

PENRYN COLLEGE

**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)
SUMMARY**

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

What are the signs that staff should be vigilant of:

Girls of school age who are subjected to FGM overseas are thought to be taken abroad at the start of the school holidays, particularly the summer holidays, in order for there to be sufficient time to recover before returning to school.

Although not an exhaustive list, the signs when FGM may be imminent are as follows:

- When a female family elder, visiting from another country, is around (particularly where FGM is a cultural practice);
- Where FGM is heard about in conversation by a professional, i.e. where a girl tells other children about it, confides that she is to have a special procedure or attend a special occasion to become a woman;
- Where a girl requests help from a teacher or another adult if she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk;
- Where parents state that they or a relative will take the child out of the country for a prolonged period;
- Where a girl talks about a long holiday to her country of origin or another country where FGM is prevalent; or
- Where parents seek to prevent their children from learning about FGM.

There are also a number of indications that a girl has already been subjected to FGM. These include the following, although the list below is not exhaustive:

- A girl may have difficulty walking, sitting or standing and may even look uncomfortable. She may specifically talk about pain or discomfort between her legs;
- A girl may spend long periods of time away from a classroom during the day with bladder or menstrual problems;
- A girl may have frequent urinary, menstrual or stomach problems;
- There may be prolonged or repeated absences from school or college;
- A prolonged absence from school or college with noticeable behaviour changes (e.g. withdrawal or depression) on the girl's return could be an indication that she has recently undergone FGM;
- A reluctance to undergo normal medical examinations; and
- A girl may confide in a professional or ask for help but may not be explicit about the problem due to fear or embarrassment.

What should you do if you have a concern?

Safeguarding girls at risk of FGM poses specific challenges as the families involved may give no other cause for concern. For example, they may in all other respects be loving and caring parents and have good relationships with their children. However, there remains a duty to act to safeguard girls at risk and practitioners must be aware of the need to do the following:

Dos...

- **Raise your concerns with the Designated safeguarding Lead**
- Always take the issue seriously and recognise the need to protect a girl from potentially significant harm. Many professionals may find it hard that a parent, for example, will arrange for FGM to be committed on their daughter and have her sent abroad for that purpose. Depending on the cultural practice, young girls may be told by their parents that it is a special procedure that will enable them to become a woman;
- Gather as much information as possible about the potential victim or victim – it may be the only opportunity;
- Remind the potential victim or victims of their rights, i.e. that FGM is considered illegal in the UK and that FGM is, depending on the age of the girl, considered to be child abuse; and
- Discuss the case with other relevant agencies. For example, if a girl has already been subjected to FGM, then the police should be informed that an illegal act has been committed.

Don'ts...

- send the girl or person acting on her behalf away and dismiss the allegation that FGM could be committed on the basis of little evidence;
- inform the girl's family, friends or members of the community that she has sought help; or attempt to mediate.

For further information, please see the latest guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack>