



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Collective Voices for Improving the Care and Reducing the Risk of FGC

Raising a Girl



With a Special
Focus on
Conversations
about Female
Genital Cutting

A Handbook for Newcomer Mothers and Daughters

Raising a Girl

This book belongs to

A Letter for Mom

Dear Mom,

Your daughter is entering a new phase in her life, one that brings excitement and confusion. She is still a child, yet she is quickly becoming an adult. At this time, her world is rapidly changing. Her friendships are becoming more complex, her responsibilities at home and school are increasing, her body is changing (if it isn't already, it will soon!). She is probably experiencing mood swings and wanting more independence at a time when you may not be ready to let her become more independent. On top of all this she and your entire family are navigating a new culture, a new language, and life in the U.S.!

This time can be challenging for mothers and daughters to go through together. But remember, you went through these same things and because of this, you can be a resource to your daughter. You probably remember feeling the social pressures to fit in, the awkwardness of your changing body, and the excitement of gaining new independence. This may also have been a time when you went through Female Genital Cutting (FGC). In the U.S., FGC is very uncommon and considered illegal because it is harmful to women and girls. However, the tradition of marking a girl's passage into womanhood is unique and something that should continue to be celebrated and honored in a safe and healthy way, without the practice of FGC.

If you come from a culture that traditionally practices FGC, we hope this book can be a helpful guide for talking about the practice, considering alternatives to FGC, and thinking about other relevant topics impacting girls at this age. Talking about these things might feel awkward, but it's important that your daughter hears from you, and that these conversations take place sooner, rather than later. This book can help! Topics are focused on things girls may experience in their pre-teen years such as puberty and a changing body, relationships with friends, romantic relationships, as well as topics related to FGC.

Remember, you might not always know the answers to your daughter's questions, but you have the ability to listen and the wisdom to help her navigate this new phase in her life and this new culture. Most importantly, we hope each page creates an opportunity for you to get to know each other better, helps build a habit for healthy communication, and strengthens your relationship as your daughter continues to mature.

—BRYCS

A Letter for Daughter

Dear Daughter,

You are entering a new phase in your life, one that is filled with excitement and challenge. You are leaving childhood and becoming a teenager. As you may already know from experience, puberty will lead you through emotional and physical changes. Your body is changing quickly. Your friendships are becoming more meaningful. You also have new responsibilities at home and school and are gaining and wanting more independence! On top of all this, you and your family are navigating life in the U.S. and how to live in a new culture.

It might feel like your mom doesn't understand or know what you are going through, but remember, she was a teenager once herself. She remembers feeling awkward in her own changing body, the peer pressure of friends, and the desire for more independence. She can be a helpful resource!

Talking about certain topics with your mom like wearing bras, feeling attraction to someone, cultural traditions such as Female Genital Cutting (FGC), having your menstrual cycle, and feeling pressure from your friends can feel embarrassing. But it's important that your mom hears from you and that you hear from her. Talk about these things now, rather than later.

This book is designed to help you and your mother talk about these topics. Most pages in this guide have a section for moms and a section for girls. It also includes different activities you and your mom can do together and spaces for you to write and reflect on questions.

We hope this handbook allows you to open up to your mom. And remember, your mom might not always know the answers to your questions, but you can learn from her wisdom and navigate this new phase of your life and this new culture together. Most importantly, we hope each page creates an opportunity for you to get to know each other better, creates a habit for healthy communication, and strengthens your relationship.

—BRYCS

Legend

This book is broken into sections for moms, daughters, and activities that can be completed together.

These symbols will let you know which pages are for you!

Mom 

Daughter 

Mom & Daughter 

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Disclaimer of Illegality of FGC

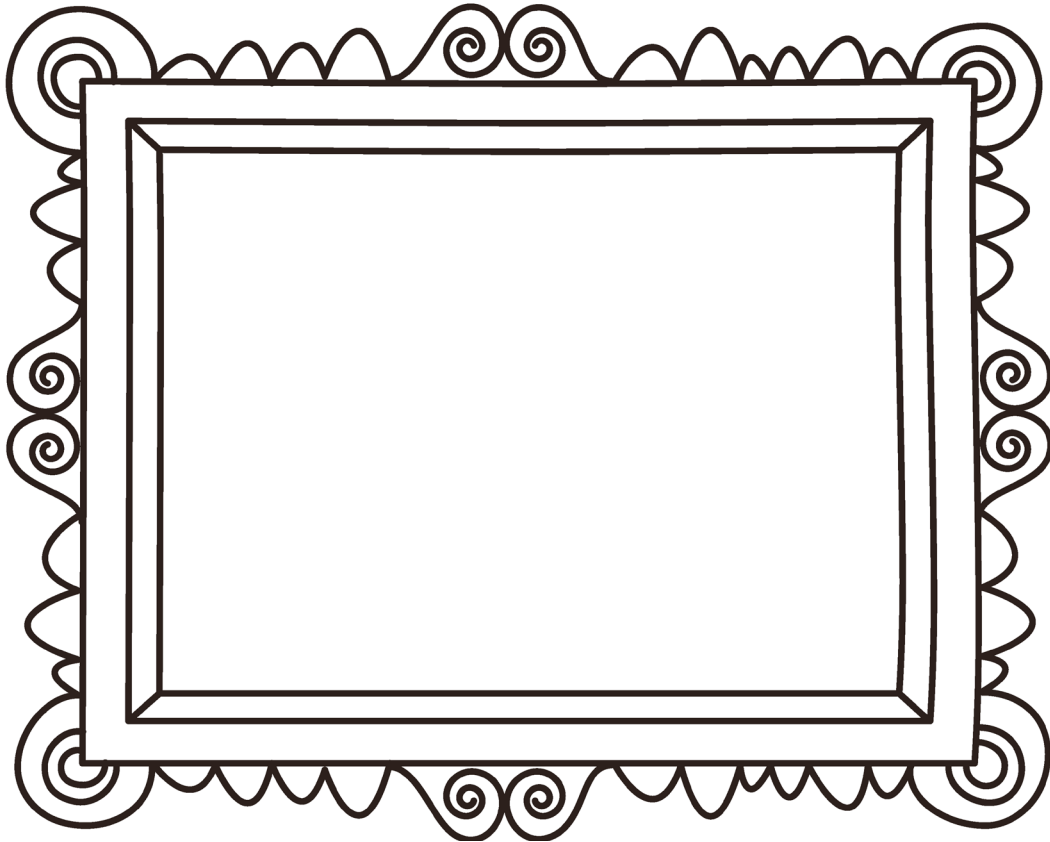
This book addresses the topic of puberty, healthy development for preteens, and Female Genital Cutting (FGC), also called female circumcision. FGC is illegal in the United States. It is illegal to perform or assist in performing FGC on anyone under age 18. The U.S., and many countries around the world, considers FGC a violation of human rights, gender-based violence, and a form of child abuse. Traveling outside of the U.S. or attempting to travel outside the U.S. for the purposes of having a daughter undergo FGC is also against the law.

If you have undergone FGC before you arrived in the U.S. you are **not at fault** and have not violated any U.S. laws. Federal law makes the discrimination against anyone who has undergone FGC illegal. Many girls have FGC forced on them with no choice of their own.

Moms and Daughters

This book is for the two of you to write and draw in. Before you get started, let's remember that this is a place for both of you to express your thoughts and be honest. There are many activities and questions to help start conversations. We encourage you to take your time completing this book so that you can get to know each other!

In the picture frame below, draw or place a picture of the two of you!



About You and Me

Moms and Daughters

Each of you, circle five words that *describe* you. Then, using a different color, circle five words that *describe* the other.



Why did you choose these words to describe each other?

What is your favorite thing about each other?

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.



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.

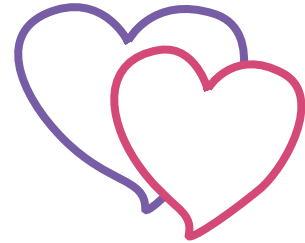


Daughters, think about it...

- * 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?

A Girl's Changing Body

For Moms

The preteen stage is a time when many changes occur for girls, most noticeable are the changes to her body. This is referred to as puberty. Your daughter may start growing hair under her arms and on her legs, as well as her private parts. Maybe she is getting taller or gaining weight, or her hips are expanding. She will start growing breasts soon too, if she has not already. And soon she will start her menstrual cycle or 'period'. She may also begin developing romantic feelings towards others. As your daughter notices these changes in herself, it can leave her feeling confused or embarrassed. Sometimes, these confused feelings lead to a negative self-image and a low self-esteem. As an adult, you went through these same changes and can be there for your daughter to help her process the mixture of emotions.

Your daughter's changing body may start to attract attention from boys. She may be flattered by this, though it can often leave girls feeling insecure and confused. Help your daughter learn the best way to respect herself and her body. Help her think of appropriate ways to respond when people make comments about her body.

Help your daughter by showing her new hygiene routines such as applying deodorant, wearing a bra, and what to do when she starts her menstrual cycle.

As your daughter enters into puberty, this may also be a time when YOU feel a mixture of emotions! While you feel proud of your daughter growing up and developing into a woman, you may also feel sadness that she is no longer a little child. Additionally, you might feel anxious about the attention she gets from boys and her need for independence, all while figuring out how to raise your daughter in a new country and culture! These feelings are very normal for moms. Consider talking to other moms about how you are feeling and their strategies for walking alongside their daughters through puberty.

Most importantly, talk to your daughter and help her sort out her confusion.



Menstrual Cycle

Your daughter may start her menstrual cycle soon or she may have already. You can be a great resource by telling her about your experience when you were her age. Girls often feel anxious about starting their menstrual cycle, so it can be helpful to talk about before she begins it. Make sure she has the products she needs like panty liners, pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or underwear, and that she knows how to use them. She can keep the products she will need in her backpack, so she's prepared if she gets her period at school. It's important she change her hygiene patterns to prevent the odor that comes with a menstrual cycle. Be sure to also communicate the physical and emotional feelings often connected to a menstrual cycle, such as abdominal cramping, bloating, tender breasts, mood swings, or feeling tired. These things are referred to as premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and are normal. However, if her period is keeping her home from school or making her feel really sick, visit a doctor as there may be other issues. You should let your doctor know if she hasn't started her period by age 17.

Some cultures believe that using tampons takes away a girl's virginity. In the U.S. they are very common and girls who are abstinent or waiting until marriage often use them.



Moms, think about it...

- * Have you noticed your daughter maturing physically and emotionally? It might be very difficult for her to start a conversation with you about the changes in her body, even if she really wants to. As the adult, take time to initiate questions and listen to her responses. Your opinions and feedback are important, and hers are too.
- * Do you listen to your daughter's concerns about her appearance and affirm her in her beauty? Talk about the difference between outer beauty and inner beauty and ask her what she thinks is beautiful about herself. Remind her that everyone's body is different and acknowledge her changing body in a positive way. Let her know that beauty comes in all different shapes and sizes and encourage her to focus on inner beauty. Do you encourage your daughter to participate in activities such as music and sports that help build confidence and character without focusing on appearance?



For Daughters

At this age, your body might be changing, or it will change soon. You will develop breasts, the shape of your body will change, or you may gain weight or get taller. You may also start to notice pubic hair and that the hair under your arms and on your legs is getting thicker and darker. These changes are normal and are referred to as puberty. Your friends are also going through these changes, but remember, everyone's body is different, and changes happen at different times. These changes usually bring a mixture of emotions. In one sense you might feel embarrassed or awkward about going through puberty, but in another sense, you may feel more confident and excited that you are growing into an adult!

As your body changes, you might notice people making comments about your physical appearance. Whether they say something positive or negative, it can feel awkward to know that people are noticing your body now. Just remember, no matter what shape you have, your body is beautiful and deserves to be respected by yourself and others. If people's comments are not respectful to you, you should stand up for yourself and talk to someone about what was said.

Many girls in the U.S. shave their legs and their underarms when they become teenagers. Every culture does things differently and however you and your mom decide to take care of your hair is okay. Talk to your mom about how she takes care of the hair on her body and what is best for you.

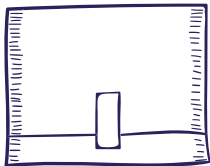
Now that you are getting older, your hygiene practices should change. You will need to start bathing more, wearing deodorant, and carrying toiletry products so you are ready for your menstrual cycle.

Sometimes it may be uncomfortable to talk about these things, even with your mom. It is hard to imagine, but your mom went through these same changes and felt the same mixture of emotions you do. If you haven't already, bring up your feelings about puberty with your mom. Ask her how she dealt with these changes and any advice she has for you. For example, you may want to talk to her about wearing a bra or someone at school you have a crush on. She can help you sort through these things.

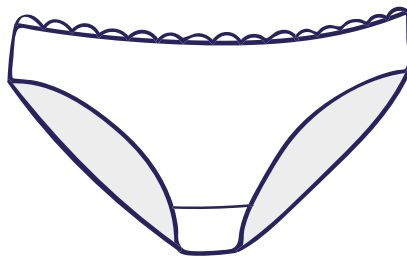


Menstrual Cycle

You will start your menstrual cycle soon if you haven't already. This is also called a 'period'. The average age girls start their period is around 12 years old, but everyone is different. You might feel anxious about starting your first period, which is normal. Talk to your mom, an older sibling, or another trusted adult about what their experience was like. You may also want them to show you how to use certain products such as a pad, tampon, menstrual cup, or underwear so you are prepared when your period arrives. Store some supplies in your backpack in case you start your period at school. Once you start your menstrual cycle, it will last for 3-7 days and occurs once a month. The time during or around your period you might also feel abdominal cramping, bloating, tender breasts, mood swings, or exhaustion. These things are referred to as premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and are uncomfortable, but normal. If these feelings are regularly keeping you home from school let your mom and your doctor know. It's helpful to keep track of your cycle so you know when to expect it by marking the dates of your cycle on your calendar. If you have a smart phone, there are a lot of apps that help you keep track of your cycle and how you feel during that time.



panty liner



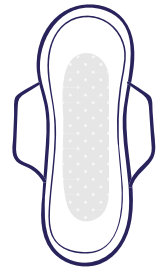
menstrual underwear



menstrual cup



tampon



pad



Daughters, think about it...

- * Most girls start going through puberty from the ages of 9-13. Have you or your friends started going through puberty? What have you noticed that's changed?
- * Consider how media around the world portrays only certain body types as beautiful. Women and girls are so diverse and represent many different body shapes and weights, skin colors, and hair types and colors. Beauty is represented in this diversity, not just one type of body.



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ I've noticed your clothes are fitting you differently. It seems like your body is starting to change and you are starting puberty. Have you noticed this? How does this make you feel?
- ◆ Are you noticing your friends' bodies are also starting to change?
- ◆ Would you be interested in going bra shopping with me this weekend? I think it's a good idea you start wearing one.
- ◆ Are you prepared for your period? Maybe we can pack a toiletry bag for your backpack. I can help and explain how to use the items.
- ◆ Boys may start to notice your body more and make comments to you. If anyone says anything unpleasant to you about your body, please tell me or tell your teacher at school. Your body deserves to be honored and respected. Has anyone made comments that make you uncomfortable?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ How do you take care of your body?
- ◆ What changes to my hygiene and health routine do I need to make as my body changes?



What makes us beautiful?

Puberty can be hard. Your body is changing and sometimes these changes can be uncomfortable. You may find that society's ideas of beauty are impossible to reach. Take the time to talk about what beauty is to you.

