

## **The International Day of the Girl 11th October 2024**

The International Day of the Girl highlights the challenges girls face and promotes girls' empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights. Girls and young women face particular safeguarding issues we must be aware of.

### **UNICEF says:**

- Today, one in five young women aged between 20 and 24 were married as children.
- Nearly one in four partnered/married adolescent girls have experienced sexual or physical abuse.
- Globally, 75% of new HIV infections among adolescents occur in girls.
- One in three adolescent girls suffer from anaemia, which can be caused by malnutrition.
- Almost double the number of adolescent girls (one in four) compared to boys are not in any form of education, employment or training.

To mark this annual event this briefing raises awareness of some key safeguarding issues, and resources and training to support your efforts in safeguarding girls and young women:

- Early Forced Marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Honour Based Violence
- Breast Flattening and Other Harmful Practices
- Sexual Exploitation
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

Lets support our girls' visions for the future in Hillingdon. Let's work to provide all girls with equality, hope and empowerment.

### **Theme for 2024**

The 2024 International Day of the Girl theme is 'Girls' vision for the future'. Go to UNICEF for more information.

unicef  | for every child





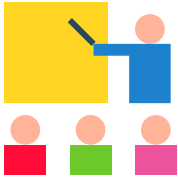
## Early Forced Marriage

Early forced marriage is where one or both individuals are below 18 years old. It is a violation of children's rights.

In the UK, the legal age for marriage is 18, following recent changes to the law to protect children from being coerced into marriage. No child can consent to marriage.

Early forced marriage often has devastating impacts on girls, including disruption to education, increased risk of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and serious health consequences from early pregnancies. Early forced marriage is child abuse.

Child marriage is a global issue. It is fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, social norms and insecurity.



Training on forced marriage is currently available on Learning Zone. Next session is 14th November and there are plenty of spaces.

**[Book onto the training here](#)**

## What to do if you are concerned

If you are concerned about a girl at risk of early forced marriage report this to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). It is a safeguarding concern. You do not need consent.

The UK Government's [Forced Marriage Unit](#) operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to:

- Victims and potential victims of forced marriage
- Professionals seeking advice

telephone: +44 (0) 20 7008 0151  
email: [fmu@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fcdo.gov.uk)

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

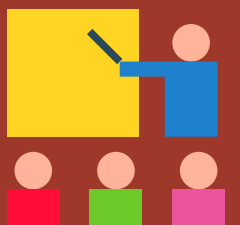


According to the World Health Organisation FGM means "*all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.*"

FGM is child abuse. It is a safeguarding concern and it is illegal. If you suspect it, gather information and report it to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). You do not need consent.

Girls are more at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) during the school holidays. Be vigilant and curious about long holidays, female-only holidays, girls talking about 'becoming a woman' ceremonies, parents being evasive about holidays, or girls saying they are being asked to keep holidays or events secret. Ask questions. Be direct.

Read up on the key information you need and find resources to support you in identifying and assessing risk of FGM available from the [National FGM Centre](#).



The Safeguarding Partnership delivers free training on FGM for all professionals working with children and adults.

**[Book your place through Learning Zone](#)**



## Breast Flattening and Other Harmful Practices

Breast flattening is when a girl's breasts are flattened to slow down or stop them growing, using hot stones, hammers, or spatulas or elastic belts or binders. This is one of a number of harmful practices that affect girls. Breast flattening usually starts with the first signs of puberty, which can be as young as nine years old and is usually carried out by female relatives.

You can find out more about breast flattening and other harmful practices from the National FGM Centre. Just click on the icon.

Breast flattening can cause significant health and developmental issues including abscesses, cysts, itching, tissue damage, infection, discharge of milk, asymmetry of the breasts, fever, and even the complete disappearance of one or both breasts. There may also be an impact on the child's social and psychological well-being.

Harmful practices are persistent practices and behaviours that are grounded on discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other grounds as well as multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination, and they often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering.

**Breast flattening is child abuse.**

If you suspect that a girl is at risk of breast flattening gather information from the girl if it is safe to do so, and report it to the [Stronger Families Hub](#).

**It is a safeguarding concern so you do not need consent.**

## Honour-Based Violence (HBV)

Honour Based Abuse is often thought of as a 'cultural', 'traditional' or 'religious' problem. It can affect people of all ages, but often begins early in the family home. It can lead to a deeply embedded form of coercive control, built on expectations about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. It can involve a whole range of abuses including violence, emotional abuse, sexual violence, and even homicide, which are used to control or punish predominantly girls and women for perceived 'shameful' or 'dishonourable' behaviour. It happens in the UK as well as elsewhere.



The Karma Nirvana charity offers a confidential helpline and specialised services for those facing honour-based abuse and forced marriage in the UK.  
0800 5999 247 / Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

Karma Nirvana say:

- Victims of Honour Based Abuse experience abuse for much longer than those not identified as at risk of Honour Based Abuse
- Victims of Honour Based Abuse are seven times more likely to experience abuse from multiple perpetrators, and are at greater risk of serious harm or homicide
- Research suggests that at least one so-called 'honour' killing occurs in the UK every month (and this is likely to be an underestimate)

If you are concerned about a girl at risk of HBV report this urgently to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). It is a safeguarding concern. you do not need consent.

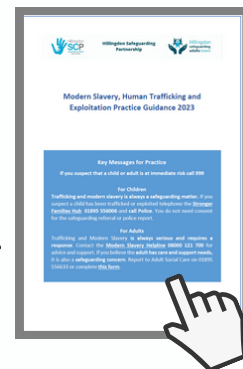
**Call 999 if there might be any immediate risk to any woman or girl**

# Sexual Exploitation

Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking. This can occur in homes, schools, and communities, and during conflicts or natural disasters where protection mechanisms may be weak.

Exploitation of girls can take many forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, and trafficking. Girls may be manipulated, coerced, or threatened into situations where they are exploited for the benefit of others. It's important to recognize the signs of exploitation, such as changes in behaviour, unexplained absences, or possession of expensive items, and take action to protect and support the victims.

Use the Hillingdon Modern Slavery and Exploitation Practice Guidance to support your efforts to safeguard suspected victims. The guidance includes a handy flow chart to follow.



## #LookCloser

The #LookCloser campaign by The Children's Society, British Transport Police, and the National County Lines Coordination Centre raises awareness about child exploitation and abuse, urging the public and businesses to recognise and report signs of exploitation

If you suspect any form of exploitation of a child:

Call 999 if you suspect immediate risk.

Report all safeguarding concerns to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). You do not need consent because it is a safeguarding concern.

## Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

Women's Aid defines domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the majority of cases it is experienced by women.

Domestic abuse also affects teenage girls directly. Teenage girls need support to recognise indicators of unhealthy, coercive or controlling relationships. The Children's Society has information about young people and relationship abuse.



Targeted programmes run by the council can help. [Click here](#) to explore programmes available for children and young people to help build self esteem, understand healthy relationships and get sexual health, reproductive and relationship advice.

If you suspect a girl, or other young person, is at risk of domestic abuse or sexual violence this is a safeguarding concern.

Report your concerns to the [Stronger Families Hub](#). You do not need consent.