



## **Safeguarding: Female genital mutilation (FGM) Policy**

### **Policy statement**

Our setting will work with children, parents and the community to ensure the rights and safety of children and to give them the very best start in life. Our Safeguarding Policy is based on the three key commitments of the Pre-school Learning Alliance Safeguarding Children Policy.

### **Rationale**

FGM is a collective term for all procedures involving partial or total removal of external female genitalia for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. Typically it is performed on girls aged between 4 -15 or on older girls before marriage or pregnancy. It is illegal in the UK and it is also illegal to take a child abroad to undergo FGM. There is a maximum prison sentence of 14 years for anyone found to have aided this procedure in any way. It is considered to be child abuse as it causes physical, psychological and sexual harm. FGM is more common than many people realise, both across the world and in the UK. It is practised in 28 African countries and in parts of the Middle and Far East and increasingly in developed countries amongst the immigrant and refugee communities. In the UK it has been estimated that 24,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM.

### **Aim:**

- That all staff talk about FGM in a professional and sensitive manner
- That all staff are aware of the indicators that FGM may be about to take place or have taken place
- That all staff are aware and follow the Safeguarding procedures the school has in place
- That all staff have contextual knowledge of FGM
- That all staff are aware of how best to support children and families
- To create an 'open environment' where pupils feel comfortable and safe to discuss the problems they are facing and know that they will be listened to and their concerns taken seriously

### **Guidelines**

The following national guidelines should also be read when working with this policy (**Available in Staffroom, on school website or by searching online**):

- HM Government - FGM Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines Nov14
- FGM Leaflet - Female Genital Mutilation 'The facts' – Gov.uk

### **Signs and Indicators:**

- Some indications that FGM may have taken place include:
- The family comes from a community that is known to practice FGM, especially if there are elderly women present in the extended family
- A girl / young woman may spend time out of the classroom or from other activities, with bladder or menstrual problems
- A long absence from school or in the school holidays could be an indication that a girl / young woman has recently undergone an FGM procedure, particularly if there are behavioural changes on her return - this may also be due to a forced marriage
- A girl requiring to be excused from physical exercise lessons without the support of her GP
- A girl may ask for help, either directly or indirectly
- A girl who is suffering emotional / psychological effects of undergoing FGM, for example

### Some indications that FGM may be about to take place include:

- A conversation with a girl where they may refer to FGM, either in relation to themselves or another female family member or friend;
- A girl requesting help to prevent it happening;
- A girl expressing anxiety about a 'special procedure' or a 'special occasion' which may include discussion of a holiday to their country of origin;
- A boy may also indicate some concern about his sister or other female relative.

### Cultural Context:

The issue of FGM is very complex. Despite the obvious harm and distress it can cause, many parents from communities who practice FGM believe it important in order to protect their cultural identity.

FGM is often practiced within a religious context. However, neither the Koran nor the Bible supports the practice of FGM. As well as religious reasons, parents may also say that undergoing FGM is in their daughter's best interests because it:

- Gives her status and respect within the community;
- Keeps her virginity / chastity;
- Is a rite of passage within the custom and tradition in their culture;
- Makes her socially acceptable to others, especially to men for the purposes of marriage;
- Ensures the family are seen as honourable;
- Helps girls and women to be clean and hygienic.

### Actions

All staff should:

- talk about FGM in a professional and sensitive manner,
- recognise and respect the child's wishes where possible, but child welfare must be paramount. **FGM is child abuse and against the law.** If a member of staff believes that the girl is at risk of FGM, or has already undergone FGM, the correct safeguarding procedures should be followed (Child Protection Policy 4.4).
- Liaise with the designated teacher with responsibility for safeguarding children

Staff should not:

- treat such allegations merely as a domestic issue
- ignore what the child has told them or dismiss out of hand the need for immediate protection
- decide that it is not their responsibility to follow up the allegation
- approach the student's family or those with influence within the community, in advance of any enquiries by the police, adult or children's social care, either by telephone or letter.

Action to take if staff believes a child is at risk of FGM:

- Report any concerns immediately to Child Protection Designated officer without delay (Refer to the Child Protection Policy section 4.4)

The Designated Safeguarding Officers will:

- Follow procedures in line with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies (Section 4.3)
- If a member of staff suspects that a student has been removed from, or prevented from, attending education **as a result of FGM**, the local authority will be notified along with social care and the police.