

Early Marriage and Female Genital Cutting



Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit

A Faith Leader Toolkit

Early Marriage and Female Genital Cutting



CIFA c/o Washington National Cathedral
Massachusetts & Wisconsin Avenues, NW
Washington, DC 20016
info@cifa.org www.cifa.org
© 2012 Center for Interfaith Action

Table of Contents

Introduction to the Faith Leader Toolkit

Letter to Faith Leaders



Get Started

Introduction to Conversation Starters
Conversation Starters – Early marriage (EM)
Conversation Starters – Female genital cutting (FGC)



Begin the Conversation

Introduction to Information Sheets
Information Sheets – Early marriage (EM)
Information Sheets – Female genital cutting (FGC)



Engage Women

Introduction to Women's Modules
Women's Modules – Early marriage (EM)
Women's Modules – Female genital cutting (FGC)



Engage Youth

Introduction to Youth Modules
Youth Modules – Early marriage (EM)
Youth Modules – Female genital cutting (FGC)



Activity Kit

Introduction to EM Flipchart Activity and Anatomy Lesson
Instructions and additional narrative for the EM Flipchart Activity
EM Flipchart
Instructions for Anatomy Lesson
Anatomy Flipchart

Introduction to the Faith Leader Toolkit

Welcome, and thank you for picking up this toolkit! If you are reading this, you may be interested in ways to engage your community in conversations about female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM), or even simply educate yourself further about these harmful traditions. In this faith leader toolkit, you will find what you need to begin doing just that!

Every document, activity, and educational tool in this faith leader toolkit is designed to help you learn more about FGC and EM, and talk about eliminating these practices to all members of your community, whether in conversation in their homes, one-on-one, or in youth or women's groups.

It's a great idea to begin by educating yourself about the cultural reasons behind these practices, and the negative effects they have on girls and women in our communities. Start by brushing up on what your religious texts have to say about EM and FGC by reading the **Conversation Starters** in **"Get Started."** Then, when you feel like reviewing key facts and preparing yourself to answer some tough, frequently asked questions about FGC and EM, then you can move on to the **Information Sheets** in **"Begin the Conversation."**

Once you feel you understand FGC and EM from a theological perspective AND know your key facts and information about FGC and EM, use the **Conversation Starters** in **"Get Started"** to begin engaging your community in conversations about FGC and EM, and other harmful traditions. **Conversation Starters**, along with the **Information Sheets**, can be used as references when talking to your congregants in their homes, or even one-on-one. They are meant largely for an adult audience, mainly parents of young girls. However, they can be used as you feel appropriate with any age group, depending on how your community currently feels about FGC and EM.

Women and young girls are the people in your community most affected by the harmful traditional practices of FGC and EM. Therefore, we have crafted special modules/lessons plans for the women's and youth groups that may be associated with your house of worship. All of the activities in the **Women's Group Modules** in **"Engage Women"** and **Youth Group Modules** in **"Engage Youth"** are specifically tailored to appropriate sub-groups within the larger groups of "women" and "youth." The **Women's Group Modules** contain discussion questions, religious text references and activities for married women with sons, daughters, or no children, and young/unmarried women. The **Youth Group Module** contains discussion questions, religious text references, and activities for children 14 and under and youth 15-18, for mixed groups of both boys and girls. Each **Women's Group Module** or **Youth Group Module** can be taught as an entire, unified lesson, or excerpted as you see fit. These are meant to serve as a guide, so you may modify the lessons as you see fit – however, make sure that the key messages in each lesson get across to all participants.

Along with each **Women's Group Module** or **Youth Group Module**, there is an **"Activity Kit"**, consisting of an **Early Marriage Flipchart Activity** and a **Female Anatomy Lesson/FGC Anatomy Guide** to be used as dictated in each lesson. Please read all relevant instructions, and make sure you are familiar with the **Early Marriage Flipchart Activity** and **Female Anatomy Lesson/FGC Anatomy Guide**, before using them in any setting.

Because different approaches may be required for different groups of people in your community, each piece of this toolkit has been designed for a fairly specific audience. Remember, however, that it is up to you how you choose to use the tools, documents, activities, and information in here to engage your community.

This faith leader toolkit is intended to help you start (and continue) open, honest conversations about two harmful practices that keep girls and women from reaching their full potential. With your help, we can stop harmful practices like FGC and EM, and spread a message of love, kindness, and acceptance towards all people – this is something that almost every faith in the world has in common.

Enough talk – let's get started!

Early Marriage (EM) and Female Genital Cutting (FGC): A Faith Leader Toolkit to Address Harmful Traditional Practices in Your Community

Dear Faith Leader,

Thank you for picking up this toolkit. It takes a lot of courage to begin open, honest conversations about harmful practices that are deeply entrenched in a community's culture and tradition. We commend you for taking this first step to eradicating female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM) and promoting the health and wellbeing of girls and women in your community.

No matter what your stance has been in the past, you can make a big difference in helping your community think more deeply about these practices. Whether you have never spoken to your community about FGC and EM, or whether you have been speaking out against these practices for a long time, we offer you several ways of starting or re-energizing the conversations around these issues. Your congregation looks to you for guidance and support; this means that you are uniquely positioned to make lasting change in the lives of girls today, and for generations to come.

We understand that FGC and EM will likely be difficult to discuss. This toolkit is designed to educate and make it easier for you to talk about these harmful practices. In it, you will find resources that will arm you with medical facts and theological references that speak out against FGC and EM, and ways to answer the tough questions you may face along the way.

We have worked with local and international partners and with faith leaders from diverse faith backgrounds across Africa to develop this toolkit. We recognize that eradicating FGC and EM is a vital step to promote the health and wellbeing of girls and women, which will greatly improve the health and success of communities and nations as a whole.

Please feel free to share this approach with peers of your own faith or across faiths in your community. Our hope is that, by equipping yourself with information about this new intervention, you can become a part of the movement to change the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of communities – and the lives of girls who need your support the most.

Thank you for joining us in our mission to empower girls by eliminating FGC and EM.

National Faith Leader
Title
Denomination
Country

Ministry of Health Official
Title
Ministry of Health
Country

Secretary General
National Inter-Religious Council
Country



EARLY MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit

Get Started

Conversation Starters

Introduction

Congratulations, and thank you for your willingness to empower girls in your community through the eradication of harmful traditional practices! Female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM), though devastating to a girl's health, well-being, and future, continue to be practiced in many communities, and viewed as good and necessary. Therefore, it may seem a daunting task to change the minds of your community members about these harmful practices. However, educating yourself and continuing to brush up on your newly acquired knowledge about FGC and EM will help you pave the way for real and sustainable change in your area.


These conversation starters are a good first step to engaging your community in a (you guessed it!) conversation about the practices of FGC and EM. They are meant to provide talking points and key messages to convey to your congregation and community about these practices. Each talking point/key message comes with appropriate theological/scriptural references to back them up.

There are many ways to use these conversation starters – it's up to you. No matter how you choose to use them, though, be sure to study them carefully before you begin talking to your community about FGC and EM – and continue to use them as a resource for yourself, as needed.

Instructions

Read through these conversation starters, and the theological/scriptural references around each talking point/key message. Reflect on them, and absorb the information. If you find anything you disagree with, take this as an opportunity to educate yourself further. These theological/scriptural references have been tested and approved by some of the highest religious authorities in Ethiopia. When you feel ready, and adequately prepared to speak about FGC and EM using these talking points/key messages and their attendant scriptural references, you can begin engaging your community in a discussion about these issues. There are several ways you can do this:

- If you make frequent home visits to your community members, use them to help you structure conversations about these topics. These conversations can be as long or as short as you like – you don't need to get to every talking point/key message! Just one per conversation can be enough, since everyone will likely have a lot to say.

- 
- If you lead a men's or women's group, use them as a way to informally get them thinking about the realities of FGC and EM for their daughters. It is best to begin by engaging a small, trusted group you know will listen and discuss issues with each other respectfully.
 - If you feel comfortable enough, you can use these conversation starters to address larger groups of adults or youth in your community.

Again, how you use these conversation starters is up to you. Once you have educated yourself, and feel prepared, the possibilities are endless!



Muslim Conversation Starters

Early Marriage

These conversation starters are intended for a Muslim audience. They should be used by Muslim faith leaders/Imams as a guide to address the entire congregation. The objective of this sermon starter is to highlight the sanctity of marriage, the importance of waiting until the right time for marriage, and that early marriage (child marriage) is a sin.

Key Messages

1) Marriage is a gift from Allah, and should be treated as such.

- One way we can do this is to respect our future spouses enough to know when they are prepared, and have adequate knowledge of what marriage involves.
- “Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (sunnah) path is not from among us.” (ibn Majah)
- “Whoever is able to marry, should marry”. (Bukhari) The term “able” is important here; it is interpreted as physical ability/maturity as well as mental ability/maturity, and financial preparedness.

2) We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage.
 - i. We must have knowledge of all that marriage entails, including spousal relations and raising a family.
 - ii. Underage youth do not have adequate knowledge of what marriage entails, and are not adequately prepared to have joyful marital relations or raise a family.
 - iii. Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before menses, or even directly after. By the time of menses, the pelvis is only 85% developed; it will only develop fully by the age of 18. Therefore, pregnant girls under 18 face a higher risk of experiencing obstructed labor.
- There are several verses that may be interpreted as arguments against waiting for marriage.
 - i. “O people, Jibaraell has brought unto me a divine command stating that girls are like fruits from a tree. If they are not plucked in time then they get rotten by the rays of the sun and a slight blow of the wind will result in their falling down from the tree.” (narrated by Imam Sadia) As the Prophet’s teachings do not contradict one another,

this sunnah should be interpreted in light of the previous sunnah, which provides ways for us to wait and keep ourselves from temptation. This verse does not warn against waiting the proper amount of time; rather, it warns against delaying marriage when we are, in fact, fully capable of entering into marriage and mature enough to do so.

- ii. "When a youngster marries early in his youth, Shaitaan (Satan) cries out of desperation and says, 'Alas! This person has protected one third of his religion, now he will protect the remaining two thirds also.'" (Mustadrakul Wasail).
- iii. Education, self-discipline, and independence are signs that someone is ready for marriage.
- iv. Marrying simply to satisfy sexual urges/maintain chastity is a sign that we are, in fact, not seeing the whole picture/purpose of marriage as Allah sees it.

3) Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual unconditional love and respect.

- Marrying a young girl breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect.
- Quran 30:21 "...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another..."
 - i. Marriage is an institution of love, dedication, and genuine affection founded from a consensual, equal match.
- "The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manners and kindest to his wife." (Abu Dawud)
 - i. Marrying a young girl before she is ready, and forcing her into sexual relations is the opposite of kindness. A good Muslim will not marry a woman without her full consent, and will treat her with kindness as a partner.

4) Like all things, marriage has its proper time. We should only marry when we are mentally, physically, and financially prepared.

- Learning self-control is a better way to ensure virginity until after 18.
- Sexual morality and purity is best before marriage, and fidelity is necessary for a happy marriage afterwards. However, this does not mean we should marry before we are ready or as early as possible.
- Marrying a girl off for financial gain is against Allah's wishes. Therefore, as faithful Muslims, we should fight against and avoid marriages underpinned by direct or indirect material benefit (as widely observed in Amhara). A true Muslim understands the importance of supporting the poor without taking their young girl in return.
 - i. Imam as-Sadiq (as) states: "The blessed of women are those who ask for small living expenses, and the evil of them are those who are demanding in terms of living expenses."
 - ii. Parents are supposed to pave the way for their daughters to marry at their right age; they are not supposed to impose a high dowry or demand top-of-the-social-ladder husbands for their daughters before they are even ready to marry.

5) Marriage should enhance our lives, not harm our futures. In other words, it should be supportive but not abortive of our future glorious destinies. Girls should not be considered as born to suffer.

- Child marriage is like burying a young girl alive – her future is irreparably stunted, for her schooling is cut short. Additionally, both mothers under 18 and their babies have a much higher chance of dying in childbirth.
- **Quran 65:4 “If you are in doubt concerning those of your wives who have ceased menstruating, know that their waiting period [before one can divorce them] shall be three months. The same shall apply to those who have not yet menstruated.”**
 - i. This is the only verse which specifically mentions early marriage. A footnote acknowledges that child marriages were common custom in the days of Mohammed, dating back to “**al- gahiliyya,**” or, “**the era of ignorance.**”
- It is a fact that adolescent girls are not physically prepared to have healthy pregnancies and births. They are not fully physically developed until at least two years after the first menses.
- **“O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” [The Prophet as narrated by Al-Bukhaari]** This sunna clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into this highly regarded and honored institution.
 - i. Marriage is a means to a spiritual end, not the end itself.
 - ii. Happy marriages, based on choice, love, and mutual respect, are what Allah really desires. Aisha gave her consent before marrying the Prophet.
- Prosperity and community growth comes from choice: give your children the choice of whom to marry and when.

The following story shows how forced, early marriage is often devastating to the lives of young girls, and thereby the lives of their families and communities. EM does not breed healthy, loving families: instead, it can only breed fear and mistrust.

WOMAN'S TESTIMONY – THE HORROR OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN ARTUME FARSI, AMHARA

I was married off at 13. I had never even heard about sex before – I had only ever been to the public festival of a wedding. On our wedding night, I did not know why we slept together, or why my husband kept pulling me closer to his armpit and began to touch me. As he touched my body with his genitalia, I screamed and continued to suffer through the painful, agonizing sex for about an hour. Because of my circumcision (FGC) and early age, I could not stand sex with my husband (adult) in the subsequent days. A week later, I ran away to my parents and told them of my horrors, but they rejected my complaints, and returned me back to my husband, for they were supposed to re-pay my dowry if they did not.

To avoid the intolerably painful sex, I spent several nights in a tree in a nearby forest. Finally, community leaders intervened and facilitated divorce. Even though this man took my virginity and enjoyed my early childhood for a while, the community leaders decided that my parents needed to return the dowry. My parents sold their ox and re-paid the dowry (which they already used for the wedding feast). During the divorce, the man pressured the community elders and forced me to sign a contract not to re-marry within a fifteen kilometer radius of our community. I am lucky, for my parents managed to sell their ox and re-pay my dowry. My friend, who suffered through a similar marriage, had no one to pay back the dowry, so she committed suicide (hung herself).

Conversation Starters

Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

These conversation starters are intended for a Muslim audience. They should be used by Muslim faith leaders/Imams as a guide to address the entire congregation, or as a resource for conversations with congregants and community members. The objective of these conversation starters is to promote the dignity of human life by the ending of the practice of female genital cutting (FGC).

Key Messages

1) All human life has dignity.

- We are all perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator.
 - i. Cutting or harming a body part that we were born with when there is nothing wrong with it, as happens in FGC, goes against Allah's wishes.
 - ii. "...and there is no changing Allah's creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know" (Quran 30:30)
 - iii. "...and make not your own hands contribute to your destruction" (Quran 2:195)

2) Both boys and girls should be treated with love and respect.

- Quran 60:8 "God loves the equitable."
 - i. We are all fellow human beings, not one physically inferior to the other: "Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men." (Sahih reported by Abu-Dawud (RA) This is physically, factually true – cutting of the clitoris is equivalent to the cutting off of the entire male penis. We are physically wired very similarly, just constructed differently! Allah wants us to act according to the truth, and FGC is not in line with this Quranic ideal. In other words, gender inequality is not Islamic.
- Acts such as FGC punish the innocent in the absence of a crime—which is an injustice before Allah. The Prophet did not recommend it for any of the women in his house, nor did he approve of the practice when he saw it being done.
 - i. **Hadith of Ummu-Attiya:** This is the Hadith most commonly used to link FGM/C to Islam. The Hadith relates that the Prophet said to a woman of Medina, a circumciser called Ummu-Attiyah, "O Umm `Attiyyah, 'ashimmi' and do not exaggerate; as doing so will preserve the fairness of the woman's face and satisfy the husband."As one

Islamic scholar noted, one line of this hadith attempts to express the reaction of the Prophet to the screaming of the girl being circumcised. “The Prophet held his head and shared her agony” for a while—meaning he disagreed with this pre-Islamic, harmful traditional practice. Cognizant of the contextual interpretation of the Hadith, other scholars believe that during that time, the Prophet was not authoritative enough to strongly denounce such widely tolerated traditional practice.

- **Quran 4:124 “But the believers who do good works, both men and women, shall enter paradise.”**
 - i. Men and women are equal in the sight of God.
 - ii. FGC is a practice that can harm a girl for the rest of her life – affecting her ability to enjoy a relationship with her husband, and often making childbirth complicated and unbearable.

3) Allah’s creation is perfect.

- “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
 - i. The beauty of a human body is to be left as it was created by Allah, unless there is an authentic basis allowing interference with it. Authentic bases include medical indications and the clearly stated male circumcision. Conversely, FGC could be seen as an insult to Allah that is an issue to repent/confess for saying (in action): **your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!** Of course, the underpinning argument is that Allah has created women abnormally, and that we need to take corrective measures. Current medical science, however, agrees with perfect creation.
 - ii. The Chinja is a myth. The perfect creator would not put something there that makes every female body unclean from birth.
- FGC is not a healthy form of circumcision or covenant with God, as with male circumcision.
 - i. It is instead an insult to God through an act of violence and humiliation on innocent people.
 - ii. It is not equivalent to male circumcision – in fact, it is akin to removing the entire male member.
- “Oh you messenger [Muhammad] proclaim [the message] which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And if you do not then you have not conveyed His message” (Quran: 5: 67).
 - i. If FGC was a religious requirement, the Prophet would have explicitly taught it, and his wives/daughters would have been circumcised. The Prophet taught about correct Islamic behavior in all aspects of life, including toilet manners, table manners, relations between husband and wife, and so on. It is not logical, therefore, that he would be silent on a matter that affects an important human reproductive organ.
- Kindness means never inflicting harm unless necessary – and even then, mercy is far more admirable

4) Knowledgeable, responsible, happy, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.

- The harms of FGC outweigh the benefits.
 - i. FGC can cause infertility.
 - ii. FGC can cause infections, whether during the procedure or afterwards.
 - iii. FGC has lifelong health consequences, and can lead to death.
- “And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people” (Quran 5:32).
 - i. There is no question that stopping the practice of FGC saves and greatly improves lives. True heroes in the community are those who combat harmful and deadly practices like FGC.
 - ii. Halting unnecessarily cruel practices like FGC can improve the lives of the whole community – girls who are healthier are happier, and enter into marriages better-prepared to enjoy a good relationship with their husbands.
- According to the Quran, any act that amounts to changing Allah’s creation is considered the work of Satan.
 - i. Iblis (Satan) who said, “Verily I will mislead them and surely arouse in them false desires and I will order them to slit the ears of cattle and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allah...” (Quran: 4: 119).
- The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its full potential.
 - i. “Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts...” (Quran 13:11). We cannot make great changes in our communities until we change our thoughts and feelings towards all humans – this means recognizing the full humanity of and showing compassion towards girls and women, as with all people.

This story is a poignant example of how FGC can wreak havoc on girls’ mental and physical health, destroy marriages, families and thereby communities.

A STORY OF A GIRL WITH FISTULA

A beautiful young girl, X, was identified, in a routine community visits, by the Gender and Developments Officers of the South Central Synod of Mekane Yesus in Hadiya Zone, 300km south of the capital. When they first met her, she was incontinent of urine, smelled bad, and was surrounded by flies. Once they looked into her history, they found that she underwent FGC as a prerequisite for an arranged marriage. As the wedding approached, she was reexamined by the community mothers and told that her former circumcision was not done properly, and that she needed further cutting. Following the second barbaric cutting, she became incontinent of urine, and ended up attending her wedding ceremony, at her early age, in such bad shape – she had developed fistula.

After meeting her and learning her story, the Gender and Development Officers took her to a fistula hospital in the capital, but their efforts were to no avail, for the girl's urinary sphincter was torn. Desperate for a repair, the girl returned to the same fistula hospital on her own, changing her identity so that they could not identify her. When members of the hospital staff recognized that it was the same girl, and her problem was beyond their expertise, they burst into tears. When she got back to the village after the third failed trial, she heard heart-breaking news: her husband had gotten married to another woman. Filled with deep sorrow and hopelessness, she returned to her parents' house. Now, through the psycho-social and economic support of the Mekane Yesus Gender and Development Officers, she is re-married to a poor farmer. She recently gave birth to a baby girl and leads a better lifestyle despite her fistula.



EARLY MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit

**Begin the
Conversation**



Information Sheets

Introduction

Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and Early Marriage (EM) can be very difficult topics to talk about – generations of misinformation and secrecy have led many communities to believe that these practices are good, and demanded by tradition or religion. However, you can equip yourself with knowledge and facts about the devastating effects of these harmful practices on girls, and on communities as a whole. Once you have the knowledge, you can begin to speak to your community and spiritual children about these issues with authority.

This section, **“Begin the Conversation,”** consists of information sheets that provide the key medical facts about FGC and EM – they also provide answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s) that may arise about these practices, and their place in your community. These information sheets have many uses in your conversations with your community about both FGC and EM – it is up to you. No matter how you choose to use these information sheets, be sure to read them, and educate yourself further about the facts about these harmful practices.

Here are some of the ways you can use these information sheets, and their accompanying FAQ’s.

- They are a quick way to brush up on your knowledge about FGC and EM.
- They can be used as a quick reference for you when answering tough questions from your community about FGC and EM.
- They can be given to your fellow faith and community leaders as a factual resource on the practices of FGC and EM.
- They can be given to your spiritual children and literate members of your congregation as educational resources on FGC and EM.

Instructions

Read the following information sheets, and absorb all the information on them. Begin with the key facts. Once you feel you understand the key facts about both FGC and EM, move on to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s). Some of these FAQ’s seek to address cultural and historical ideas, not medical facts – therefore, when you read these FAQ’s, ask yourself if you agree with the answers. If you have questions that these information sheets cannot answer, take this as an



opportunity to seek out further information from a trusted source about FGC and EM. If you agree with the answers to each FAQ, think of some other questions that members of your community may ask in a conversation about EM and FGC, and how you might answer them. The possibilities are endless!



Early Marriage (EM) Muslim Information Sheet

Early Marriage: The facts

- 1) Marriage under 18 (EM) is illegal in Ethiopia.
- 2) Girls who are married underage are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- 3) Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- 4) Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- 5) Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death and their babies are much more likely to die as well.

Frequently Asked Questions about early marriage

Q: What does Islam say about EM?

Although there is no mention of specific marital age in the Quran or authentic Hadith, many Hadith Quranic and verses highlight physical, mental, emotional, and financial maturity as essential criteria for marriage. A child bride under 18 is not going to be prepared in any of these ways for marriage – the marriage, therefore, will suffer. It says in the Quran, 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...” Marriage is an institution of love, dedication, and genuine affection founded from a consensual, equal match. An adult man and a child bride are not a consensual, equal match.

There are several verses that may be interpreted as arguments against waiting, such as “*O people, Jibaraell has brought unto me a divine command stating that girls are like fruits from a tree. If they are not plucked in time then they get rotten by the rays of the sun and a slight blow of the wind will result in their falling down from the tree.*” (narrated by Imam Sadia) As the Prophet’s teachings do not contradict one another, this sunnah should be interpreted in light of previous sunnahs, which provide ways for us to wait and keep ourselves from temptation. This verse does not warn against waiting the proper amount of time, but warns against delaying marriage when we are in fact fully capable of entering into marriage and mature enough to do so. Marriage in Islam is highly honored

institution, and we should enter into it with the knowledge and respect it deserves. Entering into a marriage for financial reasons or because of social pressure is not Islamic – but waiting until the proper time (at least age 18) is.

Q: If EM is illegal, then why have our communities practiced it for so long without punishment?

Generations of practice can often make tradition seem like truth. EM has continued because people fear the social stigma that has come with remaining unmarried for “too long,” whatever the community says that is. These traditions and their attached social stigmas are very strong, and often local law enforcement feels powerless in the face of community and traditional leaders who permit or encourage the practice. Many law enforcement officials fear social stigma themselves, and are therefore reluctant to fully punish offenders. A lack of money, organization, and resources on the legal level makes it very hard to enforce laws against EM.

Q: How else can I ensure my daughter’s virtue before marriage?

Practically speaking, for generations, it seems as though early marriage was the best way to guarantee virtue and virginity in a bride. However, early marriage is a cheap way to accomplish this – the ends do not justify the means. Marrying a girl off before she really knows what sex – which is often the case in EM – will only have harmful effects, such as fear and resentment between her and her husband, and a dysfunctional home in which to raise children. Terminating her schooling to marry her off before she is 18, as well, will have negative effects on her future, and the future of her children – studies have shown that well-educated, well-adjusted, successful children come from homes where the mother has finished school. Teaching our children how to resist temptation, exercise self-control, and wait for the right spouse is the most spiritually healthy way to ensure virginity – and build up communities.



Early marriage places the unfair burdens of terminated schooling, a forced sexual life with an adult husband, and the feeding of a family on a young girl who is not ready to handle such adult responsibilities.



Information Sheets

Introduction

Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and Early Marriage (EM) can be very difficult topics to talk about – generations of misinformation and secrecy have led many communities to believe that these practices are good, and demanded by tradition or religion. However, you can equip yourself with knowledge and facts about the devastating effects of these harmful practices on girls, and on communities as a whole. Once you have the knowledge, you can begin to speak to your community and spiritual children about these issues with authority.

This section, **“Begin the Conversation,”** consists of information sheets that provide the key medical facts about FGC and EM – they also provide answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s) that may arise about these practices, and their place in your community. These information sheets have many uses in your conversations with your community about both FGC and EM – it is up to you. No matter how you choose to use these information sheets, be sure to read them, and educate yourself further about the facts about these harmful practices.

Here are some of the ways you can use these information sheets, and their accompanying FAQ’s.

- They are a quick way to brush up on your knowledge about FGC and EM.
- They can be used as a quick reference for you when answering tough questions from your community about FGC and EM.
- They can be given to your fellow faith and community leaders as a factual resource on the practices of FGC and EM.
- They can be given to your spiritual children and literate members of your congregation as educational resources on FGC and EM.

Instructions

Read the following information sheets, and absorb all the information on them. Begin with the key facts. Once you feel you understand the key facts about both FGC and EM, move on to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s). Some of these FAQ’s seek to address cultural and historical ideas, not medical facts – therefore, when you read these FAQ’s, ask yourself if you agree with the answers. If you have questions that these information sheets cannot answer, take this as an



opportunity to seek out further information from a trusted source about FGC and EM. If you agree with the answers to each FAQ, think of some other questions that members of your community may ask in a conversation about EM and FGC, and how you might answer them. The possibilities are endless!



EARLY MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit

Engage Women



Women's Group Modules

Early Marriage (EM)
Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

Women's Group Module

Introduction

Female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM) are practices that can have devastating effects on the lives of women and girls. FGC can seriously impair a girl's health, and these effects will only worsen as she grows to be a woman. Health problems caused by FGC include: shock, bleeding, infection from unsterile blades (including HIV), painful scarring, fistula (incontinence of urine/feces) and continued pain/trauma which can affect marital relations, and will definitely obstruct childbirth, endangering both mother and child. EM can cause health problems in young girls as well, especially if the girl has undergone FGC. However, FGC aside, the health problems caused by EM include: pain, shock, and trauma from forced marital relations (including fistula), increased risk of HIV infection from an older/more experienced partner, and obstructed childbirth, since girls under 18 are often not physically prepared to have children.

Many of the women in your women's group may have been affected by FGC or EM – or both. Therefore, you must be sensitive to their experience when engaging them in conversations about this topic. Many have been led to believe that this was the best thing that could have been done for them, and continue to perpetuate these practices with their own daughters for the same reasons. In order for this women's group activity to work, you or the facilitator must make sure the women feel like they have a safe space where they can talk about their own experiences honestly.

Instructions

This Women's Group Module contains two separate lessons/group activities: one to engage women in a conversation about FGC, and one to engage women in a conversation about EM. They should ideally be used in a group of 12 women or less, and be facilitated by a faith leader, or a trusted, educated lay leader, male or female.

Read through each lesson/group activity carefully, and make sure you do not have any questions about the content before you proceed. If you do, please take this as an opportunity to seek more information from a trusted source, such as a local health clinic.

Each lesson/group activity is centered around one theme: "The Dignity of all Human Life" for FGC, and "Preparedness for Marriage" for EM. Each includes an icebreaker activity with follow-up discussion questions and supporting theological/scriptural references, key messages, a main activity with follow-up discussion questions and supporting theological/scriptural references, a secondary activity, a reflection on the relevant supporting theological/scriptural references, and a wrap-up conclusion/opportunity for women to ask any questions they may have.

Please use the instructions provided in each lesson/group activity, and always allow women the opportunity to speak up or ask questions if they wish to do so.

NOTE: Make sure you know a bit about each of the women in your group, so you may ask the appropriate discussion questions. Please refer to the discussion questions in the lesson/group activity for the questions to ask married women, married women with sons, married women with daughters, and unmarried women.

Women's Group Module – Muslim

Early Marriage (EM)

This women's group module is designed to engage a group of women in a conversation about what it means to be prepared for marriage, and how early marriage affects the health of our community. The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular women's group sessions.

Materials needed:

The accompanying illustrated flipchart with the family narration for the EM flipchart activity. Any materials that the facilitator deems necessary based on what main activity they would like to engage the participants in. This may vary depending on whether the participants are married or unmarried women.