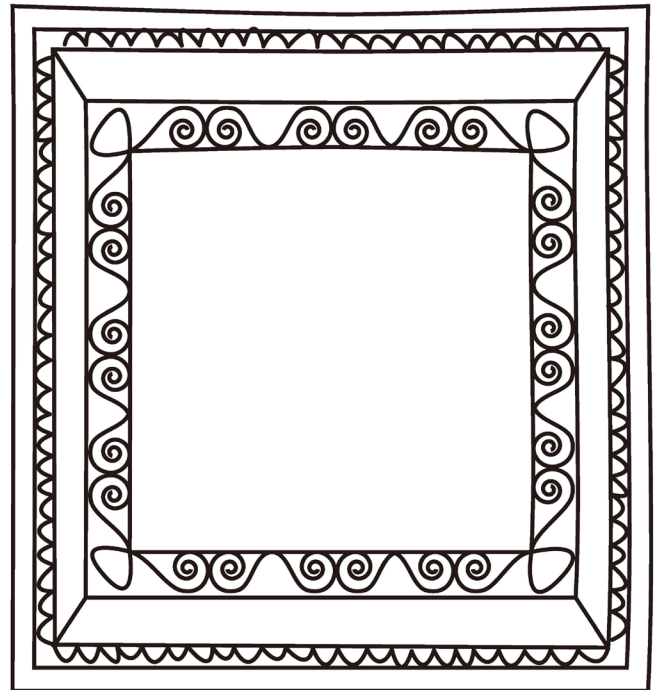
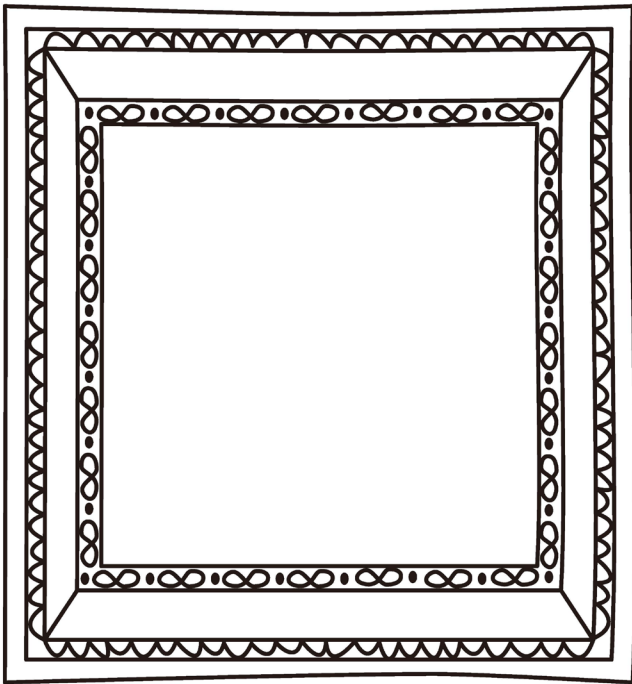
What is beauty?

Who in your life do you think is beautiful? What makes them beautiful?

What do we think is the most beautiful part of each other?



Draw a portrait of each other,
celebrating the most beautiful parts of you!



Health Implications of FGC

For Moms and Daughters

There are no health benefits of FGC. It is harmful to women and girls and there are many unhealthy side effects. Despite these health consequences, many still chose to continue the practice for fear they may be excluded from their communities or to ensure a future marriage partner. However, the health consequences of FGC can last a lifetime and may become severe if not treated. If you've undergone FGC, consider if you are experiencing any of the complications listed below or if you have in the past.

Short Term Health Effects	Long Term Health Effects	Emotional Effects	Relational Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ excessive bleeding❖ severe pain❖ difficulty urinating❖ infection❖ shock❖ death	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ chronic infection❖ development of a false vagina❖ infertility❖ complications during childbirth, even death❖ cysts and abscesses inside and outside of the vagina❖ inflammation❖ urinary incontinence❖ pain during intercourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ confusion of reason for practice, especially after migrating to the U.S.❖ shame❖ resentment❖ fear of sex and childbirth❖ anxiety or post-traumatic stress❖ powerlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ feelings of confusion or resentment towards family who took you to have it done❖ may influence your relationship with your husband or future husband



Think about it...

- * If you have experienced any of these complications, it is important to let your doctor know so they can help find treatment options that will help you.
- * Consider reaching out to a doctor, a counselor, or your resettlement case worker. They might be able to help you or connect you with someone who can provide support.
- * Some communities have active women's groups for refugees. If this is available to you, this could be a safe space for you to talk about how you are feeling.



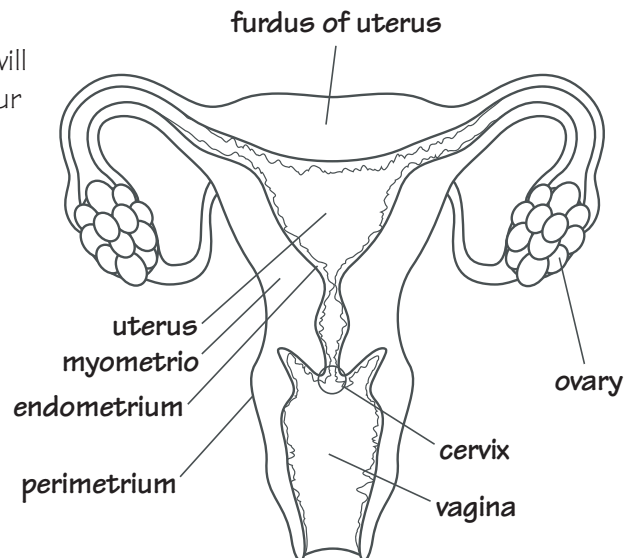
What to Expect when Visiting the Doctor

For Moms

Going to the doctor in the U.S. might make you feel nervous or uncomfortable. This is normal. Cultural norms about healthcare practices and doctor visits vary depending on the region of the world you are from. The two most common doctors women visit in the U.S. are Primary Care Doctors, who assess your overall health, and an OB/GYN (Obstetrician and Gynecologist) who provides medical care specifically to women and specialize in reproductive health, pregnancy, and childbirth. It is recommended that you visit the OB/GYN and Primary Care Doctor once a year for a women's wellness exam.

When you go to an OB/GYN appointment, you will interact with many different people. First, a receptionist will check you in and take down personal information such as your name, birth date, and insurance information. Then a medical assistant or nurse will take your weight, height, blood pressure, and sometimes a blood test or a urine sample. They will also ask you questions about how you have been feeling and any health concerns you may have. They will provide you with a gown and give you time to undress, put the gown on, and sit on an exam bed. The doctor will then come visit you and ask more questions about your health. They might listen to your heart and conduct a physical exam in which they press on your stomach or breasts to see if there is anything abnormal.

The doctor will also ask questions related to your reproductive health, your menstrual cycle, and your sexual activity. This is an opportunity for you to ask them questions about getting pregnant or any health issues related to FGC.



FEMALE
Reproductive System



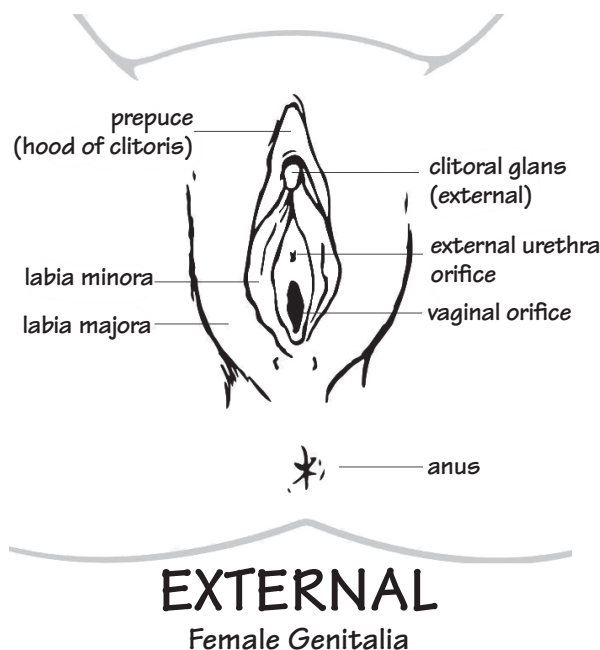
Doctors perform a pelvic exam and a pap smear about once a year to examine the health of your reproductive body parts. These exams are optional, but recommended. If you have undergone FGC these exams may be impossible or more difficult to perform. It's important to inform the doctor prior to the exam if you have been circumcised.

