Risk factors for Female Genital Mutilation
Introduction

It has been widely reported FGM is a deeply embedded social norm, practised by families for a variety of complex reasons. Although FGM is practised by secular communities, it is most often claimed to be carried out in accordance with religious beliefs. However, FGM predates Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and the Bible, Koran, Torah and other religious texts do not advocate or justify FGM.

FGM is known by a wide variety of names, including ‘cutting’, ‘female genital cutting’, ‘circumcision’ or ‘initiation’. The terms ‘FGM’ or ‘cut’ are increasingly used at a community level, although they are not always understood by individuals in practising communities because they are English terms.

Risk factors

The most important factor to consider when thinking about the risk of FGM is whether the girl’s family has a history of practising FGM and whether it is known to be practised in her community or country of origin. It is believed that FGM may happen to girls in the UK as well as overseas. Girls of school age who are subjected to FGM overseas are likely to be taken abroad, often to the family’s country of origin, at the start of the school holidays, especially in the summer, so there is enough time for her to recover before the start of school.

Other potential risk factors include:

- a girl confides to a teacher or other member of school staff that she is to have a ‘special procedure’ or to attend a special occasion to ‘become a woman’
- a girl talks about a long holiday to her country of origin or another country where the practice is prevalent
- parents state that they or a relative will take the girl out of the country for a prolonged period
- a girl requests help from a teacher or another adult because she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk of FGM
- a girl from a practising community is withdrawn from Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education or its equivalent
- a girl is unexpectedly absent from school
- a female child has an older sibling or cousin who has undergone FGM
- a female child’s parent comes from a community known to practise FGM
- the family indicate that there are strong levels of influence held by elders and/or elders are involved in bringing up female children
- a woman/family believe FGM is integral to cultural or religious identity
- a girl/family has a limited level of integration within UK community
- parents have limited access to information about FGM and do not know about the harmful effects of FGM or UK law
• a parent or family member expresses concern that FGM may be carried out on the girl
• a family is not engaging with professionals (health, education or other)
• a family is already known to social care in relation to other safeguarding issues
• a girl talks about FGM in conversation; for example, a girl may tell other children about it
• a girl has attended a travel clinic or equivalent for vaccinations/anti-malarials.

Please note:

This is not an exhaustive list of indicators and they should be considered in the light of other behavioural factors and what you already know about the child or young person. However, if any of these indicators are identified, you should discuss them with your safeguarding lead because professionals are subject to a mandatory reporting duty which we will cover later in the programme.

Roles and responsibilities

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility so everyone who comes into contact with a girl affected by FGM has a role to play.


What should you do?

If a girl discloses that she has undergone FGM or is concerned that she may be at risk of FGM, teachers and other school staff should listen very carefully and ask questions for clarification only.

The girl should be reassured that she is right to tell and that you will need to pass the information on to get her the help she needs.

After the conversation, you should make a record of what was factually said and immediately report it to your school’s designated safeguarding lead.

If you do not receive a disclosure but you are concerned that a girl may be at risk of FGM (given the risk factors we have covered and others), again you should record your concerns and the reasons for them and speak to your designated safeguarding lead immediately. They will have had extra training on FGM and be able to offer advice and support, including taking the matter up with children’s social care and/or the police.

Your school’s safeguarding policy and procedures should cover all types of harm, including FGM, so you should ensure you are familiar with it and take the actions it details. FGM is child abuse and like any other form of abuse you should not assume that someone else will pass on information that may be critical to keeping a child safe.
This information has been taken from our online training course, Female Genital Mutilation Awareness, which has been accredited by the Police ‘Secured by Design’ service and meets National Police Approved Standards.

Female Genital Mutilation Awareness is included in both EduCare for Education® and EduCare for Health®, our online e-Learning services which combine multiple essential Safeguarding and Duty of Care training courses together with a robust reporting su