Please read through the instructions to the EM flipchart activity before this lesson to familiarize yourself with each picture, the narrative and the discussion questions involved.

Topic:

We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Welcome, and thank you for joining me! Today, we are going to discuss marriage, and more specifically, how we can truly honor marriage as a gift from Allah. One way we can do this in our community is to avoid early marriage, or marriage before one is mature enough to handle its responsibilities – this can often only happen when we are above the age of 18. Before we begin, let's play a quick game.

Initial icebreaker:

"Sharing the Burden."

This is an exercise to demonstrate the equal and interdependent roles of husbands and wives. Divide into pairs. Ask each pair to sit on the floor with their partner, backs together, feet out in front and arms linked. Their task is to stand up together. Once everyone has done this, two pairs

join together and the group of four try to repeat the task. After they succeed, add another two and try again. Keep adding people until your whole group is trying to stand together. This can lead to a discussion of teamwork and equality.

Once you have finished the exercise, let everyone laugh, recover, and collect themselves. Then, ask the following questions, according to the mix of women in your group.

For all women:

How do you feel about the institution of marriage? Do you believe it is supposed to be an equal partnership?

For married women with sons:

Ask them how much they have discussed equality and division of work in the house? How do they treat their sisters? How do they view women?

For married women with daughters:

Ask them how much they have discussed equality and division of work in the house? How does she treat others? Do you encourage her to educate and support herself?

For married women without children:

Ask them what their expectations were before they got married. If they were to have children, would they treat their sons and daughters equally?

For unmarried women:

Ask them what their expectations are of marriage. How are they viewed/treated by their families? What is their experience with division of labor in the house? Do they feel that all do their equal share? If not, what are ways they could remedy that?

Supporting verse:

Quran 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...”

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is a gift from Allah, and we should not enter into it lightly. It is meant to be an equal partnership based on mutual love and respect – anything else is displeasing to Allah. Love and mutual respect cannot grow in a forced, early marriage between an underage girl and an adult man, as the relationship will be more like father-daughter, than like husband and wife. Overburdening an unprepared underage girl with the duties of marriage is not pleasing to Allah – instead, Allah wants us all to wait until we are mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage.

Begin by reminding everyone about the benefits of a true, loving marriage before Allah.

- Marriage should help both partners dwell in spiritual tranquility, and live a calm, peaceful life, without excessive worry.
- Marriage should help safeguard one's imaan (faith). It is both preventive of sin, and promotive of strong faith.
- Marriage should serve as a means to emotional and sexual gratification.
- Marriage should be a form of Ibadah (Worship) because entering into a good marriage is a way of obeying Allah and His Messenger.
- Marriage should be a way of achieving goodness in life through mutual support between spouses.
- Marriage should be a way for us to build good societies, by establishing healthy families.
- Because of Islam's great honor for marriage, it strongly emphasizes that people should marry as soon as possible, but this means as soon as we are prepared, **not in childhood**.

Supporting verse:

"O young men, whoever among you is able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him." (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari)

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

We all may think this verse applies only to young men, but it applies to all of us: it is Allah's way of telling us we must wait to marry until we are prepared for marriage. This next activity will help us think about what it means to be prepared for marriage.

Main activity

For a group of married women:

- 1) Ask women about their experiences being married. Have them call out words they associate with marriage, and write them down on a chalk board or large piece of paper. Ask them to pick which words (read them out loud in semi-literate settings) seem to belong in an ideal marriage.
- 2) Ask them how prepared they felt when they were married. Go over what it means to be physically, mentally, financially, and emotionally prepared for marriage. Go more into detail about preparation for marriage if they were mostly child brides, with aim of teaching them about having their daughters wait.

For a group of un-married women:

Use a physically resonant example. Have a bag full of rocks ready, and a sack. Have two volunteers stand holding the sack, and tell them they must not let the sack touch the ground. Add rocks to

the sack one by one, naming them things like, “married life,” “a house,” “a farm,” “one child,” “another child,” “another child,” “feeding your family,” “pleasing your in-laws,” etc. At a certain point, the sack will become heavy. After the sack has touched the ground or the women can’t hold it up anymore, have everyone return to their seats, and talk to them about the responsibilities of marriage. Ask them what they think about the activity, and how heavy the responsibilities of being married seemed. Ask what might have happened if their partner were much younger/physically weaker than they were, or if one partner refused to hold their end of the sack. Emphasize that because marriage is such a heavy responsibility, it requires two mature, willing, equal partners.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts, ideas, and experiences. No matter what our view of marriage is, this is what Allah wants us to know: it is a gift, meant to be based on love and respect, but can only be a true blessing when we wait until we are prepared and mature enough.

Supporting verse:

Return to Quran 30:21, then discuss the following Hadith:

“O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari)

This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into marriage. It is not just referring to young men – it refers to all of us! If we are afraid that we may be tempted into premarital sex by waiting “too long,” we must instead practice discipline, self-control, and prayer – this, instead of early marriage, makes us stronger in the faith.

EM flipchart activity:

Engage the participants in the EM flipchart activity, featuring the Menkir family with four children. Please refer to the accompanying flipchart instructions/narrative and speaking guide. Show each child in the Menkir family, and give details about how old they are, where they are in school, what they do to help at home, etc. At the end, ask participants which child seems most prepared for marriage. Once all participants have given their answers, flip to the last picture, featuring the oldest daughter in the family with her new husband and both sets of parents on the third day after the marriage, in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is good, and a blessing, but Allah wants us to be prepared for marriage. A young girl’s body is physically not ready for marriage, she is not mentally or emotionally ready to take on a

house/husband/children/sexual relations/sole responsibility for domestic work, and it is dangerous to entrust a young girl who is unable to support herself financially completely to an older man. Early marriage deprives girls and women of a full, Allah-pleasing life, and cannot foster the kind of love and respect that Allah wants in marriage. There may be a few Quranic verses and Hadiths that are confusing, and appear to support early marriage. Let's go through two of these references, and clear up some of the confusion.

Quran 65:4: "If you are in doubt concerning those of your wives who have ceased menstruating, know that their waiting period [before one can divorce them] shall be three months. The same shall apply to those who have not yet menstruated." This is the only verse that specifically mentions early marriage. A footnote acknowledges that child marriages were common custom in the days of Mohammed, dating back to "al- gahiliyyah," or, "the era of ignorance."

"O people, Jibaraell has brought unto me a divine command stating that girls are like fruits from a tree. If they are not plucked in time then they get rotten by the rays of the sun and a slight blow of the wind will result in their falling down from the tree." (Hadith of Imam Sadia) As the Prophet's teachings do not contradict one another, this sunnah should be interpreted in light of the sunnah that provides ways for us to wait and keep ourselves from temptation ("O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him"). This Hadith does not warn against waiting the proper amount of time; rather, it warns against delaying marriage when we are, in fact, fully capable of entering into marriage and mature enough to do so.

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is meant to be an equal partnership, and while it is a wonderful blessing that should be enjoyed as soon as we are able, we first must make sure we are ABLE. This means waiting until both parties are physically, mentally, financially, and emotionally prepared, and – above all – WILLING. Marriage is a means to a spiritual end, not an end in itself.

Thank you again for joining me today. I know this discussion may have been difficult for some of you. However, through open, honest discussion about these things, we can do our part to stop a harmful tradition that is keeping our girls from reaching their full potential. Allah truly wants us to seek knowledge about things we do not understand, and stop harmful traditions like EM – by doing so, we show respect for Allah's gift of marriage, and above all, become a community based on love, mutual respect, and kindness towards one another, just as Allah would like us to do.

Women's Module – Muslim Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

This women's group module is designed to engage a group of women in a conversation about female genital cutting. The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular women's group sessions.

Materials needed:

Anatomy lesson (found in "Activity Kit").

Topic:

The dignity of human life; Allah's creation is perfect.

Initial icebreaker:

"Things in Common."

- 1) Have all participants stand in the center of the room/outdoor area. Begin the game by calling out things that may be true about many of the women in your group, e.g., "I enjoy [particular kind of local food]" "I am married!" "I have brown eyes!" "I have brothers and sisters!" and standing in a corner of the room (or designated "corner" in an outdoor space). Anyone who agrees or thinks that statement applies to them must stand in the same corner. Anyone who disagrees or thinks that the statement does not apply to them must go stand in the opposite corner.
- 2) Once it has been established who has been in what corner, call out a new statement. You can get more and more specific, e.g., "I know how to do [regional dance]" "I am afraid of snakes!" "I have lived in the same house all my life!" If the participants are comfortable enough to do so, have them call out the statements/things in common and walk over to the designated corners. Do this for 5 minutes or so, or until everyone is sufficiently warmed up/comfortable talking/standing/moving around with each other.
- 3) Finally, call out "I have been circumcised/undergone FGC." (This only works if the facilitator is a woman). Then, sit down with everyone and discuss what they thought about the game, what they learned about each other. There should be common threads. Ask what they thought of being asked if they had undergone FGC, and what they thought about it. If all in the room have, ask them to think about what the experience meant to them throughout the group study.

Let all women return to their seats, then ask the following questions, according to the mix of your group.

For all women:

What did it mean for them to undergo FGC? How do they feel about their circumcised/uncircumcised status?

For married women with sons:

Ask them how their sons view girls in their community. What have you done to teach them about kindness to all, and the things we all have in common as humans beings under Allah?

For married women with daughters:

Ask them how their daughters view themselves in their relation to boys. Do they see themselves as unclean or inferior? Have they had FGC performed on their daughters? If so, why? If not, what are the challenges they face, and how do they resist the social pressure to do so?

For married women with no children:

Ask them if they hope to have daughters or sons more. If they have daughters, will they circumcise them? Why or why not?

For unmarried women:

Ask them if they believe that FGC affects whether or not they will be able to marry. Why or why not?

Supporting verse:

“Allah loves the equitable.”(Quran 60:8)

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

It says in the Holy Quran that Allah “love the equitable,” which means those who treat all people with equal love and kindness, both male and female. FGC is not a way of showing equal love or kindness, but instead a way people have treated girls badly. FGC is disrespectful to Allah’s perfect creation – however, you should not be overburdened with guilt if they have had your own daughters circumcised, nor should you be too angry at your own mothers if you have been circumcised, but instead forgive, with the mind to make change. Social pressure can be very strong, and that social pressure, combined with generations of misunderstood messages and ignorance, can create very harmful traditions.

Emphasize the following key messages:

- 1) Allah has created us perfectly.
- 2) FGC, or the cutting/removing of a perfectly functioning, necessary part is against Islamic teaching, because it is an act of violence and humiliation against innocent people; and Islam commands us to do no harm.
- 3) FGC is not a healthy form of circumcision or covenant with Allah, as with male circumcision; it is not equivalent to male circumcision, but akin to removing the entire male member.
- 4) Knowledge of our own bodies and how they work is power: the Quran commands us to seek information on what we do not know.

Supporting verses:

- 1) We are all perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator. “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
 - **This verse may say “man,” but it applies to all of Allah’s human creation – that means women, too.**
 - Cutting or harming a body part that we were born with when there is nothing wrong with it, as happens in FGC, goes against Allah’s wishes.
 - “...and there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know” (Quran 30:30)
 - “...and make not your own hands contribute to your destruction” (Quran 2:195)
- 2) Both boys and girls should be treated equally with love and respect. (Quran 60:8) “Allah loves the equitable.”
 - We are all fellow human beings, not one physically inferior to the other: “Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men.” (Sahih reported by Abu-Dawud) This is physically, factually true – cutting of the clitoris is equivalent to the cutting off of the entire male penis.
 - We are physically wired very similarly, just constructed differently! Allah wants us to act according to the truth, and FGC is not in line with this Quranic ideal. In other words, gender inequality is not Islamic.
- 3) Acts such as FGC punish the innocent in the absence of a crime—which is an injustice before Allah. The Prophet did not recommend it for any of the women in his house, nor did he approve of the practice when he saw it being done.
 - **Hadith of Ummu-Attiya:** This is the Hadith most commonly used to link FGM/C to Islam. The Hadith relates that the Prophet said to a woman of Medina, a circumciser called Ummu-Attiyah, “O Umm `Attiyyah, ‘ashimmi’ and do not exaggerate; as doing so will preserve the fairness of the woman’s face and satisfy the husband.”As one Islamic scholar noted, one line of this Hadith attempts to express the reaction of the Prophet to the screaming of the girl being circumcised. “The Prophet held his head and shared her agony” for

a while—meaning he disagreed with this pre-Islamic, harmful traditional practice. Taking into account contextual interpretation of the Hadith, other scholars believe that during that time, the Prophet was not authoritative enough to strongly denounce such widely tolerated traditional practice.

“And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people” (Quran 5:32).

- There is no question that stopping the practice of FGC saves and greatly improves lives. True heroes in the community are those who combat harmful and deadly practices like FGC.
- Halting unnecessarily cruel practices like FGC can improve the lives of the whole community – girls who are healthier are happier, and enter into marriages better-prepared to enjoy a good relationship with their husbands.

Main activity:

Read the following story¹, then pause where indicated to ask questions of the group. Follow the speaking guide as necessary.

Once upon a time, there was a faraway land, where there lived a proud people of great cultural heritage, enriched by deep-rooted and much-treasured traditions. It was tradition, for instance, that the women in several of the villages in this land were one-legged. But one-legged as they might be, a more elegant and self-possessed group of women can hardly be imagined.

They had charming ways, and an extraordinary gift for beautiful poetry. At the same time, they were not without ambitions; and they possessed just the right measure of astuteness necessary to achieve them. And when the occasion demanded it, they could be very aggressive.

One day, a wise old woman from another area who was traveling through this land decided to stop and visit one of these villages – she had heard many great things about their people and their culture, and wanted to see them for herself. However, when she arrived, she saw that the people in this village were hungry and suffering – there had been a very bad drought throughout the land. The old woman was deeply saddened to see so much suffering in what was considered a great and vibrant community.

The old woman was further shocked when she spoke to the women in this village. They considered it not only normal, but fashionable to walk on one leg! The wise old woman set about trying to discover the reasons for the strange phenomenon of the one-legged women, because she felt like cutting one leg of every woman could only increase the suffering of the village in such hard times.

¹ Excerpted and adapted from “Tradition! Tradition! A Story of Mother Earth” by Efua Dorkenoo published by FORWARD Ltd., London, 1992. http://www.who.int/gender/other_health/teachersguide.pdf, accessed 5 October, 2012

This, however, was no easy task. The people she asked gave somewhat confusing answers as to why the women were unable to keep their two legs. Some people told her that if one of the legs of a little girl was not cut off, it would grow and grow, and before you knew where you were, it would become as big as a tree! Others told her that a woman with both legs was unable to bear a child. Yet others explained that a woman needed protection from herself, and somehow having one leg cut off helped to ensure this. The old woman asked, “in what way?” But she did not receive a satisfactory answer. However, when she persisted with her question, she was told that with two legs a woman would run away and become a prostitute, but with one she would have difficulty!