Pelvic Exam:

During a pelvic exam, an OB/GYN will use their fingers to press on the outside of your body, checking your uterus, cervix, fallopian tubes, ovaries, and bladder for any abnormalities or signs of illness. First the doctor will examine the opening of your vagina, looking for cysts, irritation, or abnormal discharge. Then the doctor will insert a speculum into your vagina and examine your internal reproductive organs. Usually, this exam takes only a few minutes and does not hurt, though can feel rather uncomfortable. It is recommended you have this exam done annually during your reproductive years.

Pap Smear:

A pap smear is usually done during the pelvic exam where the doctor obtains a small sample of cells from the cervix to test for cervical cancer, a cancer that only occurs in women. Sometimes the pap smear is slightly painful, though it only lasts a few seconds. For women ages 21-29 it is recommended you have a pap smear every year. For women ages 30 and older pap smears are only needed every other year unless there are abnormalities or signs of illness related to your female body parts. Some cultures believe a pap smear can tear your hymen, usually an




indication that a woman has lost her virginity. However, there is no evidence a pap smear tears or stretches your hymen in any way.

If you have been circumcised, going to the doctor could be emotional. Consider talking with someone (a friend, a relative, a religious leader, or a counselor) about what you are feeling before or after your appointment. You may also feel uncomfortable because of a fear of being stigmatized. Remember, FGC is not your fault and it is against the law in the U.S. for doctors (or anyone) to discriminate against you because of FGC.

Your Daughter's Visit to the Doctor

Usually, your daughter won't have her first pelvic exam and pap smear until she is over the age of 18. However, her Primary Care Doctor or Pediatrician may do a gynecological exam after her first menstrual cycle. Your daughter should visit a Primary Care Doctor annually to make sure she continues to grow and develop in a healthy way, to check for any signs of illness, or to receive updated immunizations as needed. When she goes to the doctor, you should be in the room with her to provide comfort or ask any questions during the exam. They will check your daughter's weight, height, vision, hearing, blood pressure, lungs, and body mass. They will also ask questions about her sleeping and eating habits or signs of puberty.



If it has been more than a year since your daughter went to the doctor, schedule an appointment. Having an annual checkup is not only important for her health, but it is usually required for school registration.





Moms, think about it...

- * Do you and your daughter visit the doctor at least once a year?
- * If you've experienced FGC, have you informed your doctor? This can help the doctor prepare prior to the exam so they know how to provide you with the best care. Have you considered requesting an interpreter to help discuss sensitive topics like these?
- * Bring the BRYCS resource, *Starting a Conversation with your Doctor* (see page 65) to your appointment. This resource provides an explanation of FGC to physicians as well as information on your experience and health concerns.



For Daughters

Girls usually go to the doctor every year for an annual check-up, sometimes called a ‘wellness exam.’ This is so a doctor can check on your health and make sure you are growing and developing in a healthy way. When you are at the doctor, they will check your weight, height, vision, hearing, blood pressure, lungs, and body mass. They will also ask questions about your sleeping and eating habits and check for signs of puberty. If you are growing breasts, developing pubic hair, or have your menstrual cycle, the doctor may ask you questions about these changes. It might feel uncomfortable for a doctor to ask you these questions or to touch parts of your body during an exam, but it’s an important exam for your health. Be sure your mom or another trusted adult is in the room with you during your exam. If you have any questions for the doctor, don’t hesitate to ask! They are used to getting all sorts of questions.

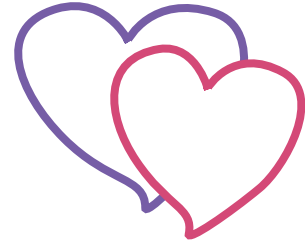
In some cultural communities, FGC is kept very private along with other topics about puberty, therefore talking about such things with your doctor can be intimidating. Nevertheless, it is important to let your doctor know if you have undergone FGC or if you have any symptoms or pain related to it. FGC is illegal and uncommon in the U.S. so letting your doctor know ahead of time can help them better treat you.

Talking to your doctor about your experience with FGC could also bring up a lot of emotion. You might feel embarrassed, confused, sad, or angry that you are circumcised. If you feel this way, it’s important to talk to a trusted adult about your feelings. This could be your mom, a relative, a teacher at school, or a religious leader.

Girls visit a doctor once a year for a wellness exam. Changes related to puberty do not necessitate going to the doctor outside of your routine check-up. However, if you are experiencing pain or discomfort that is out of the ordinary or related to FGC, let your mom or caregiver know. It may be important for you to schedule a doctor’s appointment.



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ Are there any questions you might want to ask the doctor at your next appointment?
- ◆ Are there any questions you feel embarrassed to ask the doctor? Sometimes it may feel awkward asking questions about your body, but doctors are used to all sorts of questions and they are here to help us.

Ask your Mom

- ◆ Is there anything in our family medical history I should be aware of?
- ◆ Do you have any suggestions for questions I should ask the doctor?
- ◆ Are there differences in going to the doctor in the U.S. from going to the doctor in our country?



Tell me a story

Take time to share stories about yourself with each other. Choose from this list or ask about something else you are curious about!

Something
funny that
happened
to you

Your
favorite
day

A
time when
you were
scared

Your
biggest
accomplishment

Your
craziest
dream

Something
you remember
about being
my age

Sex Education in Schools

For Moms

In most public schools in the U.S., children are taught a course on 'sex education'. The goal of the class is to provide students with an awareness of their bodies and the consequences of sexual activity. This usually takes place in grades 6, 7, or 8 by one of the teachers in the school. Often, boys and girls are split up for separate classes. In many states, parents are required to give consent before their child participates in the class and are often allowed to sit in on the instruction.

Girls learn about both male and female anatomy and gain an understanding of their reproductive parts, reproduction, conception and fetal development. They learn about puberty, including menstrual cycles, body image and shape, hormones, and growing hair on their legs, underarms, and private parts. They also learn about sex and how to protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as HIV/AIDS. Topics also include sexual violence prevention, condoms, healthy relationships, and different forms of birth control. Most public schools teach sex education based on medical facts, rather than values. However private or charter schools may teach about values and sex.

This can be a great time to talk to your daughter and teach her about your family's values about sex and how she can honor these and respect her body. If saving sex until marriage is highly valued in your family or your culture, one way to impress this on your daughter is to create open communication about the topic and begin building a healthy relationship with her early. Acknowledge her feelings and the challenges she may be facing. And don't just focus on the negative aspects of sex, help her focus on other good things like education, sports, and friends that sexual relationships at this age can sometimes take away from.



Sex Education and FGC

FGC is typically not covered in sex education courses, so if your daughter has experienced FGC, learning about the female anatomy may raise a lot of questions. In some cultures, FGC is meant to ensure a girl upholds the value of chastity. However, it's important to remember that the value of chastity can still be honored without FGC. It may seem like kids in the U.S. are more sexually active or have multiple partners, but this is not the case with everyone. Many parents in the U.S. share the same values and concerns you have about your child's sexual activity.

Moms, think about it...

- * Have you talked about sex with your daughter? This can be can be uncomfortable, however it is so important to begin the conversation early on, as she will start hearing bits and pieces at school and from friends.
- * Consider talking to your daughter about how she can protect herself from gender or sex-based violence or sexual assault. It is important she is prepared to protect herself and her body.
- * If you or your daughter struggle to talk about sex with each other, encourage her to find a trusted adult she can have these conversations with. You may also want to talk with your friends about how they talk about sex with their daughters. Learning tips to overcome the awkwardness from each other can be very helpful.



