

Guiding conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Keeping girls safe from violence

Introduction

We offer girls a safe, girl-only space where they can be themselves and share the experience of growing up as girls in today's world. But sadly, for some the home environment does not offer the same security. Girls and young women in your units may be at risk of or already facing violence or abuse, whether directly or indirectly.

Violence against women and girls can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial. It happens all over the world, crossing boundaries of age, ethnicity, sexuality, educational background and socio-economic status. It is violence perpetrated against girls or women because they are female.

In the UK the prevalence of violence against women and girls is often underestimated, and we have a responsibility to raise awareness among our members. By providing key information this *Guiding Conversation* supports leaders to talk about this sensitive issue in an open and honest way so they can support young members where necessary.

How to use this *Guiding Conversation*

This conversation focuses on three forms of violence that affect girls and young women from all backgrounds right across the UK, often in their home environments: domestic violence and abuse (DVA), female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. It includes questions and talking points to facilitate discussion at district or division meetings about awareness of these specific issues and how leaders might address them in unit meetings.

Some participants may be sensitive to the issues raised, so be considerate during your discussion. Make the group aware that anyone in need of further support should speak with their local commissioner. Local commissioners, please see page 3 for additional information.

Key questions

- What do leaders in your group already know about violence against women and girls?
- What do leaders in your group already know about DVA, FGM and forced marriage?

Domestic violence and abuse

'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.'

Home Office

Domestic violence and abuse accounted for 15 per cent of all violent incidents in 2011-12. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales also show that nearly one-third of women and nearly one-fifth of men say they have experienced DVA since the age of 16. This amounts to 5 million women and 2.9 million men. The inclusion of controlling and coercive behaviour and the lowering of the age criterion to 16 from 18 in the Home Office definition have happened only recently to encompass abuse in teenage relationships.

While both men and women experience incidents of DVA, women are considerably more likely to experience it in repeated and severe forms. Abusers use DVA to exert power and control within intimate relationships. There is no excuse for DVA, and the abuser is always responsible for their action.

Did you know?

As a group, discuss the facts below. Are you aware of these facts? How aware do you think your girls are? How do you feel about Girlguiding raising this issue with leaders?

- On average, in the UK two women a week are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner.
- Each year, across the UK, at least 750,000 children witness DVA.
- In over 50 per cent of known DVA cases, children were also directly abused.
- Only 23 per cent of girls aged 11 to 21 show a full understanding of what an abusive relationship is.

Impact on children

Children living in households where DVA is known to be happening are legally identified as 'at risk'. DVA can have both short- and long-term emotional, developmental and



behavioural consequences for children. This is the case whether a child is the target of abuse by a family member or partner, or witnesses the abuse of another person. All children witnessing DVA are being emotionally abused. Children may become depressed or anxious, develop mental health problems, have trouble sleeping, begin to self-harm, become aggressive or withdrawn, or start having problems at school.

Female genital mutilation

'All procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.'

World Health Organization (WHO)

Female genital mutilation is practised in at least 28 African countries, as well as countries in the Middle East and Asia. There are no cultural, religious or medical justifications for FGM, despite the fact that it may be practised as part of some cultural initiations into adulthood or to accord with conceptions of hygiene. FGM is deeply rooted in gender inequality and discrimination - it is used to exert control over women and girls, including over women's sexuality and sexual experience, and to enforce virginity before - and fidelity in - marriage. FGM is recognised internationally as a form of violence against women and girls and a violation of their human rights.

The practice in the UK

FGM is illegal in the UK - it's also illegal to take a British national or permanent resident abroad for FGM or to help someone trying to do this. Yet girls are still at risk. The NHS reports that FGM tends to occur in areas with larger populations of FGM-practising communities, including Birmingham, Cardiff, Crawley, London, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Oxford, Reading, Sheffield and Slough. However, the practice is not limited to these locations. Some families choose to take their daughters abroad during the school summer holidays for FGM to be carried out. Sometimes girls may be aware that they are going away for a 'special ceremony'.

Impact on girls and women

FGM has devastating physical, sexual and psychological consequences for girls and women in the short and long term. These include severe pain and blood loss, which

can result in death; shock, trauma and long-lasting mental health issues; urinary and menstrual problems; painful sexual intercourse and decreased sexual enjoyment; and problems in childbirth.

Did you know?

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- Figures to show how widespread FGM is are difficult to obtain. The most referenced study, using 2001 census data for England and Wales, estimates that 24,000 girls under the age of 15 could be at risk of FGM each year. However, FGM may be more prevalent than this study suggests.
- Nearly 66,000 women are living with its consequences.
- Approximately 100 to 140 million girls and women around the world have experienced FGM.
- More than 3 million girls in African countries annually are at risk of the practice.

Forced marriage

'A forced marriage is where one or both people do not... consent to the marriage, and pressure or abuse is used.'

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be:

- physical (including threats of or actual violence and sexual violence, imprisonment)
- emotional and psychological (making someone feel like they're bringing shame on their family, threatening them with being disowned by their family)
- financial (taking a person's wages or not giving them any money).

