



Pan Bedfordshire One minute guide Female Genital Mutilation

What is Female Genital Mutilation?

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, the National FGM Centre also has a [list of traditional terms](#). It is a form of child abuse, it is dangerous, illegal and a criminal offence in the UK. It is often performed by someone with no medical training, using instruments such as knives, scalpels, scissors, glass or razor blades. Victims are rarely given anaesthetic or antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained. FGM can happen at different times in a girl/woman's life, including; when a baby is new-born - during childhood or as a teenager - just before marriage - during pregnancy. FGM is prevalent in a number of African countries and areas of the Middle and Far East, but it is increasingly practiced in the U.K. in communities with larger populations of first-generation immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

For more details of the **four** major types of FGM go to [Pan Bedfordshire Inter-agency Child protection Female Genital Mutilation practice guidelines](#)

FGM is deeply embedded in some communities and is performed for cultural and social reasons. It is usually carried out on girls before they reach puberty, but in some cases it is performed on new-born infants or on women before marriage or pregnancy. It is often justified by the belief that it is beneficial for the girl or woman, but FGM is an extremely harmful practice which violates basic human rights. The most significant risk factor for girls/young women is coming from a community where FGM is known to be practised and/or where a mother, sister or other female family member has been subjected to FGM.

Short term effects include; severe pain, shock, bleeding, wound infections, inability to urinate, damage to other organs & possibly death. **Long-term consequences** include: vaginal & pelvic infections; menstrual problems; difficulties passing urine & persistent urine infections; kidney damage & possible failure; cysts & abscesses; infertility, complications during pregnancy & childbirth; the need for later surgery. Girls and women who have been subjected to FGM may also psychological harm, including depression, anxiety, flashbacks, substance misuse and/or self-harm.

What does the law say about FGM?

FGM is illegal in the UK and has been a criminal offence since 1985. The **Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003** strengthened existing law to make it an offence to arrange for a child to be taken abroad for FGM, and for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to abet, counsel, procure or undertake FGM abroad, even in countries where the practice is legal. The **Serious Crime Act 2015** extends this protection to girls under the age of 18 who are 'habitually resident' (or on short temporary stays) such as students and refugees. The Serious Crime Act also creates a new offence of failing to protect a girl from FGM. If an offence of FGM is committed against a girl under the age of 16, each person who is responsible for the girl at the time the FGM occurred will be liable under this new offence where the maximum penalty is seven years imprisonment, a fine, or both. A 'responsible' person will have [parental responsibility](#) with the girl and frequent contact. The 2015 Act also enables the high court or family courts to make a [FGM Protection Order](#) for individuals who are victims or at risk of FGM (similar to forced marriage protection orders. Victims or those at risk, or relevant third parties (including local authorities) can apply for the orders which set restrictions to protect an individual.

Signs FGM might happen

- 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 might 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.

What should practitioners do?

Where a person is in a regulated profession (i.e. a teacher, social worker or healthcare professional) and in the course of their work they believe that that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under 18 years, she says she has had FGM or there are signs which appear to show she has had FGM then the Police **must** be notified on 101 as soon as possible. Longer timeframes are allowed under exceptional circumstances but always discuss with your safeguarding lead/manager. If the girl is at **immediate risk of having FGM dial 999 and make an urgent referral to the local Children's Services** details below.

The duty applies when the practitioner is either informed by the girl or where the practitioner has observed physical signs. Failing to comply with the duty will be dealt with through existing disciplinary measures which may include referral to the relevant professional regulator.

- Practitioners, particularly those working in schools and in health services should be aware of and consider potential indicators that FGM may be, or has already taken place, e.g.
 - Preparations for the child to take a long holiday - arranging vaccinations or planning an absence from school;
 - A change in the child's behaviour after a prolonged absence from school, including; being withdrawn; crying or being away from class for long periods; and/ or
 - The child has bladder or menstrual problems, and/ or may have difficulty walking, sitting or standing.

Key contacts and more information

To make a referral contact your local Children's Services;
[Bedford Borough](#) – 01234 718700
[Central Bedfordshire](#) – 0300 300 8585
[Luton](#) - 01582 537653
Out of office hours Emergency Duty Team: 0300 300 8123

[Luton All Women's Centre \(LAWC\)](#) supports women and girls living in Luton and Bedfordshire and offering a wide-range of advisory, information, practical and holistic support services in respect of issues such as harmful practices, domestic abuse/violence and sexual exploitation.

[Forward UK](#) (Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development).

You can look at [Petals](#)—an app to help protect young girls and women from FGM.

[FGM Statutory Guidance 2018 \(Updated July 2020\)](#)
Schools should read the updated [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020](#).

[HALO](#) The Halo Project Charity is a national project that will support victims of honour-based violence, forced marriages and FGM by providing appropriate advice and support to victims. We will also work with key partners to provide required interventions and advice necessary for the protection and safety of victims.

[Pan Bedfordshire Inter-agency Child protection Female Genital Mutilation practice guidelines](#)