For Daughters

Now that you are older, you will soon take a course at school called 'sex education'. Usually you will take this class when you are in grades 6, 7, or 8 and it will only be with the girls in your grade. You will learn about male and female anatomy and have a better understanding of your private parts. You will learn about puberty, including menstrual cycles, body image and shape, contraceptives, and hormones. And you will learn about sex and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as HIV/AIDS. It might feel awkward to sit in this class and you and your friends might laugh a little, which is normal.

It is unlikely you will learn about FGC in your sex education class. If you have undergone FGC, remember that your anatomy may look a little different from what you learn in school, and that's okay. You should find an older person you trust to talk about this with. It could be your mom, an older sister, an aunt, or a teacher.

Some of your friends might be sexually active already, but it does not mean you have to be. It is better to focus your time on school, extra-curricular activities, and friends. You only get to be your age once and sex can get in the way of you accomplishing your goals. While sex can be a wonderful thing and you may feel like you want to have sex, it is not something to focus on now. Sex requires a lot of maturity and responsibility. Remember it's important to respect your body, mind, and spirit. Sex makes relationships more complicated and when not done responsibly, can lead to consequences you may not be ready for such as getting pregnant, complicating relationships, and contracting a sexually transmitted disease.



Family and cultural views on sex may stem from religious beliefs, traditional views, cultural values, or health implications. It is important for you to think about YOUR own views on sex. Where do your beliefs come from?

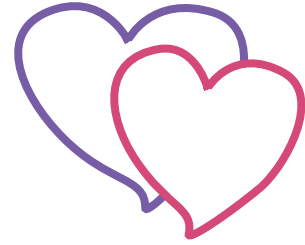


Daughters, think about it...

- * Have you talked about sex with your mom? This can be uncomfortable but if you have questions about sex, you should feel free to ask your mom. She can help explain what sex is and the values your family holds around sex. Do you know your cultural, religious or family values about sex? What do you think about sex?
- * Some cultures practice FGC to promote sexual chastity in women, however, there are other healthy and safe ways to wait to have sex. For some, sexual chastity is connected to your religion or tradition. Why do you think waiting to have sex is important?
- * How can your actions, the way you dress, and ways you communicate with male and female peers honor yourself, your culture, community, or your family?



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ Now that you are older, you will soon take a class at school on sex education. Have you heard anything about this class yet? Do you know what sex is? Do you have any questions about it?
- ◆ You might hear your friends talk about sex. What do you think about what they say?
- ◆ Do you know what our family and culture believe about sex before marriage? How do you think this is different from your friends or from U.S. culture?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ How is sex viewed in our culture? How does this compare to the U.S.? What are good things about both cultures we can adopt?
- ◆ How is romance in real life different from what we see in the movies?

Spending time together

What are some things we can do together? Some examples include:

Go for a walk

Read a book

Cook our favorite meal

Volunteer

Go shopping

Start a craft

I enjoy _____ with my mom because _____

I enjoy _____ with my daughter because _____

My favorite place to go with my mom is _____ because _____

The best thing about spending time together is _____



Building Healthy Relationships with Peers

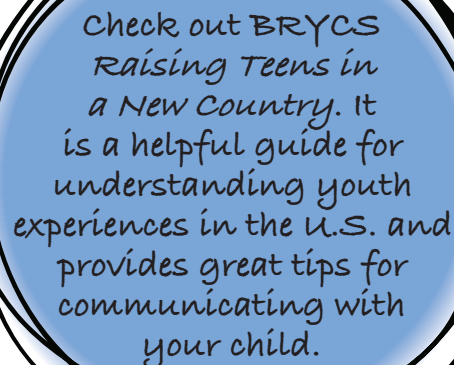
For Moms

As your daughter gets older, her friends are becoming more important than ever before. She is gaining more independence and spending more time with them. Her friends might be changing too, as she becomes more involved in extra-curricular activities at school or in the community. Or she might still be making friends which is okay too.

It can be very difficult for girls this age to develop friends and feel like they fit in, especially when they are new to the U.S. and new to a school. In addition to navigating friendships, your daughter may also be learning English, focusing on her classes and doing her homework, and learning in a new environment. School and community or religious groups can be really great places for her to find good friendships with girls her age that help her learn about U.S. culture and help her navigate these new spaces.

Youth represent an ethnically diverse population in the U.S. and hold a variety of beliefs about religion, values, and education. You may notice this in the friends your daughter is making. It is also very common in the U.S. to have friends of the opposite sex that are not romantic relationships.

At this age, girls are often influenced by their friends. Your daughter likely feels pressure to do things she typically would not do or act in certain ways simply to fit in. Having a sense of belonging or feeling a part of a group is essential at any age. They may be tempted by peer pressure to do things just to feel like they belong. Therefore, encouraging your daughter to find good friends is important.



Check out BRYCS *Raising Teens in a New Country*. It is a helpful guide for understanding youth experiences in the U.S. and provides great tips for communicating with your child.



As your daughter's hormones change, she may also start developing crushes or romantic feelings for her friends. Her hormones at this age may cause her to have sexual feelings, thoughts, and temptations she has never felt before. This can leave her heart pounding and a flushed face when she is around her crush. For a young girl this new feeling can come as a surprise. But you remember that feeling—which is why you can be such a great resource!

Your daughter likely spends a lot of time interacting with her friends online through social media. This has become very common in the U.S. and is something parents everywhere are trying to figure out how to monitor. Try to establish open conversations with your daughter about how she interacts with social media. Have her show you how to use social media so you better understand what she is doing.

Bullying is also something to be aware of at this age. This is when kids tease other kids at school or online and it happens to kids of any color, shape, or personality type. It can be very harmful to those who are targets of bullying. No one deserves this treatment no matter how they look, talk, what their grades are, or how they perform in sports. Talk to your daughter about how to identify bullying and teach her how to stand up for herself and others if she sees it happening. Make sure she talks to you and her teachers if she experiences or sees bullying take place.



Moms, think about it...

- * Moving to the U.S. can be exciting, scary, and lonely all at the same time, especially during adolescence when so many physical and emotional changes are taking place. Do you check on her regularly to see how she is feeling? Is she doing well in school? Is she making new friends?
- * Do you think your daughter has good friends? Do you think she is a good friend? As a parent, you may have a lot of experience finding good friends, but your daughter is just getting started. Help her identify good qualities she would want to have in a friend. Help her also identify qualities she wants to possess and give to others in a friendship.
- * Have you met your daughter's friends and their parents? Consider inviting them to your home and talk to them at school or community events.
- * Do you know how your daughter spends her time online? While this can be a great resource, there are also ways her safety can be at-risk. Set clear limits and expectations about internet use together.
- * Teach your daughter to be kind to others and to herself. The words she uses to describe herself and her peers have so much power and influence. It is important to choose words wisely and you can be an example of this!



For Daughters

As you get older, your friends become more important than ever. You are probably spending more quality time with them and developing more meaningful relationships with them. Your friends might be changing too, especially as you become more involved in sports, music or dance classes, or other extra-curricular activities at school or in the community. As a new student, you may still be in the process of finding friends.

It can feel very difficult to make good friends and feel like you fit in, especially as a new immigrant to the U.S. and as a new student. In addition to navigating friendships, you are also learning English, finding your classes, doing your homework, and learning a new environment at school. You are going through a lot!

School and cultural or religious groups are great places to find friends who can help you learn about U.S. culture and to have fun with.

At this age, you can also be very easily influenced by your friends. This is called 'peer pressure' and it is when you feel pressure to do something you wouldn't usually do because you want to fit in. Belonging and feeling a part of a group is important for girls of any age, but you don't have to do everything your friends do. It is a life long struggle to not be motivated by peer pressure, and to take actions based on your goals and values. This is usually easier to do when you have good friends. Keep this in mind as you spend more time with your friends.

Bullying is something to be aware of at your age. This is when kids tease other kids at school or online. It can be very hurtful to those who are targets of this kind of treatment. No one deserves to be bullied no matter how they look, talk, what their grades are, or how they perform in sports. If you see someone being bullied, stand up for them and if you are being bullied, stand up for yourself. If your friends are the ones bullying others, ask them to stop. Let your teachers and your parents know if you experience or see bullying taking place.