Some people turned to the religious texts for an answer to the wise old woman’s question, and they convinced themselves that it was Allah who had decreed that women would behave better with just one leg. But there was one very old woman in the village who could remember how this habit of cutting one leg off every little girl had started. And she told the visiting wise old woman the following story:

“A long time ago,” said the old village woman, “in fact three thousand years ago, this land was enjoying a period of plenty and there were great festivities. Each year, colorful, exotic dance festivals were held to select the person who would be Ruler of the Land. In those days men and women competed equally and the best dancer would be crowned the Ruler of the Land. For five successive years, one man had won all the competitions hands down. But in the sixth year, it seemed that the throne was going to be snatched away from him. A beautiful woman had appeared on the scene, and it was clear that she could dance far better than this man.”

“He got very worried,” the old woman continued, “and decided something had to be done! In desperation, he passed a decree that all women should have one leg cut off. This seemed to solve his problem, for dancing on one leg unsuccessfully put women out of the competition. That is how this man continued his reign for another 20 years.”

This, then, was the old village woman’s recollection of how the phenomenon of the one-legged women began. But to generations of people in this village, it was simply tradition, handed down by their ancestors. What is more, it had become the responsibility of women themselves to see to it that all girl children adhered to this tradition!

The visiting wise old woman was fascinated by this story. But she wanted to know whether the old village woman thought it was a good practice. The old village woman stood pondering for a while, and then she replied: “I have known of many traditions, some good, some bad – as for this one, I am not sure.”

Then the visiting wise old woman remarked: “But just from looking at you, I thought you felt comfortable.”

“Oh no,” said the old village woman. “We have so many difficulties carrying out our daily chores with one leg! But when it was decreed by the ruler three thousand years ago, everybody was frightened, and dared not discuss the issue. They all put on a brave face and professed it to be a wonderful tradition! Some said you could only be beautiful with one leg! Some said you could only be clean with one leg! Many claimed a woman could only be pure with one leg! And after a while, some women would say: ‘Why should we let the young women off the hook? We have suffered so much being one-legged. Now it is time for young girls to play their part in keeping the tradition going.’”

By this time, the visiting wise old woman was curious to know what the men had to say about all this. Was it possible that fathers would be blindly following such a tradition? Surely not! But the truth, she discovered, was that men could not afford to disapprove of tradition – even bad tradition. They believed that it would destroy family honor and dignity, and affect their status in the community. “After all,” they argued, “who would pay a good bride price for a daughter with two legs?”

Then the wise old woman asked, “But what about the children?” She could imagine them screaming with fear and pain. Yes, she was told, children would always be children. There were those who screamed and shouted and had to be forced to have the operation for their own good. Most of them, though, wanted to be like their friends and part of the crowd.

Then, the wise old woman thought that perhaps the rulers and lawmakers in this land might take a lead in stopping this bad tradition. But alas even they were not prepared to do so! They were afraid of challenging such a deep-rooted tradition.

Meanwhile, the food situation in this drought-stricken land was getting worse and worse. Walking on crutches, the women found it difficult to work the land and to travel far and wide to find richer pastures and foliage for the animals. But as the situation became worse, the wise old woman noticed that the people in this village were beginning to question cutting off a woman’s leg. A few men and women were coming together to discuss what they could do to stop this bad tradition. They had realized the time had come to challenge it, if future generations were to survive these hard times.

As they talked among themselves, they discovered a multitude of myths surrounding the tradition. And as time went on, they gathered strength to challenge the myths and began to plan.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

You may be thinking to yourselves, “this is an odd place to end the story, what happens?” Well, we are going to write our own ending to this story. Let’s ask ourselves, what are some of the possible ways this could turn out for the suffering village? Will getting rid of the one-leg tradition help this village get back on its feet? How might the people of this village challenge the tradition, and keep young girls from having their legs cut off in the future?

(Allow 10-15 minutes for discussion).

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Thank you for all of your great ideas. The reason I read you this story is that this is our story. If any of us have undergone FGC, we are the one-legged women. However, there is hope, and there is hope for our daughters.

Ask the following discussion questions.

For all women:

Ask what they thought of the story. Do they see the allegory? How they think it reflects their own experience.

For married women with sons:

Ask them how they feel about tradition. Do they talk to their sons about the teachings of the Prophet and the traditions in their community? Do they explain that there is a difference?

For married women with daughters:

Ask them how they feel about tradition. Do they talk to their daughters about the teachings of the Prophet and the traditions in their community? Do they explain that there is a difference?

For married women without children:

Ask them if they felt that FGC was a requirement for their marriage. If they were to have children, would they tell them this story?

For unmarried women:

Ask them if this story means anything to them. If they were to have children, would they tell them this story?

Supporting verse:

The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its full potential. “Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts...” (Quran 13:11). We cannot make great changes in our communities until we change our thoughts and feelings towards all humans – this means recognizing the full humanity of and showing compassion towards girls and women, as with all people.

Anatomy lesson:

Refer to the anatomy lesson included in the faith leader toolkit, and use the speaking guide to explain the various parts of the female anatomy to all participants. Allow plenty of time for questions and discussion.

Supporting verse:

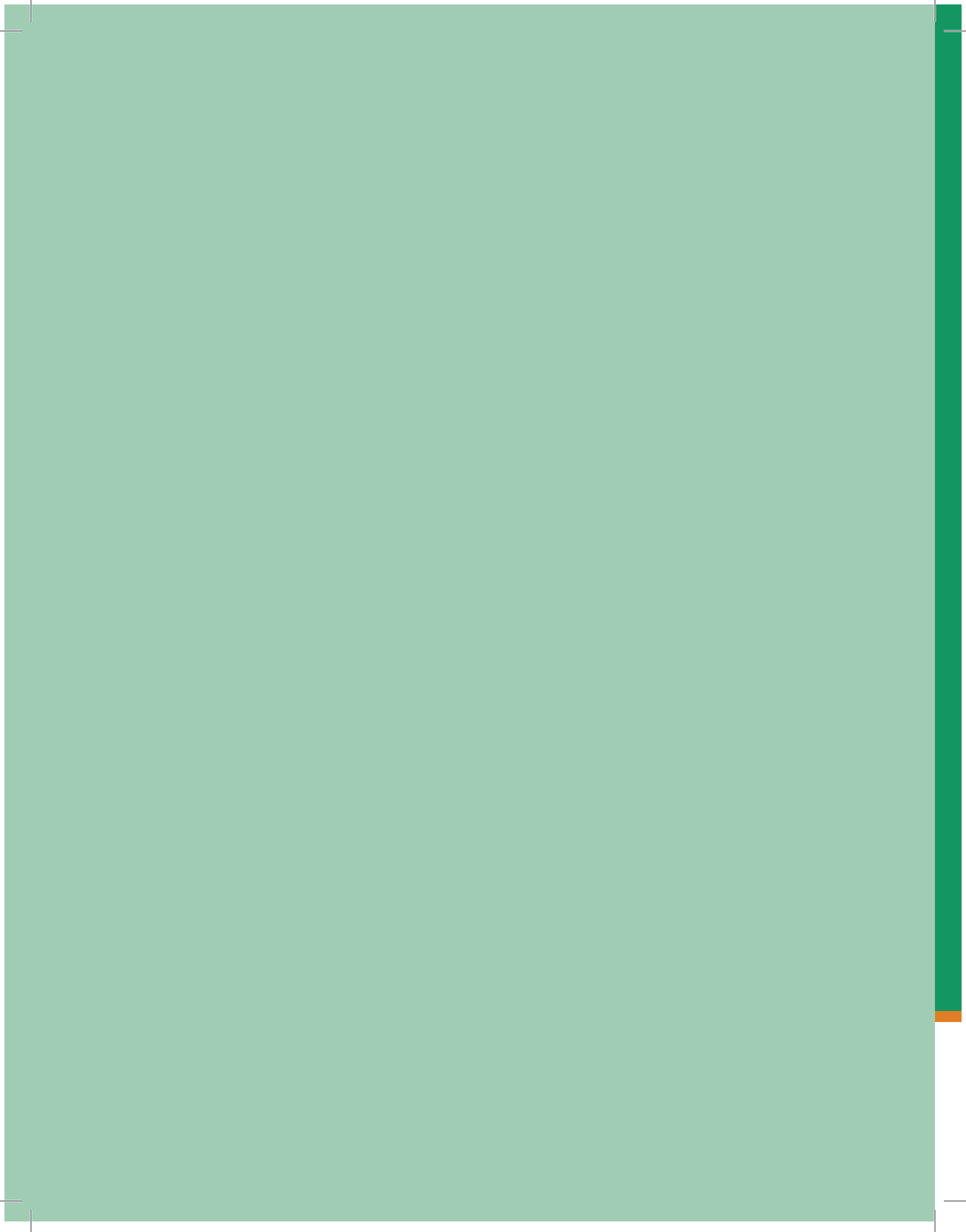
“Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

We are creations of a perfect creator, and we must treat each other with the love and kindness that such creations deserve. FGC is not only an act of violence on innocent people, but it is like telling Allah, “your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!”

Thank you all for joining me today. I know this discussion may have been difficult for some of you. However, through open, honest discussion about these things, we can do our part to stop a harmful tradition that is keeping our girls from reaching their full potential. Sometimes what is wrong can be perceived as what is right, simply because it has been garbled/distorted through multiple generations. We must seek knowledge on things we do not understand: that’s what Allah wants us to do! Allah truly wants us to stop harmful traditions like FGC – by doing so, we show respect for Allah’s perfect creation, and above all, demonstrate love and kindness towards one another, just as Allah would like us to do.





CIFA c/o Washington National Cathedral
Massachusetts & Wisconsin Avenues, NW
Washington, DC 20016
info@cifa.org www.cifa.org
© 2012 Center for Interfaith Action



EARLY MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit



Youth Group Modules



**Early Marriage (EM)
Female Genital Cutting (FGC)**

Youth Group Modules

Introduction

Female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM) are issues that directly affect children, especially girls. In order to make real and sustainable change, and eradicate these practices forever, it is vital to change the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the community's youth as well as the adults. If youth learn early that FGC and EM are harmful, and not sanctioned by your religion, they will be far less likely to inflict these practices on their own children – and if the adults in your community are engaged in steps towards change, young people will be more likely to feel they have a voice in stopping these practices.

The amount of information about the direct medical effects of FGC and EM you choose to share in a youth group setting may vary depending on the age you are speaking to – each activity in this youth group lesson has a version for children 14 and younger, and for youth ages 15 to 18. Your youth groups may be separated by gender, or mixed – either way, make sure everyone in your group feels like they have a safe space to talk about their experiences honestly. These lessons/group activities should help you start conversations with young people in your community about these practices, and how they can work to stop them.

Instructions

This Youth Group Module contains two separate lessons/group activities: one to engage youth/children in a conversation about FGC, and one to engage youth/children in a conversation about EM. They should ideally be used in a group of 12 or less, and be facilitated by a faith leader, or a trusted, educated lay leader, male or female.

Read through each lesson/group activity carefully, and make sure you do not have any questions about the content before you proceed. If you do, please take this as an opportunity to seek more information from a trusted source, such as a local health clinic.

Each lesson/group activity is centered around a theme: “The Dignity of all Human Life” for FGC, and “Preparedness for Marriage” for EM. Each includes an icebreaker activity with follow-up discussion questions and supporting theological/scriptural references, key messages, a main activity with follow-up discussion questions and supporting theological/scriptural references, a secondary

activity, a reflection on the relevant supporting theological/scriptural references, and a wrap-up conclusion/opportunity for anyone to ask any questions they may have.

Please use the instructions provided in each lesson/group activity, and always allow youth/children the opportunity to speak up or ask questions if they wish to do so.

NOTE: Make sure you use the appropriate activity for your age group, either children 14 and under, or youth 15-18.



Youth Group Module – Muslim

Early Marriage (EM)

This youth group module is designed to engage a group of young people in a conversation about what it means to be prepared for marriage. The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular youth group sessions. Always allow plenty of times for questions from the participants with every activity!

Materials needed:

The accompanying illustrated flipchart with the family narration for the EM flipchart activity, and any materials that the facilitator deems necessary based on what main activity they would like to engage the participants in (blackboard, paper and pens, etc.). This may vary depending on the age and literacy level of the group.

Please read through the instructions to the EM flipchart activity before this lesson to familiarize yourself with each picture, the narrative, and the discussion questions involved.

Topic:

We must honor marriage through preparedness for marriage.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Welcome, and thank you for joining me! Today, we are going to discuss marriage, and more specifically, how we can truly honor marriage as a gift from Allah. One way we can do this in our community is to avoid early marriage, or marriage before one is mature enough to handle its responsibilities – this can often only happen when we are above the age of 18. Before we begin, let's play a quick game.

Initial icebreaker:

“Blind Leader.”

This is an exercise that emphasizes trust of your partner. One partner is blindfolded, and the other partner must stand at one end of the room, and lead the blindfolded to another corner by calling out directions like, “move to your left!” “walk forward!”. This activity engages two participants who may not know each other and builds a quick sense of trust among the group.

Once everyone has laughed, recovered, and returned to their seats, ask the following discussion questions.

Discussion Questions:

How did you feel about that activity? Did you enjoy it? What parts were challenging? How do you think this might be like marriage, in any way?

Supporting verse:

Quran 30:21 "...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another..."

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is a gift from Allah, and we should not enter into it lightly. It is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect – anything else is displeasing to Allah. Allah wants us all to wait until we are mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage, so that we can treat our husband or wife with the love and respect they deserve, and that Allah wants us to show!

Emphasize the following two key messages:

- 1) Marriage is a gift from Allah, meant to be enjoyed as a partnership based on mutual, unconditional, equal love. It is a path to closeness with Allah, not a financial end in itself.
- 2) Like everything, marriage has its proper time. We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage.

Supporting verse:

Quran 30:21 "...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another..."

Ask the children how they think this relates to the trust exercise. Make sure that they know that above all, marriage is a gift from Allah, a way to have a trustworthy partner in life. However, to be trusted and to trust another person this much, we must be adequately prepared for marriage.

Main activity:

- 1) Depending on the children's literacy levels, have them either write down or call out what they are looking for in a spouse. If they are too young or don't have any ideas, give them examples of traits like, "beautiful," "kind," "hard-working," "lazy," "selfish," or "good Muslim," and ask what types of people would make the best husbands/wives.

