

Safeguarding

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)



What is it?

“Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there’s no medical reason for this to be done.” NHS Choices

There are many preconceptions surrounding FGM, one of which being that it is a religious rite of passage. This is in fact incorrect and can cause uncertainty for those with responsibility for safeguarding children. Some believe that the procedure itself is a matter of family honour, or that it preserves the girl’s chastity or is a matter of cleanliness. What we can be sure of, is that there is NO justification for FGM and that it is against the law. As practitioners we should be alert to signs and indicators of FGM and how we can safeguard girls from this form of abuse.

Who does it affect?

FGM is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, most commonly before puberty starts. It is illegal in the UK and is child abuse. The procedure is most commonly carried out by another female and can cause serious harm to the individual, with lasting physical and emotional implications.

What are the possible signs and indicators?

- An older female relative has come to stay.
- A child confides about a special procedure that has or is going to take place.
- A girl is going away on holiday to her country of origin at the beginning of the summer.
- You become aware of physical changes when supporting with toileting/changing. Toileting itself may become difficult for the child.
- Changes in the child's behaviour.
- Unexpected, repeated or prolonged absence.
- The child experiencing difficulties standing, sitting or walking

Task

Taking into consideration your safeguarding policies and procedures, consider what steps you would be required take should you suspect that there is FGM being planned or that it has already taken place?

Consider what some of the obstacles may be and explore solutions as to how they can be overcome. For example, being anxious to challenge due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

Should you identify any gaps in your knowledge or practice, be sure to action plan any next steps to support improvements that are required.

REMEMBER: FGM is child abuse, and it is our responsibility to safeguard all children.