

Netflix. Periods and Better Boys



STREAMING A NEW ERA OF
POSITIVE MASCULINITY EDUCATION

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A few months ago, the whole world, figuratively speaking, was brought to a standstill by Netflix miniseries that struck a nerve across generations and geographies. Adolescence was not just a show; it was a mirror. It tells a story that so many families, educators, and communities know all too well but rarely discuss what happens when boys are left to navigate life alone and the serious, sometimes tragic, mistakes that follow. Mistakes that are less about nature and far more about nurture, born of years of neglect, silence, and societal mishandling.

It's a phenomenon that cuts across borders and bank accounts. Because this isn't just a poor boy's burden or a rich boy's rebellion, it's a universal consequence of boys being raised in systems that failed the generation before them too.

For us at PDI, the Netflix series hit differently because we've seen what the alternative can look like.

In Kenya, PDI has been working boldly with boys and young men. For the past four years, we've led this work in three counties, Laikipia, Nyandarua, and Samburu, through our #BetterBoyz program, helping shift the conversation around masculinity and menstruation.

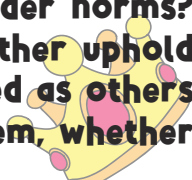
And now, something new is happening., we have added Nairobi to the list where we are talking to boys about periods. Yes, you read that right. But it's not just about menstrual health, it's about reshaping how boys see themselves and others. We're introducing conversations around positive and transformative masculinity, rooted in empathy, equality, and respect. It's about creating safe, informed spaces where boys can unlearn harmful beliefs and instead embrace values that reject violence, support reproductive health rights, and foster allyship rather than competition.

This isn't just about teaching boys what not to be. It's about helping them discover what they can be, kind, accountable, informed, and strong in ways that uplift, not harm.



Some hear our objectives—talking to boys about periods, empathy, and positive masculinity—and assume we are using boys to push a girls' agenda. That's an oversimplification of a complex issue. One that has festered long enough to produce generations of young men who don't know how to handle their own needs and hurt, so they mock what they associate with softness and femininity instead.

Adolescence exposes the harmful effects of toxic masculinity and the dangers of online radicalisation targeting young boys. But it doesn't begin online. It begins in the classroom, at home, and on the playground, where boys are expected to be harder, stronger, and stoic. Somewhere along the way, this unspoken rule morphs into a dangerous belief: that to be a "strong" boy, you must reject empathy, suppress your feelings, never ask for help, and be the first one to throw in that insensitive statement just for laughs. This is how emotional repression gets mistaken for resilience. And what happens when boys aren't taught to process emotions, seek help, or question harmful gender norms? They become the very ones who either uphold those norms or stand by unbothered as others do. They become part of the problem, whether loudly or silently.





This is what Better Boyz exists to prevent and guide our boys through.

And to be clear, for our sessions we don't just begin with menstruation. We begin by talking to boys about their own bodies—because we have learnt that most of them have never had that opportunity. Using Teen Times comic books and anatomical charts of the male reproductive system, we create space for the puberty conversation they never receive at home. This, too, is part of that unspoken masculinity code. “you're a man, figure it out on your own.” And what we found from our sessions confirmed just how damaging that silence can be.

For our most recent sessions, the boys had so many questions—and just as many misconceptions, most of them picked up from their peers. We let them leaf through the comics, study the diagrams, talk freely about what they thought they knew, and share their questions without fear of shame or judgement. Then, patiently, we walked them through the facts. We clarified what was misunderstood, explained how the male reproductive system actually works, and—critically—reassured them that growing up and feeling uncertain, confused, or even awkward is a normal part of puberty. For them—and for girls too.

What stood out to us was how quickly most conversations, even those from boys who claimed to have “received the talk,” defaulted to sex. The whole essence of a puberty talk, understanding your body, your emotions, and how to grow into yourself with confidence, had been skipped. In its place was a fragmented script of bravado, misinformation, and shame. So, when we eventually got to the menstrual health portion of the conversation, it was not a standalone topic. It was part of a wider journey of helping boys understand that their emotions matter, their questions are valid, and their role in society includes empathy, not exclusion.



GROWTH

At Millennium Global International School, a boy stared at a menstrual cup for the first time, stunned.

"I never knew there were different types of pads... or that girls could use a cup."

Across all four schools, similar reactions surfaced. Curiosity. Surprise. And above all, thoughtful questions:

"Why do people bully girls about smell?"

"Can a girl be in pain for all her period days?"

"Is it true girls can't go to school during their period?"

These weren't signs of ignorance; they were signs of exclusion. Boys aren't unwilling to understand. They've just never been invited to care. Until now.

We didn't stop at biology. We introduced them to the idea that masculinity doesn't have to mean dominance or emotional shutdown. That being informed and caring is not unmanly; it's responsible. They learnt how language, jokes, or silence can reinforce stigma, or dismantle it. They reflected on how to offer support when a girl is experiencing pain, how to challenge period-shaming among peers, and how to normalise conversations they've long been told are "not for them."

Some of their words stay with me:

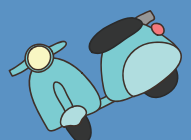
"Now I understand why my sister is sometimes moody."

"Oh my gosh, periods sound rough."

These might sound small. But in a world that teaches boys to detach, dismiss, or dominate, this kind of emotional honesty is revolutionary.



The first step to raising better men is to let boys feel. Feel deeply, speak honestly, and ask boldly—without fear that their softness makes them any less strong.



What Adolescence shows, Jamie's emotional shutdown, his inability to cry, connect, or ask for help, is what we're actively working against. Better Boyz builds emotional literacy. We teach boys to name emotions without shame, resolve conflict without violence, and express frustration without harm. We also confront the toxic influences of the online "manosphere," where misogyny is disguised as strength and emotional repression is glorified as maturity. Through honest dialogue, we aim to help boys resist these dangerous narratives.

And to complement our first-ever Nairobi Better boyz sessions, we closed our MHM2025 campaign in Laikipia, where over 500 girls gathered at Inoro Girls Secondary School for a collaborative event led by ourselves and Drawing Dreams Initiative. What made it different was that the boys had gone first. Male facilitators, some alumni of our initial Better Boyz cohorts, stood alongside their female colleagues, affirming that menstrual health is not just a girl's issue. It is a human issue. Their presence transformed the energy of the space. That shift? That's what allyship looks like.



Self-talk

And for the parents watching this shift at home, the feedback was just as telling. One mother from Millennium Global International School shared with us:

HEALTHY



"This was such a brilliant and important topic for the kids. It's one of those things they need to understand early, and I really appreciate the school for making this happen. The hilarious part, when my boy came home, I asked, "How was school?" He was like... Mum. I'm traumatised. Then he asked, "You guys go through all that?" and told me everything they were taught. I tried to keep a straight face, but honestly, I was cracking up inside. The way he said it, with so much concern and disbelief, I could tell the message really landed. I normally have such talks with him, but I've never gone that deep. Kudos team."

COMMUNICATION

Better Boyz is about menstruation, yes, but not only that. It's about power, gender, empathy, and the kind of men we raise. It's about preventing the silence that has been felt for so long. We reached 172 boys this May. A drop in the ocean. But if each one grows into a man who uplifts girls, questions toxic norms, and builds community instead of harming it, we won't just have better boys, we'll have a better world.



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