- 2) Then ask them what they think being married means. If they are reluctant to speak out at first, write a few things down on the wall/board or state things like, “trust,” “being able to raise children,” “selfishness,” “fighting,” “love,” and “sacrificing yourself for the other.” Ask which of these is best in marriage. Make sure, at the end, to emphasize the need for “equality” and “sacrificing yourself for the other.”
- 3) Finally, use a physically resonant example – this especially helps demonstrate the need for two capable, equal partners in a marriage. Have a bag full of rocks ready, and a sack. Have two volunteers stand holding the sack, and tell them they must not let the sack touch the ground. Add rocks to the sack one by one, naming them things like, “married life,” “a house,” “a farm,” “one child,” “another child,” “another child,” “feeding your family,” “pleasing your in-laws,” etc. At a certain point, the sack will become heavy – watch and make sure the children aren’t hurting themselves. After the sack has touched the ground/the children can’t hold it up anymore, have everyone return to their seats, and talk to them about the responsibilities of marriage. Ask them what they think about the activity, and how heavy the responsibilities of being married seemed. Ask what might have happened if their partner were much younger/physically weaker than they were, or if one partner refused to hold their end of the sack. Emphasize that because marriage is such a heavy responsibility, it requires two mature, willing, equal partners.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Thank you for all your participation! No matter what our view of marriage is, this is what Allah wants us to know: it is a gift, meant to be based on love and respect, but can only be a true blessing when we wait until we are prepared and mature enough.

Supporting verse:

Quran 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...”

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

As we know, Quran 30:21 says that Allah “created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...” Did naming what makes a good spouse, and talking about sharing the burdens in marriage, make you think about this verse any differently? What is the sort of person would make a spouse in whom we could “repose in tranquility,” as Allah wants us to do?

EM flipchart activity:

Engage the participants in the EM flipchart activity, featuring the Menkir family with four children. Please refer to the accompanying flipchart instructions/narrative and speaking guide. Show each

child in the Menkir family, and give details about how old they are, where they are in school, what they do to help at home, etc. At the end, ask participants which child seems most prepared for marriage. Once all participants have given their answers, flip to the last picture, featuring the oldest daughter in the family with her new husband and both sets of parents on the third day after the marriage, in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Supporting verse:

Return to Quran 30:21 again, and now discuss the following Hadith:

“O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari)

- This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into marriage. It is not just referring to young men – it refers to all of us! Waiting until we are properly prepared, as the Prophet tells us in this Hadith, can be hard—however this, instead of early marriage, makes us stronger in the faith, and is far more pleasing to Allah!

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is good, and a blessing, but Allah wants us to be prepared for marriage, as much as He wants us to be married. When we marry too young, before we are prepared, we cannot live a full, Allah-pleasing life, and cannot foster the kind of love and respect that God wants in marriage.

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Marriage is meant to be a mutually loving partnership, and while it is a wonderful blessing that should be enjoyed as soon as we are able, we first must make sure we are ABLE. Allah wants the best for us – so we must respect all of Allah’s great gifts to us, including marriage!

Thank you again for joining me today. I hope you all had fun and learned something. The one thing we all need to know is this: by waiting until we are mature and ready to marry, we show respect for Allah’s gift of marriage, and above all, become a community based on love, mutual respect, and kindness towards one another, just as Allah would like us to do.

Youth Group Module – Muslim

Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

This youth group module is designed to engage a group of young people in a conversation about female genital cutting. The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular youth group sessions. *Because this topic is particularly sensitive, there are two main activities outlined in the module, one for children 14 and younger, and one for youth ages 15-18.*

Materials needed:

In preparation for the youth group meeting, read the “Conversation Starters” document, which is found earlier in the faith leader toolkit. Please use this to identify and familiarize yourself with the Islamic messages around FGC, some of which you will use as part of the lesson. For information about FGC, please refer to the “FGC Information Sheet”, also provided earlier in the toolkit. Finally, use the anatomy flipchart provided by your faith leader for the anatomy lesson, if you deem it appropriate to do so.

Please feel free to refer to the Facilitator Speaking Guide as you need to throughout the lesson.

Topic:

The dignity of all human life: Allah’s perfect creation.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Welcome, all of you, and thank you for joining me. Today, we are going to discuss a harmful tradition that affects not just girls, but everyone in our community. But first, let’s play a game.

Initial icebreaker:

“Things in Common.”

- 1) Have all the children stand in the center of the room/outdoor area. Begin the game by calling out things that may be true about many of the children in your group, i.e. “I like playing football (soccer)!” “I have brown eyes!” “I have brothers and sisters!” and standing in a corner of the room (or designated “corner” in an outdoor space). Anyone who agrees or thinks that the statement applies to them must join and stand in the same corner with you. Anyone who disagrees or thinks

that the statement does not apply to them must go stand in the opposite corner.

- 2) Once it has been established who has been in what corner, call out a new statement. You can get more and more specific, e.g., “I know how to do a cartwheel!” “I am afraid of snakes!” “I have lived in the same house all my life!” If the children are comfortable enough to do so, have them call out the statements/things in common and walk over to the designated corners. Do this for 5 minutes or so, or until everyone is sufficiently warmed up/comfortable talking/standing/moving around with each other.
- 3) Then, sit down with everyone and discuss what they thought about the game, what they learned about each other. There should be common threads, and sometimes children may be surprised at with whom they share something in common. This should lead into a discussion about how we are unique, perfect creations of Allah, and that while all have individual value, we may have things in common that we did not even realize – because we are all human, whether we are boys or girls!

Once everyone has returned to their seats, read the following supporting verse.

Supporting verse:

“Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Quran 96:4 tells us that “man” was created “of the best stature”: that means Allah created *all* humans just the way he wanted them to be! We are perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator, and we must treat each other with kindness and respect, no matter if we’re boys or girls. FGC is not a way of showing equal love or kindness, but instead a way people have treated girls badly. FGC is disrespectful to Allah’s perfect creation. However, social pressure can be very strong, and may lead us to do things that are not pleasing to Allah. That social pressure, combined with generations of misunderstood messages and ignorance, can create very harmful traditions, like FGC. Allah does not approve of any of these harmful traditions, because they do not show love and kindness towards his perfect creation.

Emphasize the following key messages, as you feel is appropriate, and then read the next set of supporting verses and their explanations.

- 1) Allah has created us perfectly.
- 2) FGC, or the cutting/removing of a perfectly functioning, necessary body part is against Islamic teaching, because it is an act of violence and humiliation against innocent people, and Islam commands us to do no harm.
- 3) FGC is not a healthy form of circumcision or covenant with God, as with male circumcision; it is not equivalent to male circumcision, but instead like removing the entire male member.

Supporting verses:

- 1) We are all perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator. “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
 - Cutting or harming a body part that we were born with when there is nothing wrong with it, as happens in FGC, goes against Allah’s wishes.
 - “...and there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know” (Quran 30:30)
 - “...and make not your own hands contribute to your destruction” (Quran 2:195)
 - 2) Both boys and girls should be treated equally with love and respect. (Quran 60:8) *“God loves the equitable.”*
 - We are all fellow human beings, not one physically inferior to the other: “Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men.” (Sahih reported by Abu-Dawud) We are physically wired very similarly, just constructed differently! Allah wants us to act according to the truth, and FGC is not in line with this Quranic ideal. In other words, FGC is not Islamic.
 - 3) Acts such as FGC punish the innocent in the absence of a crime—which is an injustice before Allah. The Prophet did not recommend it for any of the women in his house, nor did he approve of the practice when he saw it being done.
 - **Hadith of Ummu-Attiya:** This is the Hadith most commonly used to link FGC to Islam. The Hadith relates that the Prophet said to a woman of Medina, a circumciser called Ummu-Attiyah, “O Umm `Attiyyah, ‘ashimmi’ and do not exaggerate; as doing so will preserve the fairness of the woman’s face and satisfy the husband.”As one Islamic scholar noted, one line of this Hadith attempts to express the reaction of the Prophet to the screaming of the girl being circumcised. “The Prophet held his head and shared her agony” for a while—meaning he disagreed with this pre-Islamic, harmful traditional practice. Taking into account contextual interpretation of the Hadith, other scholars believe that during that time, the Prophet was not authoritative enough to strongly denounce such widely tolerated traditional practice.
- “And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people” (Quran 5:32).
- There is no question that stopping the practice of FGC saves and greatly improves lives. True heroes in the community are those who combat harmful and deadly practices like FGC.
 - Halting unnecessarily cruel practices like FGC can improve the lives of the whole community – girls who are healthier are happier, and enter into marriages better-prepared to enjoy a good relationship with their husbands.

Knowledge of our own bodies and how they work is power: the Quran commands us to seek information on what we do not know.

Main activity:

Ages 14 and younger:

Because there is some confusion about whether or not FGC is an Islamic practice, it's good to show how one true statement can get distorted over time, to the point where it becomes a completely false statement. Have the children sit in a circle, as appropriate, for a game of "Telephone." Pick someone to start, and have that child whisper two things that they did that day into the ear of the child to their right. That child whispers what he heard to the child on his/her right, and so on, until the whispering has reached the last child in the circle. That child will then repeat out loud what s/he last heard. This will inevitably be an altered version of what was originally said. Let everyone react, then ask why they think that happened. This should lead into a discussion about how true teachings can get twisted over time, to the point where they are completely untrue. People's beliefs on FGC are the same way: the Prophet never advocated FGC in the Quran, or in any of his daily teachings, but different people, over time, somehow decided that FGC was a part of Islam, just like in the game of "Telephone."

Discussion questions:

What did you think of this activity? Have you ever misunderstood something a friend or family member said, and thought it was the truth? Have you ever asked your Faith Leader if you had a question about an Islamic teaching? Do you think boys and girls are treated with equal love and respect?

Ages 15-18:

Have the participants divide up into small groups. Instruct them to discuss what "evidence" they have that FGC is an Islamic practice. Do this for about 10 minutes. When the conversation dies down, have one person from each group present what they talked about to the larger group. This will lead to a discussion of how things become accepted even though they are not necessarily true. You can use scripture to refute "evidence" during the discussion.

Discussion questions:

Do you believe FGC is an Islamic practice? Have you ever asked your Faith Leader if you had a question about an Islamic teaching? For girls: have you undergone FGC? What do you feel about your experience? For boys: Do you think FGC is necessary? Why or why not?

Supporting verse:

"Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts..." (Quran 13:11).

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its full potential. “Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts...” (Quran 13:11). We cannot make great changes in our communities until we change our thoughts and feelings towards all humans – this means recognizing the full humanity of and showing compassion towards girls and women, as with all people.

Anatomy lesson

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Now, we are going to learn a little bit about Allah’s perfect creation, and why FGC is harmful to girls.

Go through anatomy, as appropriate, and explain that *Chincha* is a myth. Use illustrations as age-appropriate. As the facilitator, you may choose not to use the poster, but rather just discuss the effects of FGC in terms you deem appropriate, depending on your age group. Please refer to the anatomy lesson, but alter the language used, and the details given, as you feel is necessary to keep the group’s focus.

For very young children, it may only be appropriate to give the *Chincha* – as – a myth lesson. Here is a suggested speaking guide to get you started: “Some of you may have heard that if a girl does not undergo FGC, she will be *Chincha*, which will make her “dirty.” That is not true! There is no such thing as *Chincha*, it is a myth, a story made up long-ago by people who did not know very much about how our bodies really work – however, much like in the game of “Telephone”, it came to be seen as true by generations of people afterwards! A young girl’s parts will *not* grow to the ground if they are left uncut, nor will they be “dirty” or “disgusting” – remember, Allah’s creation is perfect, and the all-knowing Allah would never make any part of us naturally “dirty” or “disgusting.” Some people might say that a girl who is *Chincha*, without FGC, will not be able to grow up and have a baby. That is also not true! In fact, it is dangerous to believe that. Because there is no such thing as *Chincha*, there is nothing to remove – therefore, cutting, damaging, or changing any reproductive parts on a girl will hurt her, and may make her unable to have a baby. In the same way that FGC can make a girl unable to grow up and have a baby, it can also hurt her and make her very sick, to the point that she cannot work or go to school – and this is not what Allah wants. We should be able to live full lives, where we can work hard and achieve our greatest potential – and FGC keeps girls from being able to do that, by hurting them and making them sick.

If you wish to do so, and if your participants are old enough, refer to the anatomy lesson included in this toolkit, and use the speaking guide to explain the various parts of the female anatomy to all participants. Allow plenty of time for questions and discussion.

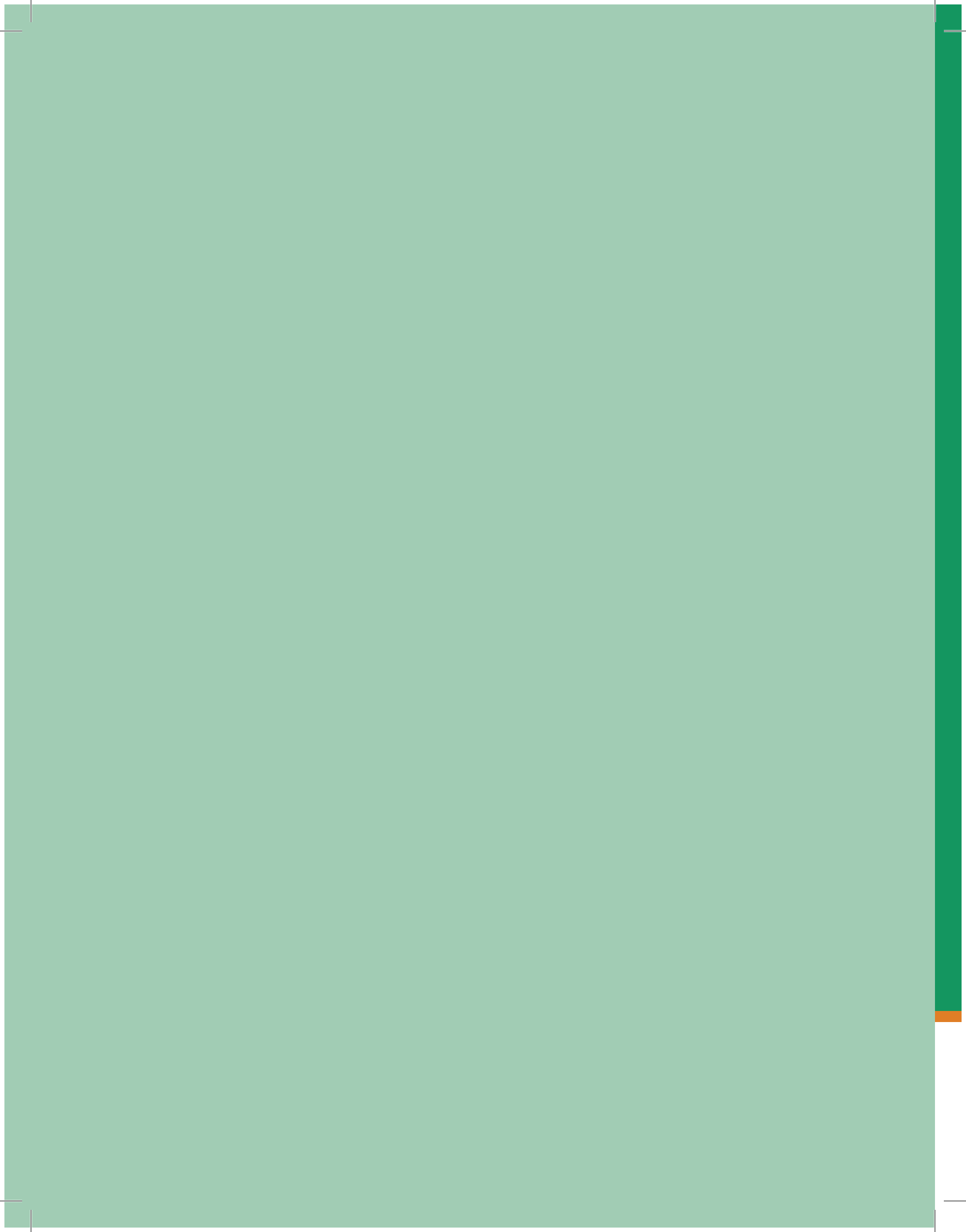
Supporting verse:

“Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4). This verse should be re-visited after the anatomy lesson, so participants can think about the female anatomy with this idea in mind.