When you go through puberty your emotions can be strong and you might start developing crushes on your friends or people you see at school. These feelings can be confusing, but they are totally normal. Your face might get flushed or you might suddenly be at a loss for words when you are around someone you have a crush on. Your friends will start to develop crushes too. You might have crushes on the same people or they may spend more time with their crushes rather than you. This might make you feel left out or mad. It's important to talk to your mom or a trusted adult about your feelings. They can give you good advice for how to talk about this with your friends.

Daughters, think about it...

- * Right now, you're probably developing deeper friendships and experiencing aspects of adult life. This is exciting and scary! Take time to think about the people around you as you go through this journey. How are your friends supportive of you? How can you support them?
- * What do you think it means to be a good friend? Do you have friends that you think are good friends or friends who are role models to you? How are you a good friend and a role model?
- * Moving to the U.S. can be exciting, scary, and lonely all at the same time. It's okay to feel a range of emotions. Consider talking to your mom about your how you are feeling and about your friends. She has a lot of experience making friends and can be a good resource.



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ What are good qualities you want in a friend? What are good qualities you want to share with your friends?
- ◆ What do you like about your friends? Are there things about your friends you wish were different?
- ◆ Are there ever times you feel like you are pressured to do something you don't want to just to fit in?
- ◆ I would like to meet your friends. What if we invited them to dinner next week?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ What are good qualities you have in your friends? What are good qualities you share with your friends?
- ◆ As an adult, are there ever times you feel like you are pressured to do something you don't want to just to fit in? How do you make good decisions?
- ◆ What was it like having friends in our country of origin? What is it like here in the U.S.?
- ◆ I think I have a crush on someone, but I don't know what to do about it. How do I know if they like me?



Future Romantic Relationships and Marriage

For Moms

When your daughter starts going through puberty, she will have stronger emotions and she will probably start thinking about romantic relationships differently. Her body and her hormones are changing and developing quickly during this phase. She will experience sexual thoughts and desires for the first time, but she will also start to think more maturely about future romantic relationships and marriage. She is too young to marry, but she probably needs guidance sorting through these thoughts and feelings.

In your tradition, it might be common for girls to go through FGC at this age as a preparation for marriage or to preserve virginity until marriage. But this is not the

FGC is sometimes traditionally practiced to maintain chastity and to promote marriageability. However, this often suppresses female sexual feelings and can cause sex to be painful. Additionally, chastity can be maintained without undergoing FGC, especially if you help your daughter during her teenage years.

only way to preserve virginity or to have a healthy romantic relationship. If this is something you or your culture values, it is important to talk to your daughter about this.

Help your daughter understand that there is so much more to a healthy romantic relationship than sex. Things like love, commitment, trustworthiness, grace, and patience make up a marriage, and sex is a further expression of the love already shared!

Many parents avoid talking to their children about romance or about sex because they are afraid it may encourage their daughters to have inappropriate thoughts and feelings more than they already do or that it will force her to think about these things sooner than she should. What is most important is that you help guide her through these confusing thoughts. This will help develop a healthy pattern of having conversations on this topic and, as she continues to mature, you can continue to talk about romance and mature relationships together in an open and honest way.



In some cultures, girls feeling sexual desires is looked down upon, especially compared to boys. This can make girls feel abnormal or weird for feeling what they feel. This can be a great time to remind your daughter that though a sex drive is different for males and females, it is normal for girls to have a sex drive. Unfortunately, FGC can negatively affect a girls' sex drive and cause complications in romantic relationships. Women have a right to feel enjoyment in sex, which can be a beautiful part of a mature, healthy relationship.

Moms, think about it...

- * Think about ways you can show your daughter how to have healthy, romantic relationships and a strong marriage. You may also consider asking a relative or friend who has a healthy marriage to be a mentor to your daughter.
- * Help your daughter think about the kinds of things she would want in a future husband. Remind her that while it may be exciting to think about, there are other important things to focus on right now, such as school. Helping her find a balance is important.
- * Avoid judging your daughter's feelings or seeming critical even if she talks about superficial traits she wants in a future romantic relationship. Instead, offer supportive comments and ask questions that make her think more critically and maturely – she will get there soon enough!



For Daughters

Have you ever day dreamed about getting married or having a romantic relationship as an adult? Sometimes thinking about your future as an adult can be exciting and fun! You are maturing physically, emotionally, and spiritually and building a foundation for the kind of person you want to be. You might be thinking about how you want to act as a friend, daughter, student, or sister. You also might be thinking about your role someday as a girlfriend, a wife, or a mother.

Your family or your cultural community may hold certain values about sex, marriage, and romantic relationships. In your culture it may be common at this age to go through FGC in preparation for marriage. Sometimes this is done because some families and cultures believe FGC will help girls stay away from sex before they are married. The truth is, sex in a romantic relationship should only happen when there's mutual consent. Women can make the choice to wait to have sex until they are married without going through the harmful practice of FGC. Additionally, FGC can negatively affect a woman's ability to feel sexual pleasure, which can complicate future relationships.

It is important for you understand your cultural views on sex, while also developing your own. Though waiting to have sex until you are married may seem like a meaningless rule, your parents probably have a good reason for it and it might be helpful to ask them why. Waiting to have sex until you are older and more mature is a good decision to avoid the ways sex can complicate relationships.

Someday, romantic relationships will be a big part of your life. While you anticipate this, you can start thinking about what you want in a future romantic relationship or marriage and the character traits you may want in a future partner. You can also start talking about these things with your mom, a trusted adult, or a mentor.





Daughters, think about it...

- * What makes a good wife or husband?
- * What do you want in a marriage? Do you want children?
- * Are there marriages you admire? What do you admire about them?
- * What do you think love is? How are sex and love related?



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ You are getting to the age where you might start feeling a physical attraction to your peers. Do you feel that with anyone right now?
- ◆ Do you want to get married and have children?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ Are marriage relationships different in our culture compared to marriage in the U.S.? What is different?
- ◆ What character traits do you think are important in a marriage partner?
- ◆ Does our culture believe that FGC is required for marriage?
- ◆ At what age are you comfortable with me dating?

Alternative Rites of Passage

For Moms

You may have gone through a traditional rite of passage in your community that marked your transition from childhood to womanhood where your status changed as well as your roles and responsibilities in your community. This transition is much more ambiguous in Western societies and is hardly acknowledged. In some cultural communities, this rite of passage includes FGC, though many are abandoning this practice and celebrating 'alternative rites of passage.' Such practices retain the cultural elements of initiation into womanhood, but girls are not physically harmed through circumcision. Rather, during a ritual period, they are provided education on topics such as sex, HIV/AIDS, interpersonal skills, healthy relationships, religion, the importance of education, and women's empowerment. The ritual usually ends with a presentation of the girls to the community and honoring them as mature, adult women.

The emphasis on certain cultural practices during the alternative rite of passage varies greatly depending on the ethnic group. Some place greater importance on physical tests of bravery, others focus on spiritual practices, while others focus on practical education. In many rituals the girls form bonds with their community leaders and each other that last a lifetime.

Though pressures from your community leaders to have your daughter undergo FGC are very serious, there are many ways to honor your daughter's passage into womanhood that are safe, culturally enriching, and empowering to your daughter and your community.



If FGC was or is traditionally practiced in your community, consider these ideas as alternative ceremonies to honor and mark your daughter's passage into womanhood:

Host a 3-5-day ceremony for girls 9-13 years of age. Have the ceremony take place at a location away from your home so you are free from household chores and so all participants can focus on the girls being honored and celebrated in the program.

Engage other women, mothers, and girls from your community to help plan the ceremony for your daughters.

During the five days consider having lectures, group discussions, shared meals, games, physical competitions, and storytelling.

At the end of the time, invite others from the community to a public event where girls are presented with certificates in front of community members.

If your culture traditionally incorporates FGC rituals in more private settings with only women, then keep to this tradition.

