

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in early years

**In the UK it is estimated that around 137,000 women have undergone FGM and some 60,000 girls under 15 years old are at risk (Gov figures, September 2021).**

Our mini-guide below will help you understand about FGM and what you need to do if you discover one of your nursery children has undergone an FGM procedure. It will cover:

- What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?
- Why does it happen?
- What should you do if you discover a girl at your nursery has undergone an FGM procedure?
- More support.

### What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?

FGM is a collective term for procedures that include the removal or partial removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical purposes. It is sometimes referred to as 'cutting', 'initiation' or 'female circumcision' and has been illegal in the UK since 1985. It is extremely painful and can have serious ongoing physical and emotional health consequences. It is considered to be a form of child abuse under the areas of physical abuse and emotional abuse.

Procedures are usually carried out by a female member of a girl's family or extended family using a sharp implement, e.g. glass, knife or scissors; sometimes the same implement is used on more than one girl at the same time. It's sometimes carried out on a girl without the mother's consent or knowledge too.

### Why does it happen?

FGM isn't linked to any religious expectations, it is a culture-specific practice and social norm practiced by families for a number of reasons, most often thought to be essential for a girl to become a 'proper woman' and to be 'marriageable'. There are of course tensions for families living in the UK that are from countries where FGM is common practice and perceived as a part of being female.

Some may justify Female Genital Mutilation for:

- Tradition
- Family honour
- Hygiene
- Fear of exclusion from their communities.

While respect for family culture and tradition is important, cultural considerations and sensitivities should not override the professional need to take action to protect a child in your setting.

## **What should you do if you discover a girl at your nursery has undergone an FGM procedure?**

It is essential that a child protection referral is made in accordance with your local authority procedures. If the situation is an emergency, you should of course contact the police immediately.

If you suspect the FGM procedure has been performed on a girl under 18 years old, or if she discloses FGM has been carried out, the legislation requires you to report it. Remember this could be a child at your nursery but also a member of staff.

Use the following guidelines to support you:

- Report the incident to the police force in the area in which the girl lives
- Use the non-emergency 101 telephone number (but in the case of an emergency ring 999)
- Be ready to explain that you are making a report under the FGM mandatory reporting duty
- Make a child protection referral following your usual referral process as required by your nation's guidance
- As with any other child protection referral, keep accurate and comprehensive records throughout the process
- If the reporting is not carried out by your setting's designated safeguarding lead you should ensure that they are kept up-to-date with reports, records and advice from the police or children's services.

## **Find out more**

Contact our training team for more child protection and safeguarding information on 01484 407070 or email [training@ndna.org.uk](mailto:training@ndna.org.uk)