

Schools urged to tackle female genital mutilation (FGM) with high levels of sensitivity on Zero Tolerance to FGM Day

Schools are being urged to ensure they provide sensitive, age appropriate information to local students about female genital mutilation (FGM).

Specialist education charity, Sundial Centre for Education on Harmful Practices, a charity operating in the South East and the Midlands, is highlighting the importance of “getting it right” as part of awareness raising to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM this 6 February.

FGM (also known as female genital cutting) is a harmful practice involving the removal of or injury to a girl’s external genitals for non-medical reasons. It is a serious breach of children’s rights, a form of abuse and a crime. One survivor of FGM in the Sundial team describes the practice as “pain for life”.

To mark Zero Tolerance to FGM Day, Sundial is launching a campaign by sending awareness-raising postcards to every school across the Thames Valley and Birmingham. Aiming to support girls at risk and survivors of FGM, the postcards include the NSPCC’s dedicated FGM Helpline and offer schools Sundial’s FGM safeguarding training and lessons.

The safeguarding training and lessons are available to some state schools free of charge, with support from funders: the National Lottery, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Education is the key to protecting children at risk and supporting survivors and learning in schools needs to be on point and age appropriate, to avoid traumatising children and alienating affected communities.

Sundial, with a large, diverse team of specialist facilitators, including survivors of FGM, has over 10 years’ experience delivering lessons and safeguarding training to thousands of students and teachers.

This year, in addition to their education work, the Sundial team is working closely with Birmingham University which has secured funding to research concerns around language used about FGM in classrooms. The university, together with members of Birmingham Against FGM, will host a conference at Edgbaston Park Hotel to mark Zero Tolerance Day where Sundial will share best practice on delivering FGM education in schools.

Fatou Ceesay, a highly experienced facilitator and activist against FGM commented: “Although FGM is now a compulsory subject in secondary schools, we know a lot of PSHE teachers can feel uncomfortable teaching the subject, especially where it doesn’t happen in their own cultural group.

Students can also feel more comfortable talking about sensitive topics with external facilitators who they don’t see every day at school.

The cost of “getting it wrong” when it comes to FGM can be high, as girls at risk can be missed, or the discussion could be wrongly pitched for the age group and could cause more harm than good.”

Kate Agha, CEO, commented that “Schools already have an ever-expanding curriculum of relationship and abuse issues to cover, and teachers can worry about inadvertently coming across as insensitive or racist when they teach subjects that impact minority ethnic communities.

Our facilitators, from communities affected by harmful practices, can share insights into how issues such as FGM affect families and communities through Sundial’s safeguarding training and lessons.

It’s vital the schools across the UK and beyond take up this opportunity to safeguard, protect and support girls from potential harm.”

Sundial, previously called Oxford Against Cutting, will also mark Zero Tolerance to FGM Day with the launch of their new website, with information on a range of harmful practices.

The website and the postcard campaign feature artwork by Roshi Rouzbehani, an Iranian freelance illustrator who uses artwork for activism.

In June this year, the charity will host its own conference, ‘the Fabric of Shame’, to explore issues of reputation, shame and “honour” in practices such as FGM and forced marriage.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Sundial Centre for Education on Harmful Practices (formerly Oxford Against Cutting) is a charity that is committed to providing top-quality education and community support to help tackle female genital mutilation (FGM), ‘honour’-based abuse (HBA), and harmful body alterations of girls and women. We provide workshops delivered with facilitators from affected communities who bring survivor experience or personal insight on the impact of harmful practices in their communities. We work directly with schools, police, nurses, local councils, GP surgeries, social services and other charities to raise awareness of these issues and teach young people and professionals how to recognise the warning signs and prevent harm, as well as how to support survivors.

To get help for someone you know at risk of FGM contact:

NSPCC FGM Helpline

Email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 028 3550

From overseas: +44 (0)800 028 3550

Contact Sundial at sundialcentre.org to book your workshops or for further information.