Plan this during the summer or another time when you daughter is not in school so she can fully participate.

During the ceremony, consider scheduling different speakers and community leaders to provide education on the following topics:

Cultural education

FGC history and prevention in your cultural community

Health and psychological consequences of FGC

Sexual rights for girls

Sex in marriage

How to protect yourself from sexual violence

Male and female anatomy and sex education

Healthy dating relationships

Friendships

The importance of education and higher education

Goal setting for the future

Leadership development

The harms of early marriage and teen pregnancy



Moms, think about it...

- * What cultural traditions are important to your community and family? How could these be incorporated in a ritual or ceremony for your daughter, without her undergoing FGC?
- * As your daughter transitions to womanhood, what is important for her to know about becoming a woman? What characteristics of a woman would you like to pass on to your daughter?
- * Consider the importance of womanhood and the values you think are important to uphold as a refugee or immigrant woman in the U.S. What are aspects of womanhood from both cultures that you like? What are aspects from both cultures that you don't like? How can you and your daughter adopt the good of both cultures?



Global Rites of Passage

Cultures around the world promote traditions that incorporate rituals, ceremonies, or celebrations that mark the coming of age of their children. Consider important cultural rituals from other communities as you consider one for your own daughter or other girls in your community:

- * In the Maasai culture, girls who do not undergo FGC still have milk poured on their thighs, an integral product in their culture and traditionally a part of the ceremony.
- * Jewish communities around the world practice Bat Mitzvahs for their daughters when they turn 12. These generally include readings from the Torah, a blessing from the Rabbi, and a celebratory meal shared with family and friends.
- * In many Latin American communities, girls turning 15 celebrate a quinceañera which marks their transition from childhood to womanhood. It usually involves a celebration with friends and family.
- * In some cultures, girls finish the ceremonial event wearing the traditional headdress to mark her transition into womanhood as they would in traditional settings.
- * In other cultures, girls are given bracelets or other culturally relevant jewelry as a sign of her transition into womanhood.

Incorporate your unique cultural traditions into your alternative rite of passage and include only aspects that honor, protect, and empower your daughters!



For Daughters

In your culture, it might be common to have a ceremony that marks your transition from childhood to womanhood. It is a special ritual practice usually led by female community leaders and incorporates things like sex education and character building activities. You probably notice that in the U.S., the transition from childhood to womanhood usually goes unmarked and uncelebrated. Your cultural practices are important though, and it is good to continue living out your traditions. Your community may practice FGC in this ceremony or they may have abandoned this altogether. Either way, it is illegal to practice FGC in the U.S. or to travel outside of the U.S. to have it done.

At your age, it might already be time to participate in a coming of age ritual! To stop FGC, communities around the world are adopting 'alternative rites of passage' that celebrate coming of age without incorporating FGC or any other harmful practices. These usually involve going away for a few days with your female peers and female elders where you participate in activities like education about male and female anatomy, sex education, women's empowerment, and character building activities. At the end, you are presented to your community as a woman! When this happens, your community will place different expectations on you regarding responsibility, upholding cultural values, and behaving honorably as a member of your family.





Daughters, think about it...

- * How do you think life will change when you become a woman?
- * What characteristics and responsibilities do you think are important to display as a woman?
- * Does your culture have ways to celebrate becoming a woman other than through FGC? What are new traditions you and your mom can implement?



Heart to Heart



Ask your Daughter

- ◆ What do you think it means to be a woman? What are important characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of being a woman?
- ◆ Have you heard of ceremonies or rituals honoring girls' transition into womanhood? What types of things have you heard? What would you like to do?

Ask your Mom

- ◆ What are cultural traditions about becoming a woman that are unique to our community? Why do we practice these things?
- ◆ What are other ways that our family can celebrate my growing up?
- ◆ What was it like when you became a woman? How did things change for you?
- ◆ What are characteristics of women that you value?
- ◆ What are important values that women uphold in our culture? What are the values we see in the U.S.? Are some better than others?

What is a woman?

For Mothers

List five goals you have as a mother:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

(examples of goals could be to have dinner three times a week with the entire family, attend ESL classes to learn English at the same rate as your child, or spend individual time with each of your children)

What do you think it means to be a woman?

What do you admire about the women in your life?

What do you admire about yourself as a mother?

Share your goals and responses to this activity with your daughter.

How can you help her achieve her goals and keep her accountable?

How can she help you?



For Daughters

List five goals related to becoming a woman:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

(examples of goals could be to graduate from high school, have healthy relationships, learn English, etc.)

What do you think it means to be a woman?

Are there women in your life you admire or look up to? Why do you look up to them? Write their names in the hands on the tree below, then add some color!



Share your goals and responses to this activity with your mom. How can your mom help you accomplish your goals? How can you help her accomplish hers?

Ways to Engage in Advocacy Against FGC

There are many ways to raise awareness and advocate against FGC around the country!

Celebrate!

- ☺ [International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting](#) is February 6th! Take part in creating awareness in your community to #EndFGM.
- ☺ Participate in [International Day of the Girl Child](#) on October 11th which celebrates girls throughout the world by addressing their needs and the challenges they face while promoting empowerment.

Learn!

- 📖 [Amref](#) focuses on Alternative Rites of Passage efforts in Tanzania and Kenya.
- 📖 [Sahiyo](#) works to educate communities and create awareness through storytelling.
- 📖 [The Orchid Project](#) believes that education is the first step to ending FGC.

Take action in the United States!

- ✓ You can support making policy changes to end FGC in the U.S. by participating in Equality Now's [End FGM Campaign](#).
- ✓ [The AHA Foundation](#) is working to make policy changes in each state to ensure the safety of all girls.

Take action around the world!

- ✓ [The Girl Generation: Together to End FGM](#) celebrates the Africa-led movement to end FGM in one generation. Join the movement, see how girls around the world are making a difference and how you can too!
- ✓ Join [Youth For Change](#) in partnering with governments and organizations around the world to end gender-based violence, including FGC.
- ✓ [Integrate UK](#) uses peer education to empower youth to take action. Their resources allow young people in schools to raise awareness on FGM and how and where young people can seek help if they need it.



Join Women and Girls Around the World Saying NO to FGC

There is such a culture of silence about FGM. If you stand up and say, 'this happened to me', people will scrutinize you, but someone has to stand up and say, 'this can't go on happening.' This is a human rights abuse and it has to stop. Until the education of a girl is a right and not a privilege we are failing our women.

Jaha Dukureh,
Nobel Peace Prize Nominee,
Safe Hands for Girls Founder

I went through female genital mutilation not knowing what it was ... I was told it will make you a woman. My education has enabled me to learn about it and now I stand against it and stand so that no other girl can go through it ... When we look at kids we see children, we don't see the next prime minister. But if we start changing the way we look at them, and look at them as the future, it just changes the whole concept of how you teach.

Dr. Kakenya Ntkaiya,
Founder and President of Kakenya's Dream

My hope is that every young girl can become the woman of her dreams. If she really wanted to be a doctor or a teacher, I want to make sure that we are giving them that platform. We are protecting them from all these harmful practices, and they are able to become anything they want to become in life

Nice Leng'ete,

Time's 100 Most Influential People 2018

All of us have a voice and therefore have the responsibility to use it wisely. Thus, I choose to use my voice for myself and all those women who have been silenced under the burden of tradition.

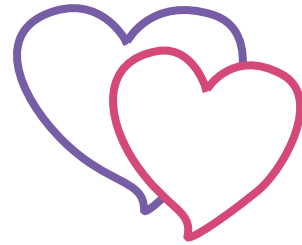
Priya Ahluwalia,

student at Tata Institute of Social Sciences

- Mumbai



Heart to Heart



Do you want to engage in prevention efforts and advocacy against FGC? What ways do you want to participate?

What are things you can do together as a mother and a daughter to help end FGC?

Can you be an advocate within your culture?
What are the needs of your community?



