



20 June 2016

Dear Colleagues,

Female Genital Mutilation

I write to seek your support in our campaign to raise awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and remind teaching professionals of their duty to report cases of known FGM to the Police. Extra vigilance by schools is needed as we approach the school summer holidays, a time when FGM is often performed on young girls who are taken abroad for this purpose.

FGM is a form of violence against women and girls and it is considered child abuse and is illegal. It comprises of all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It may be carried out at any time in a girl's life, from baby to womanhood. It can be seen as a pathway to womanhood and can also be a condition of marriage. Some communities believe that if a girl has not had it done she is deemed unhealthy, unclean, or unworthy. Parents can have very strong beliefs, genuinely thinking they are doing the right thing for their daughter, and in communities where all females have the procedure it can seem normal, then making it very difficult for girls to challenge this tradition.

In the UK, anyone found guilty of an FGM offence or of helping somebody commit one, faces up to 14 years in prison, a fine, or both, regardless of where in the world the FGM takes place. Anyone found guilty of failing to protect a girl from risk of FGM faces up to 7 years in prison, a fine, or both.

Schools are well-placed to identify girls at risk of FGM for two reasons: 1) a significant number of the girls at risk of FGM fall within the school-age range, and 2) parents and families that practice FGM may give no other cause for concern, meaning that girls are not known, or accessing, any services other than school.

Possible signs

...someone may be at risk of FGM:

- knowing both that the family of a girl belongs to a community in which FGM is practised and is making preparations for the child to take a holiday, arranging vaccinations or planning absence from school
- a child may also talk about being taken "home" for a special visit to become a woman or a special procedure/ceremony that is going to take place
- a child may say an older female relative is coming especially to see her

... someone might have undergone FGM:

- prolonged absence from school or other activities with noticeable behaviour change on return, they may become withdrawn and possibly with bladder or menstrual problems

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- find it difficult to stand or sit still and look uncomfortable, or may complain about pain between their legs
- talk of something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about
- spend longer in the toilet than usual; because of bleeding and/or infection. Have frequent vaginal, urinal, or pelvic infections
- have blood born infections, including Hepatitis B & C, and HIV
- be reluctant to undergo any medical examinations
- may ask for help, but not be explicit about the problem due to fear or embarrassment
- develop emotional and mental health problems; self-harm or signs of child abuse

What to do if you are concerned about someone who might be at risk:

- Talk to them about your concerns, but use simple language and straightforward questions
- Be sensitive and let them know that they can talk to you again
- Make a referral to Children's Social Care
- Go to www.fco.gov.uk/fgm for more information

The LSCB asks for your assistance in raising awareness of FGM in your school by:

1. Inserting the article circulated with this letter in your next communication with parents.
2. Displaying a poster such as the one available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/be-the-mother-who-ends-fgm-poster>
3. Consider using some of the other resources available for schools from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fgm-support-materials>

The *Lambeth FGM Guidance* is available on

http://www.lambethscb.org.uk/policies_procedures_professional_section

There is also *UK Government multi-agency practice guidelines on tackling and preventing female genital mutilation* available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

I ask for your support on this important matter.

Yours sincerely



Cathy Twist

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Community Engagement Sub Group

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