

FGM Factsheet

What is FGM

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

Other names for FGM

You might have heard female 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.

FGM Terms- What they mean

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

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 it might have happened

- 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.

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.

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 is 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.

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](tel:08000283550) or email fgm.help@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.

For children and young people

FORWARD Youth works to ensure the safety, well-being and dignity of girls facing FGM. They 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](tel:08001111) are free and confidential. Children can also contact [Childline online](#)

What can I do as a tutor/trainer assessor?

As a professional working with young people at FIT UK, you may have opportunities to identify issues early so it is important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a young person is being abused and to share this information by completing the safeguarding disclosure form and alerting your safeguarding lead.

Other steps you can take to help protect young people include:

- Staying alert to changes in behaviour
- Ensuring you know who the safeguarding lead is and that you are aware of the safeguarding disclosure process to follow if you have concerns about a young person.
- **Contact the FGM helpline** on [0800 028 3550](tel:08000283550) or by emailing fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk.
- **Apply for an FGM protection order.** Anyone can [apply on Gov.uk](#) if they are concerned that someone is at risk of FGM.
- **Contact your local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.
- **Contact the police.**
- Share this factsheet