Notes to my Mom

[illegible]

Notes to my Daughter

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Acknowledgments

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS), a project of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), maintains the nation's largest online collection of resources related to refugee and immigrant children and families. BRYCS' overarching goal is to facilitate information-sharing and collaboration among service providers, strengthening the capacity of service organizations across the United States to support the safety, stability, and well-being of newcomers. Please visit www.brycs.org for more information.

This guide was authored by Jenny Siegel, BRYCS Consultant. Hilary Chester, PhD, Associate Director, Anti-Trafficking Service Program and Alissa Rubio, BRYCS Information and Research Specialist provided overall guidance and management. Jacquelin Zubko-Cunha, MA, BRYCS Program Coordinator and Kathleen Goss, Program Associate, provided support. Special thanks to SYZYGY Media for their expertise in design and layout. BRYCS also acknowledges the work of our community partners Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Catholic Community Services of Utah, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington for their efforts putting together focus groups within their communities.

Most importantly, BRYCS deeply appreciates the invaluable input from the refugee and immigrant women and girls who participated in focus groups, without whom this handbook would not be possible. We acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the extraordinary challenge of opening up about their experiences and thoughts on Female Genital Cutting.

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Images on pages 21 & 64 are from the World Health Organization (2018). Care of girls and women living with female genital mutilation: a clinical handbook. <http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272429>.



TYPES OF FGC

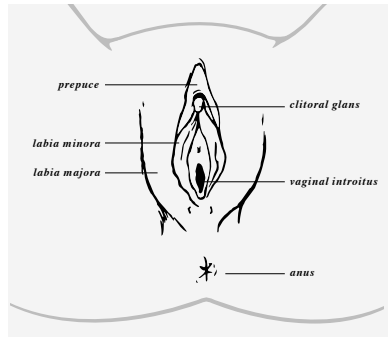
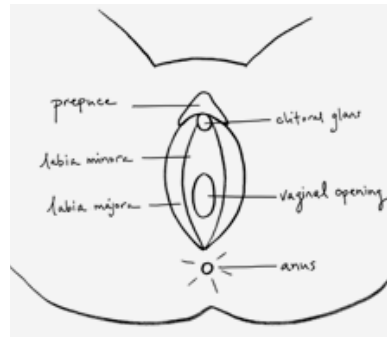
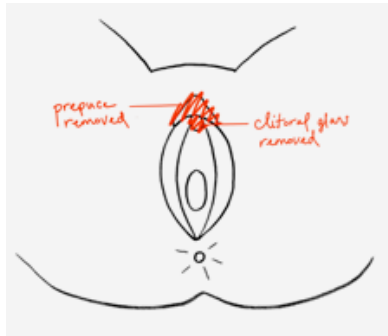


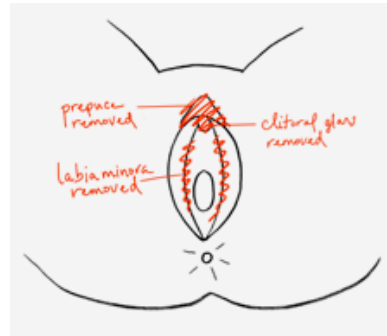
Diagram of unaltered genitalia



Drawing of unaltered genitalia



Type I: prepuce and clitoral glans removed



Type II: prepuce, clitoral glans and labia majora removed



Type IIIa: labia minora closed



Type IIIb: labia majora closed



Your visit to the OB/GYN

In the U. S., women are encouraged to visit their OB/GYN, a doctor who specializes in women's health, every year.

You may request a male or female doctor when making an appointment.

Mothers can accompany their daughters during appointments.

For teens and women ages 15 to 21, this visit is usually a conversation about their health and a chance to ask questions about their developing bodies.

A pap smear is recommended for women ages 21 and up every 3-5 years to test for cervical cancer. If you have never had a pap smear, ask your doctor to explain the process.

For women ages 22 to 44, family planning and fertility are important topics. An internal pelvic exam and a breast exam are done.

Mammograms, an X-ray picture of the breast used to look for early signs of breast cancer, are recommended for women ages 40 and up.

Let your doctor know if you need an interpreter, are uncomfortable, or have any questions about your visit. You can see a different doctor if you remain uncomfortable or feel that your needs are not met.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Collective Voices for Improving the Care and Reducing the Risk of FGC

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services
3211 4th St NE Washington DC, 20017
Email: info@brycs.org www.brycs.org



BRYCS COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS:

Starting a Conversation with your Doctor

For women and girls who have
experienced Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

Why is FGC practiced?

FGC is the collective term for a range of procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. It is often performed to mark a girl's passage into womanhood and full membership in her community as an adult. It can also be seen as a way to ensure a daughter's marriageability, and therefore her social and economic future, as certain types of FGC can be a physical indication and proof of virginity. Other communities perform it because they believe it is prescribed by their religion, however it is important to remember that the practice is not specific to one culture or religion. In many instances, individuals may not want to continue the practice, but the threat of being ostracized and pressure to conform to the ideals of family, community, and culture are stronger.

Considerations and Cultural Sensitivity

Health practitioners should do their best to provide culturally competent care by learning about the cultural and historical roots of FGC, the different types, and the health and psychological consequences. Additionally, a referral to a more knowledgeable physician would be appreciated, if it is in the best interest of the woman.

Prenatal care and gynecological exams should include topics focused on the woman and the girl's health, not only FGC related topics. Be communicative with the female patient during a gynecological exam, letting her know the steps and procedures, as this may be her first time visiting an OB/GYN.

Are there laws against FGC?

It is illegal in the U.S. to perform or assist to perform FGC on anyone under the age of 18. The U.S. considers FGC to be a violation of human rights, gender-based violence, and a form of child abuse. A woman or girl who has undergone FGC is **not at fault** and has not violated any U.S. laws. Federal law makes discrimination against anyone who has undergone these procedures illegal.

Health providers should learn the intentions of mothers of daughters regarding FGC and work collaboratively with families to prevent the practice in their communities. If you suspect or have reason to believe that a minor has undergone FGC, mandatory reporting laws must be followed.

I believe I have experienced Female Genital Cutting ____.

- ☐ Type 1: partial or total removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy)
- ☐ Type 2: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora/majora (excision)
- ☐ Type 3: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal (infibulation)
- ☐ Type 4: other (e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area)

I have questions or concerns about:

- ☐ Pain/discomfort
- ☐ Urination
- ☐ Menstruation
- ☐ Prenatal care
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Childbirth
- ☐ Fertility
- ☐ Decreased satisfaction during intercourse
- ☐ Defibulation/Reconstructive surgery

- ☐ I would like an interpreter.
- ☐ This is my first visit to the OB/GYN.
- ☐ I would prefer a female physician/nurse.

Please prioritize confidentiality over education and training needs of medical students or colleagues.

Appendix

Additional Resources

To learn more about our project, Community Conversations: Collective Voices for Improving the Care & Reducing the Risk of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) visit www.brycs.org.

For additional information and resources on Female Genital Cutting, take a look at our [highlighted resource list](#).

What to expect from this book

This book was created for parents and preteens who are new to the U.S. and addresses things that often come up in families raising girls in the United States. This book focuses on the healthy development of girls and includes the following topics:

- * FGC
- * How to talk about FGC
- * Normal body development for preteens
- * Health implications of FGC
- * What to expect when visiting the doctor
- * Sex Education at School
- * Friends in the U.S.
- * Building Healthy Relationships
- * Alternative Rites of Passage

This book is intended for mothers and daughters or caregivers of girls who are new to the U.S. to read through and talk about together. However, girls may feel more comfortable talking to an older sister, an aunt, or even a grandmother, which is just fine and the book can be used in the same way. The important thing is that you talk about these topics and provide the support girls need to transition into womanhood in a safe and healthy way. Feel free to openly share your opinions with one another and ask questions.

This can help girls and their caregivers understand each other better and strengthen their relationships. This is especially important as you transition into a new culture and as girls transition from childhood to womanhood. Conversation starters and questions are provided on each topic.