners. I decided this was my chance to get help about my cycle.

I will never forget the silence that fell

She gave us a brief description of menstruation and of the horrible diseases one gets if one doesn’t use condoms. Then she asked if there were any questions. I used all my courage to ask about my situation. I will never forget the silence that fell as 30-plus teenage girls hung on my words.

The teacher said that I must have done something wrong to cause that. Of course, everyone started laughing and snickering about me having done the naughty thing. I was more ashamed and embarrassed than I can say.

The next few days I pretended to be very sick and missed a whole week of school. This was because the teacher asked me to come and see her and I was too scared to find out what else she was going to accuse me of.

The truth

I decided that when I went for my next “asthma injection” I was going to ask the doctor about my periods and clear up this idea of me having done something naughty. When it was my turn to see our family

doctor, who was a woman, I was shocked to find a younger male doctor there instead. He explained to me that our regular doctor was on leave.

As he read, I could see his face changing

He pulled my file out and started reading it. As he read, I could see his face changing. He asked me how old I was. I told him I was 13. He calmly asked me why I was there and I told him I had come for my asthma injection. He explained to me what was written in my file, the kind of injection I was there for and had been getting for months.

Shocked

My mother and family doctor had put me on Depo Provera – a controversial hormonal contraceptive injection – because they couldn’t talk to me about my body. I was shocked, angry, upset and even more confused that I was before. I never went to my family doctor ever again and the experience damaged my relationship with my mother terribly.

I am building a relationship based on trust

Now I am a mother and have children of my own. They are still very young, with the oldest being 7 years old. But I intend to be more open with them about their bodies and life in general. I am building a relationship based on trust, so that they can feel comfortable enough to talk to me about anything.



There is always someone you can speak to

Dr Sindi is a family doctor who believes that girls are entitled to more information about their bodies.

Started menstruating

I was lucky when I started menstruating because I was prepared. I had read about it in a book that my mother kept under her bras and panties. This book was called "Every Woman" and it had taught me all I knew about women's health. I had seen an advert for o.b. tampons in a magazine and I had written off to get the free samples offered. I had also saved up enough money to buy myself a small box of tampons for The Day.

Never spoken to me

My mother had never spoken to me about any of these things, but I used to hear her gossiping about me to my granny. They were very worried that I had turned 12, had small breasts but had not started my periods. It was funny to listen to them because all they had to do was ask me ... but they never did.

Confusion

Many of you start your periods with no idea of what is happening to your bodies. Nobody has taken the time to explain the beauty of nature to you and how your body is preparing you for adulthood. There is so much confusion and I believe that it has to end.

There for you

We need to change the way we deal with issues of sex, sexual health and general women's health. There is so much that we have to deal with as young women and as we enter adulthood. And sometimes the people that you need to speak to the most just aren't there for you.

Just know that there is always someone you can speak to. If it is not a kind aunt, it could be a teacher at school, a stranger on Twitter like me, or even someone that you meet at the bus stop. Never be too shy to ask questions.

Club project: Always someone to ask

Do Club members have trusted adults to talk to about their bodies and their sexual selves? Do they have access to reliable information? If not, can you come up with some ideas to address this?

Suggestions to get you going:



Talk about it

Start with a discussion about whether you have someone to talk to who doesn't judge you.



Ask a professional

Invite someone to talk to your Club about sexual and reproductive health, and to answer questions. She could be available for private consultations afterwards.



Research it

Can you find other resources that can be of use, for example online forums, library books, or helpful organisations?

Good luck! Remember what Dr Sindi says: 'Never be shamed into not asking questions'. We have a right to understand and know about our bodies and to be proud of them.

Twitter:
@DocSindi

You can also leave questions for Dr Sindi or Sis Lebo on the Mxit app

What was your experience of Menstruation?

Sometimes it is hard for different generations to talk to each other about our bodies and sexual health. *Rise* editor Mapula Tloubatla asked mothers and daughters if they could talk about menstruation.

Mothers say:

Rochelle Behrends:

My mother never spoke to me about menstruation and my experience was frustrating because I felt like nobody understood me. When my daughter was sixteen I knew I

had to have "the talk" with her but somehow I did not know where to start. I was relieved when she came back from school one day saying they were teaching them about menstruation. I was happy that half the job had been done for me, which made it easier for me to speak to her.

Gugu Radebe:

My daughter is ten-years-old and when she was nine, I knew it was time for "the talk" because she was starting to grow pubic hair. I caught her while she was taking a bath and

it was my opportunity to ask her if she knows anything about periods and pads. Amazingly she already had an idea of what I was talking about. She was very embarrassed that her mother was talking to her about menstruation but I think it helped her to see that she can talk with me about anything.

Daughters say:

Roxy Themba:

I got my first period when I was thirteen. Luckily for me my sister had already seen hers, and so I had the chance to ask her my questions about menstruation. I wanted to know if it was painful.

It was not easy to talk to my mother about it because I felt like she would judge me.

Tholakele Sotyifa:

My primary school did brief us about menstruation. But it was still taboo because of the myth that you menstruate because you are naughty with boys. At thirteen my periods came in the

form of brown discharge I did not know who to talk to because even my friends were shy, ashamed and silent about the issue. My last resort was my mother. To my surprise she assured me that it was only normal. From then I started telling my friends about my experience and encouraged them to start talking freely about the changes in their bodies.

★ Club project

What was it like to first menstruate? If you ever have a girl child, how would you like to educate her about menstruation?

Can you talk about these and other questions in your Club? Talking together about our experiences as women can help us to feel proud of our bodies, not shamed by them. Sometimes it is easier to talk about these issues in small groups.

Sisonke Mom

Pregnant?
momconnect
is here to help!

***134*550#**

You'll get weekly messages to help with your pregnancy, and answers to all your questions. Join our community - it's completely free and we're here to support you.

It is my dream to register all pregnant women in the country - and help you have the healthiest possible pregnancy.

MINISTER OF HEALTH
AARON MOTSOALEDI

- 1 Ask a nurse to confirm you are pregnant.
- 2 We will help you register on a cellphone.
- 3 Answer a few simple questions about your pregnancy.
- 4 And you're registered - welcome to the family!

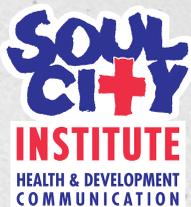
momconnect

health
Department of Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Rising Stars

Meet the sparkling stars from Phumula on the East Rand of Johannesburg.

#risingstars



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