Motivations for families to force marriage may include pressure from relatives, a desire to control their children, or to build links with extended family in their countries of origin.

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Note that forced marriage is different from an arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage both the bride and groom choose whether or not they want to marry the person suggested to them by their families.

The practice in the UK

Protection from forced marriage through the courts has been in place since 2008 and forced marriage was criminalised in March 2014. It is recognised as a form of domestic/child abuse and of violence against women and men. It is a serious violation of human rights. It cannot be justified on any religious or cultural basis.

Nonetheless, girls and young women who are UK residents and citizens are forced to marry against their will. Cases dealt with by the UK government's Forced Marriage Unit in 2013 were spread across the whole of the UK. The unit handled cases involving 74 different countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, The Gambia, India, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia and Yemen. Young people may be tricked into going abroad on a 'family holiday', during which the marriage takes place.

Impact on girls and women

Those forced into marriage can suffer hugely both in the short and long term. The means used to pressure people to marry, as well as the abuse some face once married, can lead to self-harm, depression, isolation, attempted suicide and eating disorders among other negative effects.

Did you know?

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- The Forced Marriage Unit dealt with 1,302 cases in 2013 in which they gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage.
- In 2013, 82 per cent of cases involved female victims.
- The majority of cases in 2013 involved young people under 21 years old, with 15 per cent of victims under 16 years old.

Key questions

- How do you think these three issues might affect the girls in your local area?
- How aware do you feel the members of your unit are about the different forms of violence and abuse girls could face at home and how widespread these are in the UK?
- Using the resources listed in the 'Further information' section on page 4, how might you run activities on these topics or include them within other activities with your unit?

If you are concerned about the safety of a girl at any point, or if a girl makes a disclosure to you, contact your local commissioner or email safeguarding@girlguiding.org.uk for further advice. If you believe a girl is in immediate danger, you must report your concerns, in line with Girlguiding's safeguarding policy. Consult *A Safe Space* for further information (see page 4 for more details).

For local commissioners

If you require extra support running this conversation, please speak to your county commissioner or email safeguarding@girlguiding.org.uk.

During the course of this conversation a question may be asked, or an issue raised, that you are unsure how to tackle. In anticipation of this, you may like to provide a 'question box' for participants to use at the end of the meeting. This will allow you time to respond accurately and appropriately to any queries by using the suggested resources or emailing safeguarding@girlguiding.org.uk. It could also be used to help you identify any training needs for your district/division.

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Further information

A Safe Space (www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Running your unit > Safety > Child protection) - must-read guidelines for leaders on the policies and procedures that are in place to protect both girls and volunteers.

Ending violence against women and girls in the UK (www.gov.uk > Policies) - guidance from the Home Office.

NSPCC (www.nspcc.org.uk) - free confidential advice, information and support for adults who are worried about a child and deciding whether or not to make a referral.

ChildLine (www.childline.org.uk) - free confidential help and support for children and young people up to the age of 18.

Leaders might like to look at the following resources for use with their units.

- **Voices against Violence** (www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > What's happening > Voices against violence and www.stoptheviolencecampaign.com).
- **Change the story, Girls in Action project** (www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Activities > Activity packs > Girls in Action).

Leaders could invite a Peer Educator to a unit meeting to deliver Girlguiding's *Healthy Relationships* resource for Brownies, Guides and members of Rangers. For further information, visit www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Get Involved > Peer Education.

Domestic violence and abuse

National Domestic Violence Helpline (www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk or 0808 2000 247) - freephone 24-hour helpline for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

Women's Aid (www.womensaid.org.uk) - the key national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.

This is ABUSE (<http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk>) - UK government campaign website about relationship abuse among young people.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation: guidelines to protect children and women (www.gov.uk > Publications) - guidance from the Home Office and Department for Education.

'Safeguarding girls at risk of female genital mutilation' (www.gov.uk > Publications) - correspondence from the Department of Health to General Practitioners, Practice Nurses, Health Visitors and School Nurses.

NSPCC FGM Helpline (call 0800 028 3550 or email fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk) - 24-hour anonymous helpline to give advice, information and support for anyone concerned that a child's welfare is at risk because of FGM.

There are a number of factsheets available on the topic.

- **NSPCC Inform** (www.nspcc.org.uk/inform > Topics > Minority ethnic children > Factsheet on female genital mutilation).
- **WAGGGS Voices against violence** (www.waggs.org > Take action > Stop the Violence).
- **Daughters of Eve** (www.dofeve.org > About FGM).
- **Forward** (www.forwarduk.org.uk > Key issues > FGM).

Forced marriage

Handling cases of forced marriage: multi-agency practice guidelines (www.gov.uk > Publications) - guidance from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office.

Forced Marriage Unit (www.gov.uk/forced-marriage or call 020 7008 0151) - government unit that operates both inside the UK and overseas leading policy, outreach and casework on forced marriage.

Karma Nirvana (www.karmanirvana.org.uk or call helpline 0800 599 9247) - UK-registered charity that supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and 'honour'-based abuse.

Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (www.ikwro.org.uk) - provides advice and support to Middle Eastern women and girls living in the UK who are facing 'honour'-based violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage or FGM.