Female genital mutilation (FGM)

(Information taken from NSPCC - https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation-fgm)

Female genital mutilation is illegal. We've got advice to help you keep children and young people safe.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is illegal. We're here to support you and have advice to help you keep children and young people safe from FGM.

What is female genital mutilation (FGM)?

FGM is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting', but has many other names.

emale genital mutilation (FGM) be called a different name. Some common names for FGM include:

- female circumcision
- cutting
- sunna
- gudniin
- halalays
- tahur
- megrez
- khitan.

The National FGM Centre also has a list of traditional terms (PDF) that you might find helpful.

You might have heard some FGM terms that you're not familiar with, including:

- **'Cutter'**
  A 'cutter' is somebody who carries out FGM. They might use things like knives, scalpels, scissors, glass or razor blades to carry out the procedure.
- **'Cutting season'**
  This refers to the summer months – often July, August and September – when many girls are on break from school. This is often the period when girls have time to undergo FGM. Girls might be flown abroad during this time, so it's important to be aware of this risk.

28 Too Many, a charity working to end FGM in Africa, has a list of other FGM-related terms.

FGM is a form of child abuse. It's dangerous and a criminal offence in the UK. We know:

- there are no medical reasons to carry out FGM

- it's often performed by someone with no medical training, using instruments such as knives, scalpels, scissors, glass or razor blades
- children are rarely given anaesthetic or antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained
- it's used to control female sexuality and can cause long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

FGM can happen at different times in a girl or woman's life, including:

- when a baby is new-born
- during childhood or as a teenager
- just before marriage
- during pregnancy.

Signs of FGM

A child who's at risk of FGM might ask you for help. But some children might not know what's going to happen to them. So it's important to be aware of the signs.

- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
- A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.
- A girl struggles to keep up in school.
- A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home.

Signs FGM may have taken place:

- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- Acting differently after an absence from school or college.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed.

We're here to support you, no matter your worry. Call us on 0808 800 5000, email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our online form.

If a child reveals abuse

A child who has faced, or is worried about FGM, might not realise what's happening is wrong. And they might even blame themselves. If a child talks to you about FGM it's important to:

- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- report what the child has told you as soon as possible.

Report abuse

Call us on 0808 800 5000, email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our online form.

Effects of FGM

There are no health benefits to FGM. It can cause serious harm, including:

- severe and/or constant pain
- infections, such as tetanus, HIV and hepatitis B and C
- pain or difficulty having sex
- infertility
- bleeding, cysts and abscesses
- difficulties urinating or incontinence
- organ damage
- problems during pregnancy and childbirth, which can be life-threatening for the mother and baby
- mental health problems, such as depression, flashbacks and self-harm
- death from blood loss or infections.

Why FGM happens

FGM is carried out for a number of cultural, religious and social reasons. Some families and communities believe that FGM will benefit the girl in some way, such as preparing them for marriage or childbirth.

But FGM is a harmful practice that isn't required by any religion and there are no health benefits of FGM.

Who's at risk

Girls living in communities that practise FGM are most at risk. It can happen in the UK or abroad.
In the UK, the Home Office has identified girls and women from certain communities as being more at risk:

- Somali
- Kenyan
- Ethiopian
- Sierra Leonean
- Sudanese
- Egyptian
- Nigerian
- Eritrean
- Yemeni
- Kurdish
- Indonesian.

Children are also at a higher risk of FGM if it's already happened to their mother, sister or another member of their family.

Support

For parents

If you're worried a child is at risk of or has already had FGM, call our free, anonymous dedicated FGM helpline on 0800 028 3550 or email fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk.

FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development) is an African-led women's rights organisation who can offer guidance on emergency support and advice for those affected by FGM.

We're here to support you, no matter your worry. Call us on 0808 800 5000, email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our online form.

For children and young people

FORWARD Youth works to ensure the safety, well-being and dignity of girls facing FGM. The have helpful advice on FGM, as well as support for children and young people.

How Childline can help

Children and young people can get support from Childline if they're worried about or have experienced FGM. Childline has lots of helpful advice on FGM, including how to get help and fears about speaking up. Calls to 0800 1111 are free and confidential. Children can also contact Childline online.