Conversation Starters - FGM

If you are a health professional and you suspect that a young patient 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 a discussion.
Never promise you won't tell anyone!

Building trust and encouragement

- How have things been going at home and school lately?
- Is there anything worrying you that you would like to talk to me 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.
- Is there anything you've been worried about or thinking about recently?
- 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?
- Who do you usually talk to when something is bothering you?
- Do you know what support is available if someone is worried about a tradition or practice?

Understanding pressure

- Is there anything you're worried might happen to you or someone you care about?
- Do you feel pressure between different expectations at home and at school?
- Are there any traditions for girls that you are not sure about?
- What do your parents expect from you in the future?
- What plans do your family have for you?

Signs

- You said you might be going abroad soon. How do you feel about this trip?
- You seem a bit anxious about this trip. Is there anything you are concerned about?
- Are you looking forward to the visit, or is there anything about it that worries you?
- Have you been asked to do anything that you're uncomfortable with?
- Are you struggling with PE at school? Is there anything we can do to help?
- Is everything ok with your periods/sexual health?
- You mentioned feeling low since returning from your trip. Did something happen whilst you were abroad?
- Do you know what support is available if someone is worried about a tradition or practice?

Safeguarding

- If a patient is under 18, reassure them for 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 that 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.