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE:

Thank you for joining me today! If there is one thing we need to remember after all we’ve learned, it is that we are creations of a perfect creator, and we must treat each other with the love and kindness that such creations deserve. FGC is an act of violence, and a violation of Allah’s plan: it is almost like saying, “your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!” However, sometimes what is wrong can be perceived as what is right, simply because it has been garbled/distorted through multiple generations. We must seek knowledge on things we do not understand: that’s what Allah wants us to do!





CIFA c/o Washington National Cathedral
Massachusetts & Wisconsin Avenues, NW
Washington, DC 20016
info@cifa.org www.cifa.org
© 2012 Center for Interfaith Action



EARLY MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Addressing Harmful Traditional
Practices in Your Community:
A Faith Leader Toolkit

Activity Kit

Introduction to Activity Kit

Feeling ready to engage women's and youth groups in discussions about female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage (EM)? Here are the educational tools you need to make the most of your lessons!

The educational tools included in this section are:

- 1) An **EM Narrative Flipchart Activity** (and accompanying narrations, illustrations, and speaking guide) that teaches the benefits of waiting for marriage.
 - a. This flipchart activity introduces a family that may be very similar to many in your community, and tells the story of each of the four children. As we get to know this family, we are asked to think about which of their children is ready for marriage, and whether or not the parents in this family have made the right decisions for each child.
- 2) An **Anatomy Lesson** and accompanying flipchart to be used in a lesson about the negative effects of FGC.
 - a. In order to understand the negative effects of FGC, we must know how a healthy set of female genitalia looks, what its parts are, and how they function! Additionally, all participants will be able to see diagrams of different types of FGC, how they damage the body, and how they compare to a normal, healthy set of female genitalia.

These educational tools are a vital part of each of the **Women's Group Modules** in “Engage Women,” and the **Youth Group Modules** in “Engage Youth”. When you are facilitating or leading one of the **Women's Group Modules** or **Youth Group Modules**, please refer to these educational tools as directed.

Read all introductions and instructions beforehand, and make sure you understand exactly how to best use each educational tool. It is best to be familiar with all the religious texts that we reference in each activity, so be sure to brush up on all references by reading through our **Conversation Starters** in “Get Started,” and know your facts by reading the **Information Sheets** in “Begin the Conversation”!

Please be sensitive when using these educational tools in lessons and discussions with your groups, as the topics may be uncomfortable for many to discuss at first. You may modify the use of any of these tools (especially the anatomy flipchart) as you see appropriate, depending on the age of the participants, if presenting to a youth group. However, please try to include as much information as possible, so that all participants can be fully engaged and leave the session having learned something new!

Early Marriage Flipchart Activity

Introduction & Instructions

Everyone has different ideas about when it is appropriate for our children, especially our daughters, to marry. There are many reasons some may choose to allow their daughters to marry early (before 18 years of age). Most of them have to do with traditions, and deeply entrenched cultural attitudes about when girls should marry, why they should marry, and what they can and cannot do after they marry. However, good marriages that produce healthy children and communities are those in which both partners enter physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. Here's a brief explanation of each type of preparedness.

- Physical preparedness is simple: a girl is physically prepared for marriage when her body is fully developed enough to have marital relations and safely bear healthy children. A girl is rarely fully developed before she is 18 years old; girls who become mothers before 18 are far more likely to die in childbirth, as are their babies. Therefore, a girl is not ready to be a wife and mother until she is at least 18 years old.
- Emotional preparedness is a bit trickier: this means that a girl is prepared to commit herself to her husband in a loving partnership, and raise children in a loving household. Everyone reaches this level of preparedness at different ages, but it is safe to say that until a girl is **physically prepared** to have marital relations and bear children, she is not emotionally prepared to handle a relationship with a husband and raise healthy children. This does not happen until she is at least 18 years old.
- Mental preparedness might sound a bit difficult to define as well, since everyone has different strengths and abilities, but it's quite simple: mental preparedness for marriage means that both partners understand what marital relations mean, and how to have a mutually satisfying and loving marriage. Young girls, and for that matter boys, who are married before the age of 18 rarely understand what this means, and in many cases do not understand how sex/marital relations work, or how to stay safe and protected from HIV – therefore, marital relations between an underage girl and an older man become forced, painful, and associated with fear, instead of acts that express love.
- Spiritual preparedness goes hand-in-hand with mental, emotional, and physical preparedness – it could even be seen as combination of the three, with an understanding of what it means to

be married within your faith. Spiritual preparedness also means that both parties are prepared to raise children within the faith, and teach them the values of respect that your marriage should engender. This requires a great amount of adult maturity.

- Financial preparedness, finally, is something that is different for every community. However, one thing remains universally the same: a healthy marriage is one where both partners are prepared to adequately support a family. What does this mean for girls? It's simple: girls who are married under 18 are more likely to be pulled out of school too early. Girls who don't finish school are much less able to support themselves and their families if something were to happen to their husbands.

This may sound like a lot to consider, and many of the families in your community may feel like they do not have the luxury of waiting until their daughter has reached all these levels of preparedness – they may not be able to afford to keep her in school, or they may be anxious to see her future assured by an older man who will take care of her financially. However, once you have opened up a conversation about the practice of early marriage with your community, using these tools as a guide, you can increase everyone's understanding of the requirements for a healthy marriage – and give the girls in your community time to grow and achieve full potential as wives, mothers, and successful members of your community.

This flipchart activity can be used in workshops as part of a lesson on early marriage to teach the importance of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and financial preparation for marriage – and to emphasize what ages are and aren't healthy to be married. It can be incorporated into lessons for both **women's groups** and **youth groups** within your congregation, led by a faith leader, women's group leader, youth group leader, trained lay leader, or any other caring member of your community.

Instructions

In this activity, we will meet the Menkir family, a family possibly similar to many in your area. The Menkir family has four children, three daughters and one son, ranging from age 8 to age 19. All participants will be introduced to each of the Menkir family's children, and told a little bit about them: their names, how old they are, whether they are in school, what they enjoy doing, what they help with on the house/farm, and their understanding of what it means to be married. They will also find learn a little bit about the Menkir family's parents, Hussein and Fatuma, and what they want for their children – as well as some of their struggles. Everyone has different ideas about which of their children is ready to marry, and our goal is to learn/determine which of the Menkir family's children is prepared physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially for marriage.

The facilitator for this activity should ideally be a trusted faith leader, or trained lay leader of youth or women's groups, where appropriate.

Place this flipchart where all can see, and have the group seat themselves around it. Please use the following narrative to read along with the flipchart activity. There are six pictures total. Begin with the first picture. Read the description for each picture, and ask the provided discussion questions after you have done so. Only flip to the next picture when all questions have been answered.

Illustration #1

Illustration description: “This is the Menkir family. Hussein and his wife Fatuma have four children. Merima, their youngest daughter, is 8 years old. Awel, their son, is 11 years old. Their second-oldest daughter, Kedija, is 15 years old. Finally, their oldest, Zeyneba, is 19 years old, and she has finished school. They are devoted Muslims and attend salaah [as appropriate]. They have a small farm, and while they are not poor, money is tight. It is often hard for them to find money to keep their children in school – however, both Mr. and Mrs. Menkir know that keeping all of their children in school is very important, for they want them to have bright futures, healthy marriages, and be able to support themselves and help the rest of the family when they are too old.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Is this family similar to many that you know?
- 2) What similarities/dissimilarities are there between the Menkir family and your own family?
- 3) Which of the Menkir daughters would commonly be requested for marriage?

Illustration #2

Illustration description: “This is Merima, the youngest daughter in the Menkir family. She is 8 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. She laughs and giggles a lot, and enjoys playing [local game] with her two best friends. While she is very helpful around the house and on the farm, she is not physically strong enough to do the work that her older brother and sisters do. She loves her parents and her brothers and sisters. She is not yet old enough to work outside the house for money. She does not know what “sex” means, only that there are boys and there are girls, and they are built differently.”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does this sound like many of the girls in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) Is Merima ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 3) Would Merima commonly be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 4) What do you think of that?

Illustration #3

Illustration description: “This is Awel, the Menkir’s son. He is 11 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. He is very active, and sometimes causes a bit of trouble for his parents. He enjoys playing football (soccer) with his friends. He often helps his father with the cattle, and around the house – his mother will not let him get out of helping with the cooking! He would like a job, so that he can have extra money and help his parents, but his parents want him to stay in school. He thinks Adina next door is “very pretty,” but when asked if he would marry her, says, “no way, I don’t need a wife!” He understands the very basics of sex, but does not know yet about how to stay safe, or the responsibilities that come with it.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does this sound like many of the boys in your community/your son, if you have one?
- 2) Is Awel ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you think he needs more schooling before he finds work? Why or why not?

Illustration #4

Illustration description: “This is Kedija, the Menkir’s second-oldest daughter. She is 15 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. She enjoys talking and laughing with her friends. She is very shy, and sometimes does not like going to school, because many of her friends have dropped out, and the boys tease the remaining girls on the way there and in the classroom. She has more responsibility around the house and on the farm than her younger brother and sister, because she is older. She would also like a job, and her parents believe that it would be good for her to earn money, but her parents want her to stay in school, because the payoff for waiting will be better. She has received some sex education, and knows how the physical act works. However, she is unsure if she is ready to love someone unconditionally and bear children – even though some of her friends have had their first child already!”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does Kedija sound like many of the girls her age in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) Some of Kedija’s friends have had their first child by 15 – is this common in your community?
- 3) Is Kedija ready for marriage? Why or why not?
- 4) Would Kedija commonly be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 5) What do you think of that?

Illustration #5

Illustration description: “This is Zeyneba, the oldest daughter in the Menkir family. She is 19 years old, and has finished school. She enjoys talking and laughing with her friends, cooking [complicated local dish], and listening to music, especially [artist popular with young adult population in the area]. Her favorite subject in school was math, and she uses this to help her parents with the family finances, balancing their accounts. She is very friendly, confident, and self-assured. She bears the most responsibility of all the children around the house and on the farm – she often holds things together when her mother and father have to go away. She has a job, earning money through [either selling crafts or some other attainable job for a girl out of high school in a rural setting that is still slightly more accomplished than the average girl her age]. She knows she has a young man, Nesru Mohammed, who is 24 years old, interested in her, and she believes that he is a good, upstanding Muslim/EOTC man. She received sex education in school, and then went with some of her friends to talk to the nurse at the local health clinic when she had any other questions that her school teacher could not answer. She loves her brother and sisters, and her parents, and is glad they chose to keep her in school.”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does Zeyneba remind you of any girls in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) If you have a younger daughter (under age 18), would you like your daughter to be like Zeyneba at 19? Why or why not?
- 3) Is Zeyneba ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 4) Would Zeyneba be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 5) What do you think of that?

Before you flip to Illustration #6, ask the group the following question: “Who, of the Menkir children, do you believe is prepared for marriage?” Flip to Illustration #6 only after the group has answered.

Illustration #6

Illustration narrative: This is Zeyneba, the oldest daughter of the Menkir family, with her parents, on the third day after her wedding to Nesru Mohammed. They are involved in the traditional coffee ceremony – you can see Nesru and his parents seated next to Zeyneba and her parents. The two families get along very well. The Menkir family thinks Nesru is an upstanding young man – even though he is not rich, he supports himself as a [steady local job], and knows he can support a wife and children. Zeyneba was happy to marry Nesru: she especially appreciated that both of their families asked her for her opinion, and did not force her into a decision. The Mohammeds think Zeyneba is a wonderful match for their son Nesru, especially since she is mature, educated, and well-prepared for marriage. Nesru thinks Zeyneba is very beautiful, and admires how smart and level-headed she is – he could use some help balancing his accounts, and she is very good at that!

Both Zeyneba and Nesru have agreed that they will consult with each other throughout their marriage, and especially communicate on things like division of work, finances, and family planning – they want their children to be happy, healthy, and well-educated! Both Zeyneba and Nesru chose to be married to each other, and their families couldn't be happier.

Discussion questions:

- 1) What do you think of Zeyneba and Nesru's marriage?
- 2) Is this the type of marriage you would want for your daughter or son?
- 3) How does this compare to a typical marriage in your community?

Female Anatomy Lesson

Introduction

Thank you for picking up this guide, and for being willing to engage your community in honest discussion about a topic that may be fairly taboo. This anatomy lesson can serve as a guide for dispelling myths about the female anatomy, and discussing the negative effects of FGC on the human body. Many of your participants may have never seen material like this before, so please feel free to present the material as you deem appropriate – in youth groups, for example, you may modify the lesson and language as necessary, and if you see fit, omit showing the participants the diagrams, instead, using them to facilitate a discussion of the myths regarding female anatomy, and how FGC hurts girls.

Instructions

There are three major types of FGC carried out on young girls, and this anatomy lesson intends to show what each form of FGC looks like in comparison to a set of healthy, normal female external genitalia. This guide consists of four medical diagrams, with labels, and a speaking guide for each:

- 1) A diagram showing a set of healthy, normal female external genitalia, without FGC.
- 2) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type I (removal of the prepuce, or removal of the prepuce and partial or total removal of the clitoris).
- 3) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type II (removal of the prepuce, clitoris, and all or part of the labia minora).
- 4) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type III, also known as infibulation (removal of the prepuce, clitoris, and the labia minora, with the labia majora sewn together covering the urethra and vagina, leaving only a small hole for urine and menstrual fluid).

Included also in this lesson is a speaking guide with a wrap-up/conclusion detailing the main medical facts that dispel many of the common myths associated with FGC. Read and familiarize yourself with this speaking guide, and make sure you understand all of the information.

We understand that this may be used for a variety of audiences, including youth and adults of all ages. Please use the speaking guide as you deem appropriate, depending on your audience, their age, and their level of knowledge – you may modify your language and mode of presentation as you see fit. Remember, however, that this is all useful, vital information that communities need to know in order to change their knowledge of and attitudes towards FGC, and work towards eliminating this harmful practice altogether.

