



## Creating the Period Emoji

Not surprisingly, the period emoji is easily our favorite. But how it came to be is complicated. We talked to the women who made it happen.

**Narration:** Welcome to Feeling My Flo...a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her.

So I bet you have a favorite emoji. Mine is the hands clapping emoji. It's the best way to emphasize a point or hype up a friend when they need some encouragement.

I also love the crying laughing emoji and the blowing kisses emoji. They can be used for, like, almost anything.

But it wasn't until recently that I started using a certain emoji that the Feeling My Flo team is kind of obsessed with.

This emoji is red and shaped like a teardrop. It's the period emoji!

The period emoji was not among the early ones, like the winking face or the poop emoji. It was brought into this world by a whole team of women. And it wasn't easy.

**Nikki Giant:** So I'm Nikki Giant. I'm the UK girl's rights strategy and development manager here at Plan International UK. Um, pronoun is she, her.

**Narration:** Nikki talked to our producer Mia from her office in London.

Plan International UK is a girls' rights organization. That means they try to make life better for girls all over the United Kingdom — that's England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

You'd think that someone who works on girls' rights would already talk about periods all the time. But that wasn't the case for Nikki.

**Nikki:** Um, it's not something that I ever grew up talking about. It's definitely a subject that was just...something that, I guess, you had to endure, not really particularly discuss.

**Narration:** But that all changed in 2016. That's when Plan UK decided to launch an interview project to figure out what kinds of challenges girls in the UK were facing.

After talking to a lot of girls...they realized periods were at the top of the list.

**Nikki:** One young woman talked about how, um, she was educated about having a period but wasn't taught that it would come every month. So when she had her first period, obviously it was a bit traumatic or a bit exciting for her or whatever the, the emotion was. And then she thought that was it. She was done. And then of course it happened every month.

**Narration:** Like that one girl in the study, a lot of girls in the UK said that they had received no education at all about their periods. They had no idea what was happening to them when they started their periods. And many of them felt ashamed of their periods.

So Nikki and her colleagues started thinking about how they could fight against some of those negative feelings about menstruation.

**Nikki:** We started to think in more creative ways about 'How can we change this conversation? How can we get rid of some of this shame and stigma?' Emojis are the language of young people these days. And more and more so the, the language of everybody, not just young people. And maybe that's a way for us to kind of shift the conversation a little for people to be able to talk about periods in a visual way and to kind of normalize it through a language, which I guess emojis really is becoming, um, a language that, that people are using in their everyday interactions and communications.

**Narration:** Plan UK International surveyed 55,000 people across the United Kingdom and asked them what a period emoji should look like.

**Sabrina Maestri:** It was really, really exciting to see...there was so much interest from people on social media, uh, to see the people wanted a period emoji.

**Narration:** That's Sabrina Maestri. Her pronouns are she and her. And she's the digital designer for Plan UK International.

That means she was in charge of coming up with the design for the period emoji.

After the survey, Sabrina and the team came up with five designs. And people got to vote for their favorite.

The first design was a calendar icon with three blood drops on it.

**Sabrina:** That emoji was basically supposed to represent..the menstrual cycle and also how...sometimes people mark on the calendar where the period comes to keep track of it.

The second idea was...the uterus...which unfortunately was the least favorite [Laughs.]

The third idea was...the period pad...so I looked at different...menstruation product and...it was important to have a product that would be widely used globally.

And then last one. [Laughs.] I just kind of realized that we didn't have any emoji that could be used to represent emotions. So the idea was to use the blood drop with a face so that people could use it to represent they were happy or maybe a little bit in...in pain sometimes as part of menstruation.

**Narration:** Out of the five, the public's favorite was a pair of pants stained with a drop of blood.

**Sabrina:** I guess I wanted to represent, like, those...kind of menstruation accidents that sometimes you have. I just wanted to kind of have like a...icon of, of a pair of pants and then have like a couple of drops, uh, blood drops on the pants.

**Narration:** Sabrina got her first period when she was 11 years old.

**Sabrina:** I guess the first thought was, 'Oh, I'm not going to be able to do all the things I was — I'm supposed to do, because I felt, like, it in a way could limit...myself. It was a little bit embarrassing, I have to say. But at the same time, I appreciate it now. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** Years later, as an adult working on the period emoji project, Sabrina started talking to her thirteen-year-old son about menstruation.

**Sabrina:** The period emoji was one of the main topics [Laughs.] We discussed it...in the house. It was, uh, a good way to talk about menstruation to a teenage boy. I guess his...his understanding...maybe wasn't...quite broad and...yeah, he was a bit embarrassed, I have to say, at the beginning.

But he was interested in...the process of the fact that you could, uh, you could actually have an emoji to represent anything. And, uh, even himself was surprised that there wasn't a period emoji. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** It turns out that when an emoji is created, [it has to be approved by a special group called the Unicode Consortium](#). (I know, it sounds like something to do with unicorns, but it's not...which is so disappointing.)

Turns out, anyone can propose a new emoji. But they have to prove that there are good reasons to create the emoji, and that people would actually benefit from having it.

So when Plan UK International sent the period pants emoji to the Consortium, they worked really hard to convince them it mattered.

**Sabrina:** The submission was unsuccessful. It was obviously a great disappointment. Unfortunately, Unicode didn't really provide any, uh, any details.

**Narration:** The team didn't give up. They went back to the drawing board and thought...and drew...and thought some more. And the final design they came up with...was a simple red drop...the one you can find on your phone now.

**Nikki:** I went to an event last week and somebody was telling me, 'Did you know there's a new period emoji?' That is awesome. Um, and, and to feel also that this is something that is not owned by Plan. It might have been developed by us and might've been pushed by us, but actually now it's owned by everybody and people using it in their own ways that that is so exciting to me.

**Narration:** That was Nikki. Here's Sabrina.

**Sabrina:** Finally, we all have it. How do I describe it? It's almost like when you finally can add, like, a new word in the dictionary and you're kind of able to use, like, a full sentence. I just feel like up before the period emoji, it was almost like there was something missing and, uh, it was just...wasn't complete.

**Narration:** So there you have it: how the period emoji came to be. All thanks to Plan International UK!

I'm going to text the emoji to the team to thank them for this awesome episode.

Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when you're choosing just the right emoji to express how you feel.

If you don't have a phone, you can check out what the period emoji looks like on our website.

Feeling My Flo is a production of Lantigua Williams & Co. We're here to inform, entertain, and empower. Ask your parents or an adult if you can visit us at [feelingmyflo.com](http://feelingmyflo.com) or connect with us on social media, at [flo\\_pod](#) on Twitter and [Instagram](#).

This episode was produced by Mia Warren. She's our executive producer. It was mixed by Kojin Tashiro. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. I'm Kamilah Kashanie.



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