

Flattening and Breast Ironing? Safeguarding Newsletter



Breast flattening is an age-old tradition, practiced in certain parts of Africa. The pounding and massaging of a girl's breasts delays breast development. In the UK it is child abuse.

It is typically arranged or performed by the girl's mother, to make the girl less attractive to males by delaying the signs that the girl is maturing into a young woman. Reasons for this include, protecting the girl from sexual harassment and rape. It also carried out to discourage pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancy and prevent early marriage. The practice usually starts when a girl begins to develop breasts, generally affecting pubescent girls aged between 8 and 12 years of age.

Reporting breast flattening and breast ironing.

If you suspect someone is in immediate danger, call 101. Also follow our in-school procedures and speak to the Safeguarding Lead.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also called 'female cutting' or 'female circumcision', is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. FGM happens because of various cultural, religious and social reasons. Some communities think that FGM will help the girl in some way, such as preparing her for marriage or childbirth.

FGM can cause severe psychological, emotional and medical problems. It can include extreme pain, shock, infection and many other long term serious medical issues.

Types of FGM

FGM is grouped into four main types:

- type 1: part or total removal of the clitoris or clitoral hood
- type 2: part or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minor
- type 3: narrowing of the vaginal opening
- type 4: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes

FGM and the law

The [Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003](#) makes it illegal to:

- perform FGM in the UK
- help or arrange for anyone to carry out FGM abroad on girls who are British Nationals or UK residents
- help a girl to carry out FGM on herself
- fail to protect a girl under 16 who is known to be at risk of FGM

FGM carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison.

Warning signs

There are a number of signs a girl could have been a victim of FGM:

- changes in behaviour
- missing school, particularly after a trip to a country where FGM is common
- spending long periods of time out of the classroom
- spending longer than usual going to the toilet
- avoiding going to the toilet
- discomfort when sitting down
- avoiding physical exercise
- frequent menstrual or urinary infections

Children often don't know that FGM is going to take place. This means there may be few warning signs before it happens. But, sometimes children do know in advance, which can lead to a change in their behaviour, such as seeking advice or help from professionals and friends.

If a young person is in immediate danger call 999.

Under the mandatory reporting legislation, teachers are required to report known cases of FGM in under 18s to the police. A known case is where there has been visual identification (which, usually, applies to healthcare professionals) or direct verbal disclosure.

If you are a teacher and a pupil, who is under 18, informs you that they have undergone FGM you must ring the non-emergency 101 number within 48 hours. You should make a note of your actions and record the police reference number as evidence that you have complied with the duty.

The duty does not apply if the person has reason to believe that another person working in that profession has previously made an FGM notification in connection with the same act of female genital mutilation.

If you are in any doubt, you should speak to your designated safeguarding lead, but remember the duty is individual not organisational. Once you have made your report via the 101 number, you have met the duty.

If you would like more information, please contact Derek and any other member of the safeguarding team.