Speaking Guide

“I want to begin by thanking you all for being so willing to listen and discuss about a very important topic that affects all of us, whether we are men or women, boys or girls. We are going to learn about the female body, and the parts that Allah, our creator, has chosen to put there. “

“Many of you may know about the practice of female genital cutting, or FGC. This is something that is done to girls and women in our community for many reasons. Some feel that cutting the female genitalia is a practice that is pleasing to Allah, and that it is required for a woman to be a good wife and mother. Others believe that the female genitalia will grow to the ground, or that they will produce worms and a foul smell if they are left uncut. Still others believe that a woman without FGC will be unable to have children, and that FGC is the only way a woman can live a happy, healthy life.”

“What do all of these ideas have in common? They are false, and based on generations of myth and misunderstanding. FGC is a practice that has no health benefits for any girl or woman. In fact, FGC can often make a woman unable to have children. The female genitalia will *not* grow to the ground, nor are they “dirty” or “ugly” when left alone. FGC often leaves women and girls with a lifetime of unnecessary pain and suffering. Finally, FGC is not pleasing to Allah – in fact, it is quite the opposite, since FGC is like telling Allah, ‘Your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!’”

“Even if we have promoted the practice of FGC ourselves, or had it done to us, we can stop the practice of FGC in our community right now. How? By educating ourselves about the real, medical facts behind FGC, learning more about our bodies and ourselves, and having open, honest discussions about how these things affect our daily lives. Eliminating practices like FGC can and will make our lives, and the lives of our children and all generations after, better and healthier.”

“Now, let’s begin by looking at some diagrams of the female anatomy, and see how a normal, healthy female genitalia compares to one that has been circumcised.”

Picture A: Uncircumcised (normal) female genitalia

“This is a picture of the female genitalia, as viewed when a girl or woman is lying on her back, with her legs bent sideways. I understand that you may have never seen anything like this before, or you may be shocked and ask yourself, “why is this disgusting poster being shown to us?” To that, I answer that this is nothing to be considered disgusting. Allah created both men and women, and made their parts wonderfully complex. Therefore, Allah has made our bodies perfectly, so we should not be shocked by seeing diagrams of our own bodies, in their natural state, in His house

of worship. According to Quran 96:4, “verily we created man of the best stature.” Additionally, we should not think that any part that Allah has created perfectly is ‘disgusting,’ or needs removal. Quran 30:30 says, ‘there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know.’”

“There are six main parts in the healthy, normal female genitalia: the clitoris, the prepuce, the labia minora, the labia majora, the urethral opening, and the vagina.”

[POINT TO URETHRAL OPENING] “This is the urethral opening. Many of you may confuse this with the vagina, since all fluids seem to come from the same opening in a woman’s body. However, the urethral opening is very different from the vagina, in that its sole purpose is for ridding the body of toxins through urine. **[POINT TO VAGINA]** The vagina is the opening through which a woman delivers a baby, and experiences sexual intercourse. This opening is very complex and sensitive, and requires many layers of protection from germs and outside damage, as well as help stretching during childbirth. **[POINT TO LABIA MAJORA AND LABIA MINORA]** These are the labia majora, or outer lips, and labia minora, or inner lips. Their main purpose is to protect the vagina from damage, as well as aiding sexual excitation – they are very sensitive, with many nerves, and they also produce a liquid that lubricates sexual intercourse, making it easier. **[POINT TO CLITORIS]** At the top, where the two sets of lips, the labia minora and labia majora, meet, there is a little pea-sized node called the clitoris. This little organ is one of the most misunderstood parts of the female body. Modern medical science proves that this is the only organ of its kind – small, densely packed with nerves, very complex, and built solely for the purpose of pleasure. The clitoris has over 8,000 sensory nerves whose sole purposes are to stimulate sexual pleasure. While this is a female organ, and it is largely meant for female sexual pleasure, it is vital for male enjoyment as well – the clitoris excites all of the other parts of the female genitalia, making it easier for the man to penetrate and enjoy sexual relations. **[POINT TO PREPUCE]** This is the prepuce, or the covering for the clitoris. It is formed by the meeting of the labia minora over the clitoris. Its purpose is to protect the clitoris from damage.”

“When any of these parts are cut or damaged, it severely impairs a woman’s right to enjoyment of marital sexual relations, which are necessary for a joyful family life. Damage to these parts often results in massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), lifelong pain, incontinence, and even death from all of these complications. Additionally, damage to these parts puts a mother at a serious risk of dying in childbirth, and makes her child far more likely to die as well. Therefore, if we want our community to be one of healthy and happy families, we must eliminate the practice of FGC.”

“Community wise women and traditional circumcisers may look at a girl’s genitalia, examining the size, color, and contour of the clitoris and labia minora. If any of these parts are larger, darker, and rougher around the edges than what they consider “normal,” they may conclude that she is chinchu and needs FGC. However, any well-educated doctor will tell you that the size, color, and contour of the female genitalia varies from individual to individual, and all are healthy. A larger size, darker color, or rougher shape does not mean a girl is chinchu, ‘impenetrable,’ or ‘over-sexy’ – in fact, this is medically impossible! Allah created the female genitalia exactly as He meant them to be, and FGC is an insult to Allah’s perfect creation. “

“Now, we are going to see examples of the three different main types of FGC used in our community, and in communities across of Ethiopia, and how they harm the female genitalia.”

Picture B: FGC Type I

“This is a picture of the female genitalia when FGC Type I has been performed. FGC Type I is performed by cutting/damaging the prepuce, and then possibly damaging or removing the clitoris. As you can see in this picture, both the prepuce and the clitoris have been removed, and the labia majora may be sewn together to close off the top, forming scar tissue. In many cases, circumcisers attempt to remove only the prepuce, comparing the procedure to a male circumcision. Although the prepuce has similar nature to that of foreskin of the penis, its small size and attachment to the clitoris makes it difficult to remove without damaging the clitoris, unlike in male circumcision, where the foreskin can be removed without damaging the penis. Thus, it is nearly impossible, even for the most skilled circumcisers, to cut the prepuce without damaging the clitoris. A victim of FGC Type I will usually suffer from immense pain, massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), pain during sex, lack of sexual satisfaction, infertility, fistula (which means incontinence either of urine or feces), and problems in childbirth. One out of seven girls subjected to FGC Type I die as a result of the procedure, whether from infection or bleeding out during the process, or during childbirth.”

Picture C: FGC Type II

“In this picture, we see the genitalia of a girl or woman who has been subjected to FGC Type II. FGC Type II is performed by removing the clitoris with all or part of the labia minora. As we know from looking at the diagram of the healthy female genitalia, the labia minora (inner lips) have several important functions, including protecting the vagina from damage and germs and facilitating sexual intercourse (they are very sensitive and excitable, and produce a secretion that lubricates sexual intercourse, making it easier for penetration and more pleasurable for both parties). The victim of FGC Type II suffers from all the same effects as the victim of FGC Type I – except more severely. One

out of three girls subjected to FGC Type II dies from complications of the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.”

Picture D: FGC Type III

“This picture shows the genitalia of a victim of FGC Type III, also known as ‘infibulation’. This is the worst type of FGC, and it is widely performed in the Afar, Somali, and Harari regions of Ethiopia. In this type of FGC, all external sexual organs are removed, including the clitoris, labia minora (inner lips), and labia majora (outer lips). In addition, the remainder of the labia majora will be sewn together, leaving only a small hole for urine and menstruation. The girl or woman subjected to FGC Type III is left this way until her wedding day, when her scar is ripped open for sexual intercourse – she is then repaired, making her opening only large enough for the husband to penetrate her. She is re-opened during childbirth, and this is often a very painful, bloody, and fatal procedure. The victims of FGC Type III suffer from all the same effects as victims of the previous types of FGC, except to an even more severe degree, and with more of a risk for bleeding, shock, infection, and death in childbirth – their babies are far more likely to die as well. Research has shown that half of all girls who undergo FGC Type III die from complications directly related to the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.”

“FGC is a good example of humans believing they are wiser than Allah, our creator. The damage of FGC is not limited to the just the mother, even: as mentioned throughout our lesson, 10-20% of infants born from mothers who have been subjected to FGC die because of complications directly related to her FGC – especially since FGC limits the elasticity of the vagina as a birth control. If a baby’s mother has had FGC, the baby may become stuck, suffocate, and die. While all misfortunes are not all our fault, this is something in our community that we can fix. FGC is bad for the entire community, and eliminating it will save lives.”

“Now, we are going to discuss some common myths that lead people to practice FGC, and explain why they are not true, using our newfound knowledge about the female anatomy.”

1. **MYTH:** ‘FGC removes the harmful, dirty, disgusting parts of the female genitalia.’

FACT: The female genitalia do not have any ‘harmful,’ ‘dirty,’ or ‘disgusting parts’. The parts commonly cut during FGC in our region, the clitoris and the labia minora, have a very important function in sexual pleasure. A victim of FGC usually suffers from a lack of sexual satisfaction, if not excruciating pain, which in turn affects her husband’s sexual pleasure. A joyful marriage is based on mutual satisfaction, and FGC works against that.

2. MYTH: ‘Without FGC, the female parts will produce a foul smell, making the girl undesirable.’

FACT: Starting at puberty, the time when a girl begins to mature physically into a woman, the vagina naturally produces a little bit of secretion. Unless cleaned on a daily basis, it might very well cause a bad smell. However, the same is true for men – unless a man cleans his genitalia on a daily basis, they may also produce a bad smell. Some communities believe that ‘clearing out’ the area through FGC is the solution. However, this logic is like saying all people should be scalped to prevent head lice. Therefore, the solution is not FGC, but being aware of personal hygiene, and cleaning ourselves every day.

3. MYTH: ‘We need to perform FGC to remove *chinja*.’

FACT: *Chinja* does not exist, it is a myth. There is no such thing as a physical growth that covers the entrance to the female genitalia. There is nothing there that will prevent sexual penetration and childbirth. *Chinja* is not the creation of Allah, but the creation of ignorant people. The vagina is incredibly elastic – in small girls, one may not even be able to fit an index finger into the opening, but in a grown, healthy, uncut woman, the vagina can stretch enough to let a baby’s head pass through. Many people believe that if a husband cannot comfortably penetrate his wife, it must mean that she is *chinja*. However, this is not the case. Sexual penetration cannot happen unless the woman is properly lubricated and prepared for sexual intercourse – a woman who is forcefully taken, or whose husband does not understand how to properly excite the female genitalia, may therefore seem impenetrable. Removing or damaging parts of the female genitalia in fact makes this problem worse! Unfortunately, though, our community and culture tends to blame women for this problem, creating the myth of *chinja*. Additionally, many think they are cutting away parts that will block the child’s progression in childbirth when they perform FGC – this is not true. In fact, FGC limits the elasticity of the vagina, and the size of the opening, which will in turn cause the baby to become stuck, suffocate, and die. FGC is the problem, not the myth of *chinja*.

Conclusion

“In summary, FGC results in multiple short-term and long-term complications. Short term complications, during and immediately after the procedure, include excruciating pain, massive bleeding, and infection. 10% of all girls who are subjected to all types of FGC die from the procedure itself, whether from bleeding or infection shortly after. Long term complications include psychological damage from such trauma to intimate, sensitive body parts, sexual complications, complications in childbirth, and lifelong pain. These complications lead to much discord between spouses, and within families. The divorce rate in Amhara is 47%, and most of these divorces result from the discord that FGC complications can cause. This kind of family instability leads to community instability, which leads to national instability in Ethiopia.

Therefore, for the good of our communities and our nation, we must educate ourselves. We must dispel myths about practices like FGC by asking one question: is this really good for our girls, our boys, and our families? Knowing all that we do now about the female anatomy, it is clear that FGC is incredibly harmful, not only to women and girls, but to everyone around them. It may be uncomfortable for us to talk about the human body the way we have just now, but these are honest discussions that need to happen, and will make our community healthier and happier.

FGC is not pleasing to Allah. Our bodies are Allah's perfect creations, and knowledge about this is power!"

