

# Female genital mutilation (FGM)

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## What do I need to know about FGM?

- FGM is deliberate cutting, injury or change to female genitals, with no medical reason
  - It's **illegal** in the UK, including if a girl is taken abroad for it, and is a form of child abuse
  - It happens for cultural, religious and social reasons
  - It's a form of honour-based abuse, where crimes are committed to protect or defend the honour of the family or community
  - Families might believe it's beneficial to a girl or in her best interests, which can mean a girl is less likely to raise concerns or talk about it
  - It can cause **long-term physical problems** (e.g., constant pain, repeated infections leading to infertility, and problems with sex, labour and childbirth) and **problems with mental health**
  - Girls are more at risk in the summer holidays, as this gives them time to "heal" before going back to school
  - It most commonly happens between the ages of 5 and 9
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## Your duty to report FGM

**Teachers have a statutory duty** to report known cases of FGM on girls under 18 to the police. It's not enough to tell the DSL – you **must report it yourself**. You should make the report by the end of the next working day, and must make it within 1 month.

This duty applies if:

- A girl discloses to you that FGM has been carried out on her (if someone else tells you about FGM happening to a girl, the duty doesn't apply, but you must still report it to the DSL)
- You see visual signs

As a teacher, you might see signs if you're helping a young child in the toilet or changing. If this happens, make a report, but don't further examine the child yourself.

**Even if you're not a teacher, you still have a duty to report it to the DSL as part of your safeguarding responsibilities.**

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## What to look for

### Signs that a girl might be at risk of FGM:

- She comes from a family with a history of FGM or from a community known to practice FGM (there are FGM-practising communities in many parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia)

- › She or her family have a limited level of integration within UK community
- › Her family is not engaging with professionals or is already known to social care
- › She is from an FGM-practising community and her family withdraws her from personal, social, health and economic education or relationships and sex education
- › You hear references to FGM in conversation
- › She confides she is going to have a special procedure or attend a special occasion to become a woman, or her friends share something similar
- › She talks about a long holiday to a country where FGM is prevalent, or her parents talk about taking her out of the country for a long period
- › She is unexpectedly absent from school

#### Signs that a girl may have undergone FGM – she:

- › Asks for help
- › Confides that FGM has taken place – this could be the girl or a family member
- › Has difficulty walking, sitting or standing, or looks uncomfortable
- › Finds it hard to sit still for long periods of time, and this wasn't a problem previously
- › Has been absent from school or college repeatedly or for a prolonged period of time
- › Is withdrawn or depressed, there's significant change in her behaviour, or she has other increased emotional and psychological needs
- › Talks about pain or discomfort between her legs
- › Spends longer than normal in the bathroom or toilet
- › Avoids PE and exercise
- › Has frequent urinary, menstrual or stomach problems

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## What to do

If you have concerns that FGM has happened or might happen, speak to the DSL (or deputy) as soon as possible, and make a written record. **Don't** examine a pupil yourself.

### Known cases of FGM

Teachers must personally report known cases to the police and tell the DSL (or deputy).

If you're not a teacher, report it to the DSL (or deputy) as soon as possible, and make a written record.

To make a report to the police, call 101, and be ready to give the call handler the information on page 7 of this document: <https://bit.ly/39gW9GZ>

You'll be given a reference number for the call – make sure you keep a note of this.