Conversation Starters - FGM

If you are a teacher and you suspect that a student might be at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM), it is essential to handle the situation with sensitivity, discretion and without judgement. The priority should be to create a safe and trusting environment where the young person feels comfortable and encouraged to talk. To help initiate this kind of conversation, here are some gentle question starters that open the door to discussion.
Never promise you won't tell anyone!

Building trust and encouragement

- Lately you've been a bit quiet, how are things going at home?
- I've noticed you've been a bit distracted recently, is everything OK?
- Is there anything worrying you?
- Is there anything on your mind that you would like to talk about?
- Some things are difficult to talk about, but it is OK to chat with someone who can help.
- If anything is worrying you, we are here if you want to talk about it.
- Who do you feel most comfortable talking to when something is bothering you?
- If you were worried about something happening to a friend, would you know who to talk to?
- Do you know what support is available if someone is worried about a tradition or practice?

Understanding pressure

- What plans do you have when you have finished school? Does your family support that decision?
- Do you feel pressure between different expectations at home and at school?
- Are there any traditions at home that you feel happy about? Are there any traditions you don't like?
- Are there any traditions for girls that you are not sure about?
- What do your parents hope you will do after you finish school?
- What plans do your family have for you?
- Would you like to learn more about how to stay safe and healthy?

Signs

- I hear you are going on a trip! Are you excited about it?
- So, are there any big plans for this holiday abroad?
- Is this a long trip?
- Will you be missing classes for this trip?
- You seem a bit anxious about this trip, is there anything you are concerned about?
- I am a bit worried about your attendance, is everything OK at home?

- I have noticed your performance has been dropping a bit, is there anything I can do to help?
- Is there anything worrying you that you need help with?
- I noticed you are struggling with PE, is there anything we can do to help?
- You seem to be asking for the toilet frequently, is everything OK with your health?
- You seem upset since returning from your trip, did something happen while you were abroad?

Safeguarding

- If a student is under 18, reassure them about having talked to you and advise them that for their safety, you have a duty to talk to the local authority. Reassure the student this is to protect them. You can explain to the young person that FGM is not legal and there are agencies which can help.
- If you receive a direct disclosure, remember the **mandatory reporting duty!**
- Refer immediately to your DSL and to Children's Social Care, if the student is under 18 years old.
- If the student is over 18 years old, encourage them to seek support and ask for their consent to speak to authorities and support agencies. You should also consider a vulnerable adult referral to social care.
- Explain that there are legal remedies available to support young people in this situation, such as FGM Protection Orders.
- Under no circumstances should you share information or attempt mediation with the student's family. The family may punish the student for trying to get help.
- Familiarise yourself with FGM terminology in different languages - disclosures will very rarely include the term 'FGM', instead people will refer to the procedure in first languages.