

Four Stages of Body Literacy for Girls



Becoming "body literate" is a process that takes time! For those of us who use Natural Family Planning, the vast majority of what we learned about our bodies and fertility came at a fast and frenzied pace as we prepared for marriage. For those who don't use NFP, this knowledge may never be provided at all! Here at Pearl and Thistle, I advocate for and provide an educational model which honors the natural pace at which body literacy can unfold in the life of a growing girl, keeping in mind that some stages may be combined and may be spaced out differently. I offer this to you as a way to think about how you might like to approach body literacy conversations within your own family and community!

Visit www.pearlandthistle.com to learn more about the programs and resources I offer for all Four Stages



STAGE 1: CYCLE AWARENESS

Girls learn about anatomy and the process of the menstrual cycle including hormones, phases, period bleeds, and how this cycle impacts our daily lives as women. They are taught that cycles are a means to eventually carry pregnancy, but the practical aspects of hygiene, nutrition, and self-care are emphasized.

STAGE 2: CYCLE TRACKING

Building on their knowledge, girls can be invited to track certain aspects of their cycles according to their personal comfort and preferences. Within the first few years of cycling, girls can track basic patterns of bleeds and cervical fluid alongside health and lifestyle habits. A few years later, when cycles are more regular, girls could begin looking specifically for ovulation as a sign of health.



STAGE 3: FERTILITY AWARENESS

Cycle tracking is now extended to include the idea of a "fertile window." In addition to looking for ovulation simply for health, women can track signs as they relate to potential fertility. Women would need to learn about how to calculate a fertile window, and might want to explore different method-specific approaches to find one that is comfortable for her.



STAGE 4: FAMILY PLANNING

Couples use what they know about shared fertility to navigate family planning intentions together. This requires learning and following the rules of particular Natural Family Planning (Fertility Awareness Based) Method, which is usually done with a qualified instructor.

