

What is FGC?

For Moms and Daughters

You may be familiar with female genital cutting (FGC) because you have experienced it yourself or because your mom or other female relatives or peers in your community have been circumcised. In this book it is referred to as FGC, but your community may call it something different such as female circumcision, sunna, tahara, khitan, or khatna. As you may know, FGC includes the piercing, cutting, removing, or sewing closed of all or part of a female's external genitals. FGC is performed by different cultural and ethnic groups all over the world.

Your community may have a long tradition of FGC. Some perform FGC to promote chastity or to preserve a girl's sources of power and authority. Some see it as a way to mark a girl's passage into womanhood. Other communities believe it is prescribed by their religion. Within individual families, the decision may be based on their cultural beliefs, economic reasons, or because of extreme pressure from family or friends. Some families fear if their daughter is uncircumcised, she will be ostracized from the community and not considered an acceptable marriage partner. However, all girls can be good marriage partners and all girls, no matter what, should be valued and respected in their communities—even those that say no to FGC.

As in every culture, traditions and norms change over time. As societies develop and learn, they adapt. For example, fewer people around the world smoke cigarettes today than previous decades because we have learned about the harmful effects of smoking. And more girls around the world attend school because we have learned the positive effects of educating both girls and boys in our societies.

Cultural views on FGC are also changing in some communities. For example, in Kenya, FGC has been steadily declining, and thousands of women and girls are choosing alternative rites of passage as they learn the dangers of the cut. Because of your experiences with FGC and your community's and family's beliefs about the practice, you may want your daughter to undergo FGC, or you may have strong feelings against it. While the practice itself is harmful to the physical and psychological health of women and girls, the tradition of marking a girl's passage into womanhood is unique and something that should continue to be celebrated and honored without FGC. As you continue reading, we hope you can discuss alternatives to the practice of FGC.

