

Talking about FGC Together

For Moms

If you have experienced FGC it can be difficult to talk about. It might bring up painful memories or you may simply feel uncomfortable talking about your female anatomy. It might also feel awkward talking about FGC as a new immigrant living in the U.S. where the practice is illegal and uncommon. Some, including cultural leaders, believe the practice of FGC should continue, while others feel completely confident FGC should be abandoned altogether and have spoken out against the issue. FGC is harmful to women and has no health benefits but navigating a longstanding cultural practice can be confusing in a new country.

Some refugee women in the U.S. have organized groups of women affected by FGC. If you're interested in this, consider organizing your own group or get help to do so from your local refugee resettlement agency or community center.

If you underwent FGC you should not feel ashamed to talk about it with others because this can be an important way for you to process your emotions about your own experience.

The most important person to talk with about FGC is your daughter, especially if your community promotes the practice. Sharing something like this can be an opportunity to connect in a personal way that strengthens the bond between the two of you. You may never be ready to share everything about your experience, especially because it may feel like a private and painful topic, which is okay.

It's important that your daughter hear about FGC from YOU. Take the time to talk to her about it soon, rather than waiting.

If you are considering having your daughter undergo FGC, you should tell her because she has a right to know. Remember, it is illegal to perform FGC in the U.S. or to travel outside the country to have it done. Consider the health and legal implications of FGC. You may want to have your daughter participate in an alternative rite of passage ceremony, which you will learn more about later in this book.





Moms, think about it...

- * FGC is harmful to women and girls, but it is an important part of your journey and your culture's history. Talking about FGC with your daughter is an important way to overcome the practice in your community.
- * Are you considering having your daughter undergo FGC? Remember, FGC has serious health implications and is illegal in the U.S. First consider talking to someone at a local refugee resettlement agency or your doctor who can help talk with you about FGC.
- * If you or your daughter have been cut, you may feel many emotions, including guilt, confusion, or shame. Though the act of FGC can't be reversed, there are emotional and physical ways you and your daughter can find healing and restoration. How can you help her go through this process?



For Daughters

You may not have undergone FGC, but it might be something your community practices. In any case, you should know that FGC is harmful to girls. Ask your mom to talk to you about FGC and to share what your community and family believes about the practice. Also, ask her to share what her intentions are for you and your siblings. It is illegal to undergo FGC in the U.S. or to travel outside of the U.S. to have it performed. If this is something you fear could happen to you, let a trusted adult know. You have a right to protect yourself and your body and there are many people who want to help.

Girls who have already undergone FGC, it is normal to feel a lot of emotions about what happened to you. You might feel sadness, pain, confusion, or anger. It's important for you to talk about these feelings with someone you love and trust. If you don't feel comfortable talking with your mom, talk to another trusted adult such as your sister, an aunt, a teacher, or a school counselor. They can help you sort through what happened to you and help you move forward in a safe and healthy way.



Did you know thousands of girls around the world have experienced FGC, but even more are speaking out against the practice and saying no to FGC? Worldwide it is a violation of human rights, gender-based violence, and child abuse – and YOU have a right to be protected from the practice.



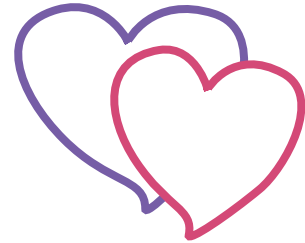


Daughters, think about it...

- * Transitioning from a child to an adult is important in many cultures. How do you feel about becoming a woman? What do you think are important values and character traits you want to have as a woman?
- * FGC is harmful to girls. Do you know if your culture practices FGC or do you know anyone who has experienced it? Take time to consider what they must have felt or what they feel now knowing it is a harmful practice and is illegal in the U.S.
- * If you have undergone FGC you may feel sadness about your situation. Girls from all over the world who have been cut are finding ways to overcome what happened to them. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Have you ever spoken with anyone about your experience? Is there a trusted adult you could speak with?



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ Have you heard of FGC or do you know of anyone who has experienced it or talked about it?
- ◆ FGC is something that is practiced in our community, or it used to be. Do you have any questions about the practice and why it is done? How do you feel about the practice?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ What does our culture believe about FGC? What does our family believe about FGC? How do you feel about it?
- ◆ Have our culture's beliefs about FGC changed in recent years? What brought about that change?
- ◆ Did you undergo FGC when you were a child or do you have friends who did?
- ◆ Is it something you were planning to have done to me and/or my younger or older sisters?