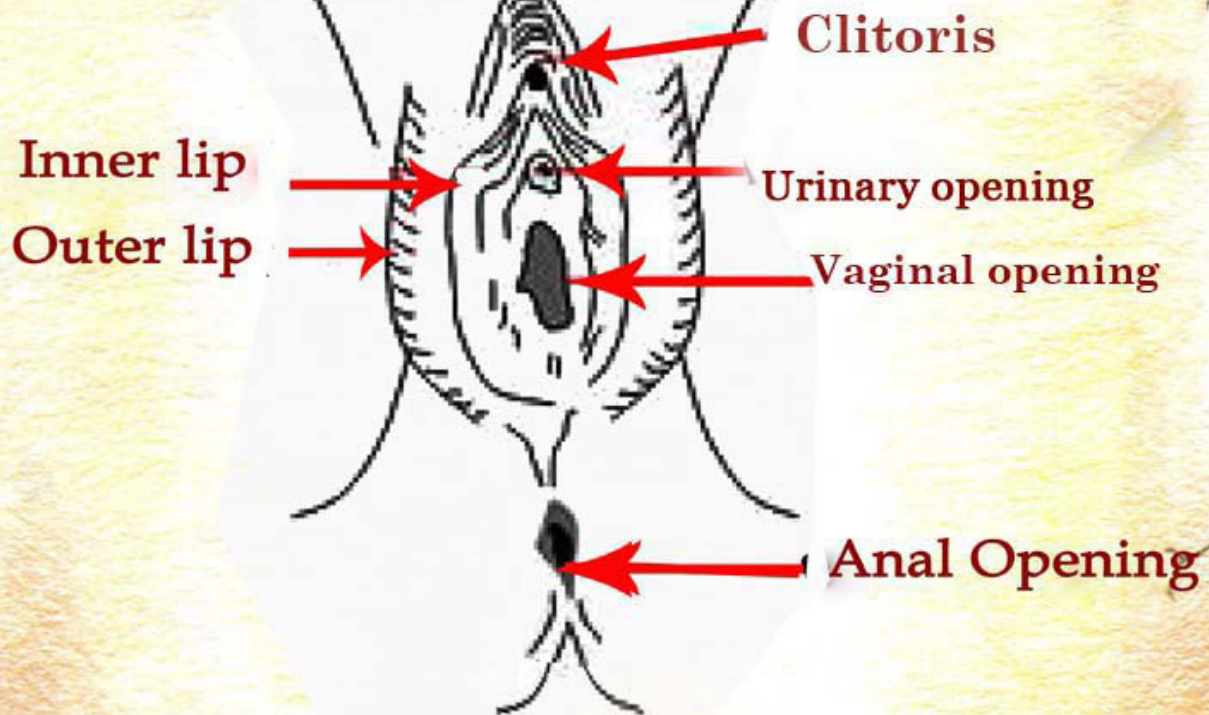


**Anatomy
Flipchart**

Female Genitalia and Types of FGC

Normal

FRONT

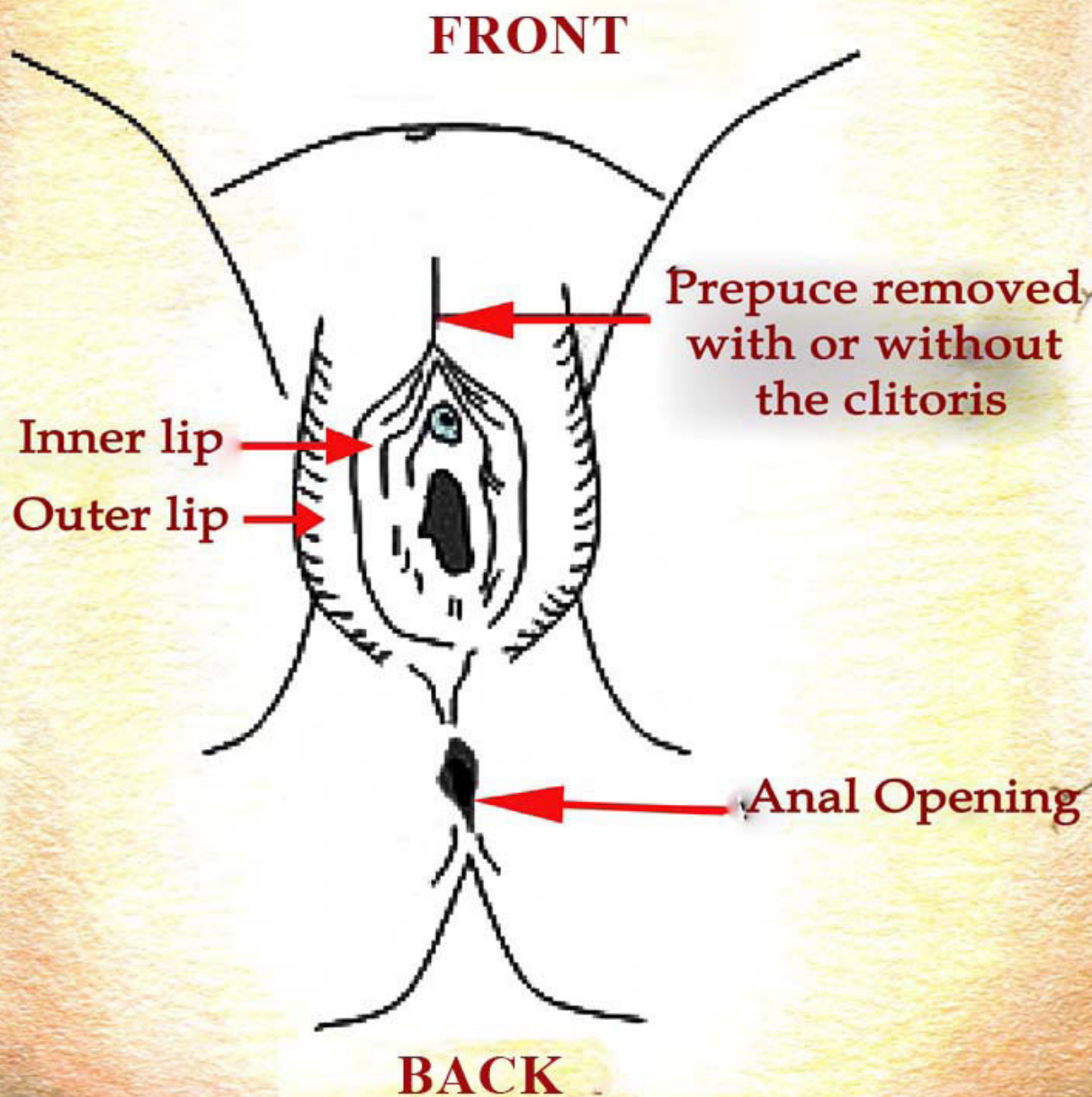


BACK

Picture A

Female Genitalia and Types of FGC

Type-I FGC



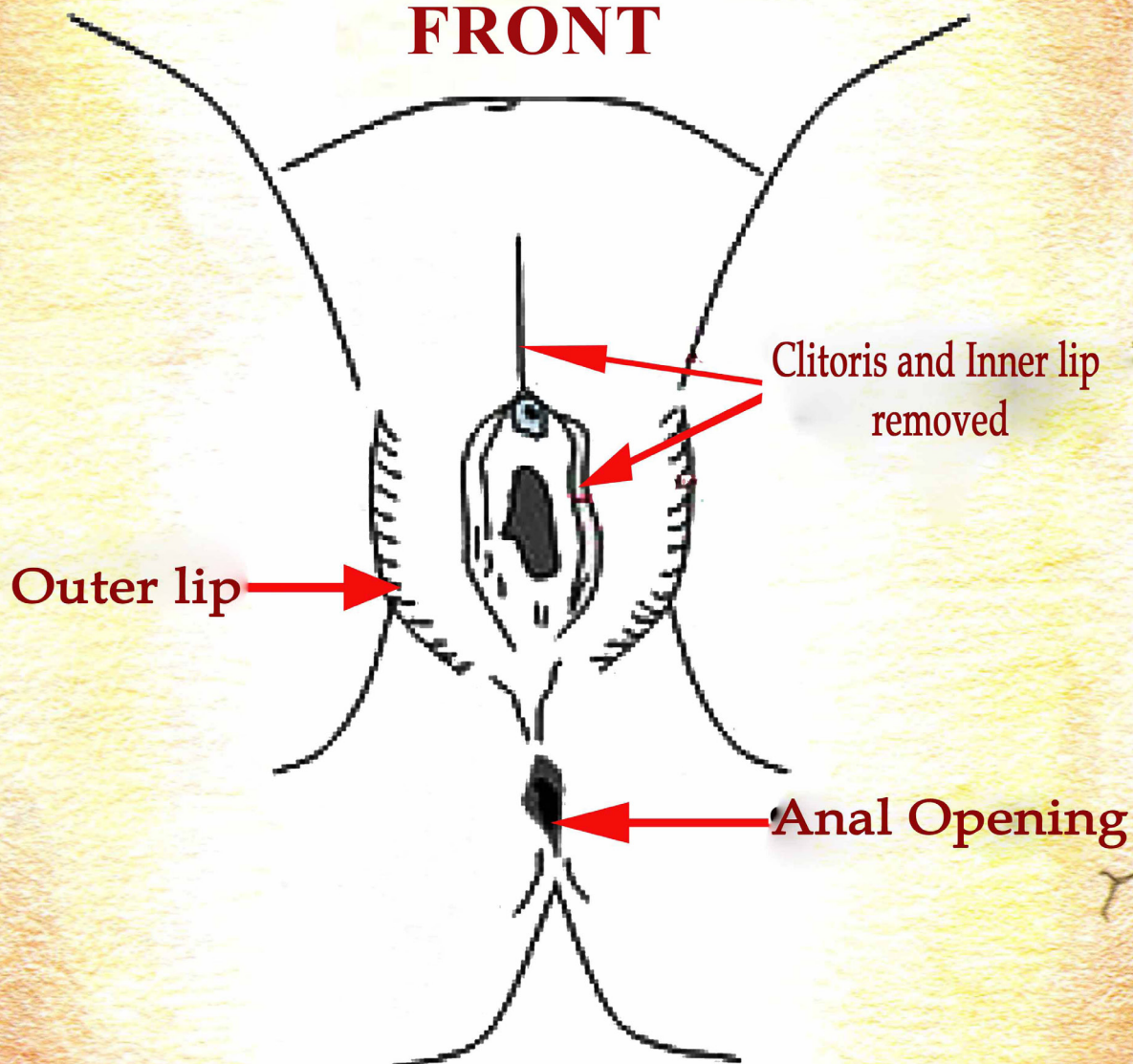
Picture B

Female Genitalia and Types of FGC

Type-II FGC



FRONT



BACK

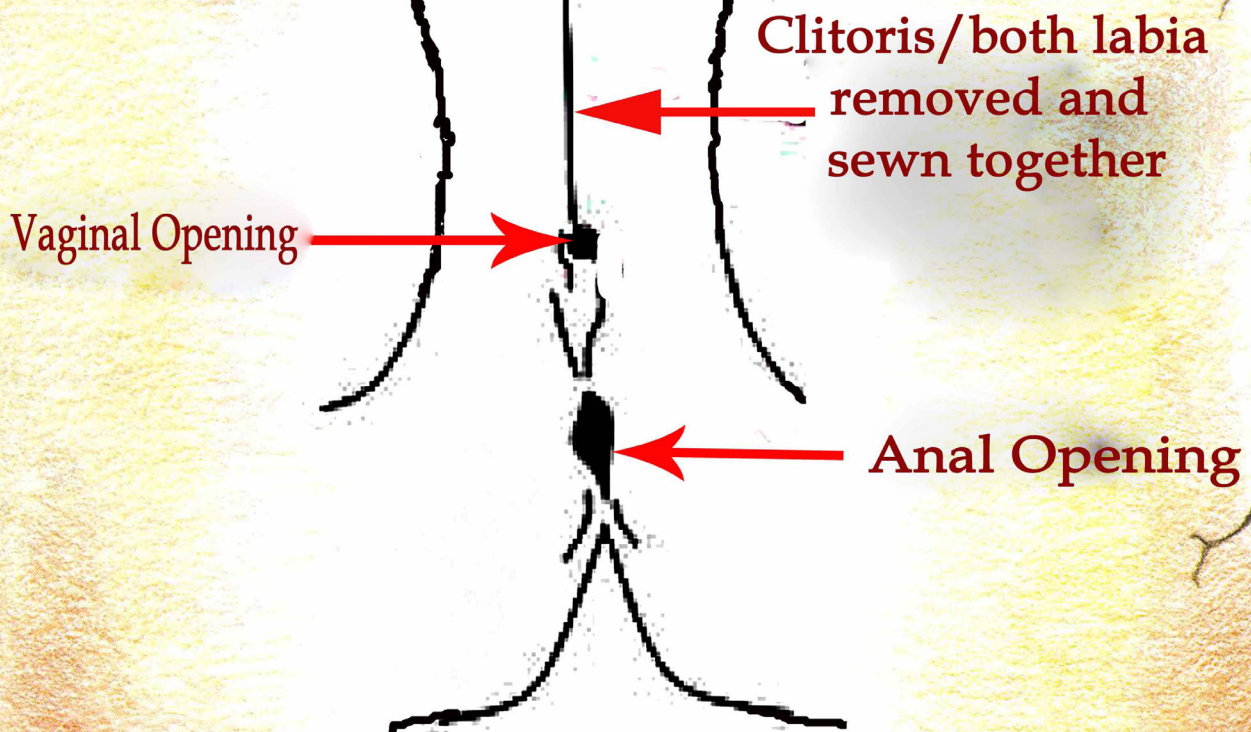
Picture C

Female Genitalia and Types of FGC

Type-III FGC

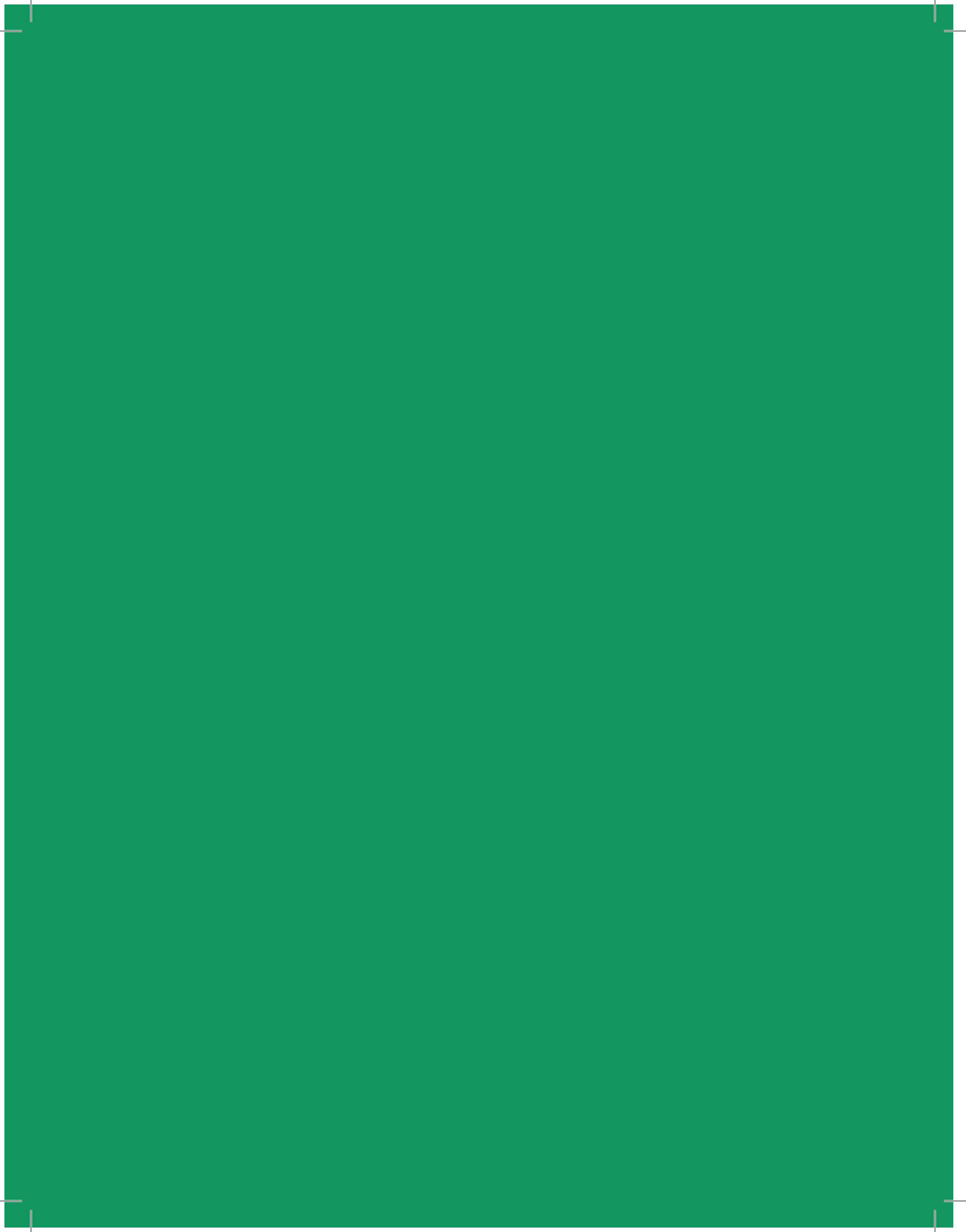


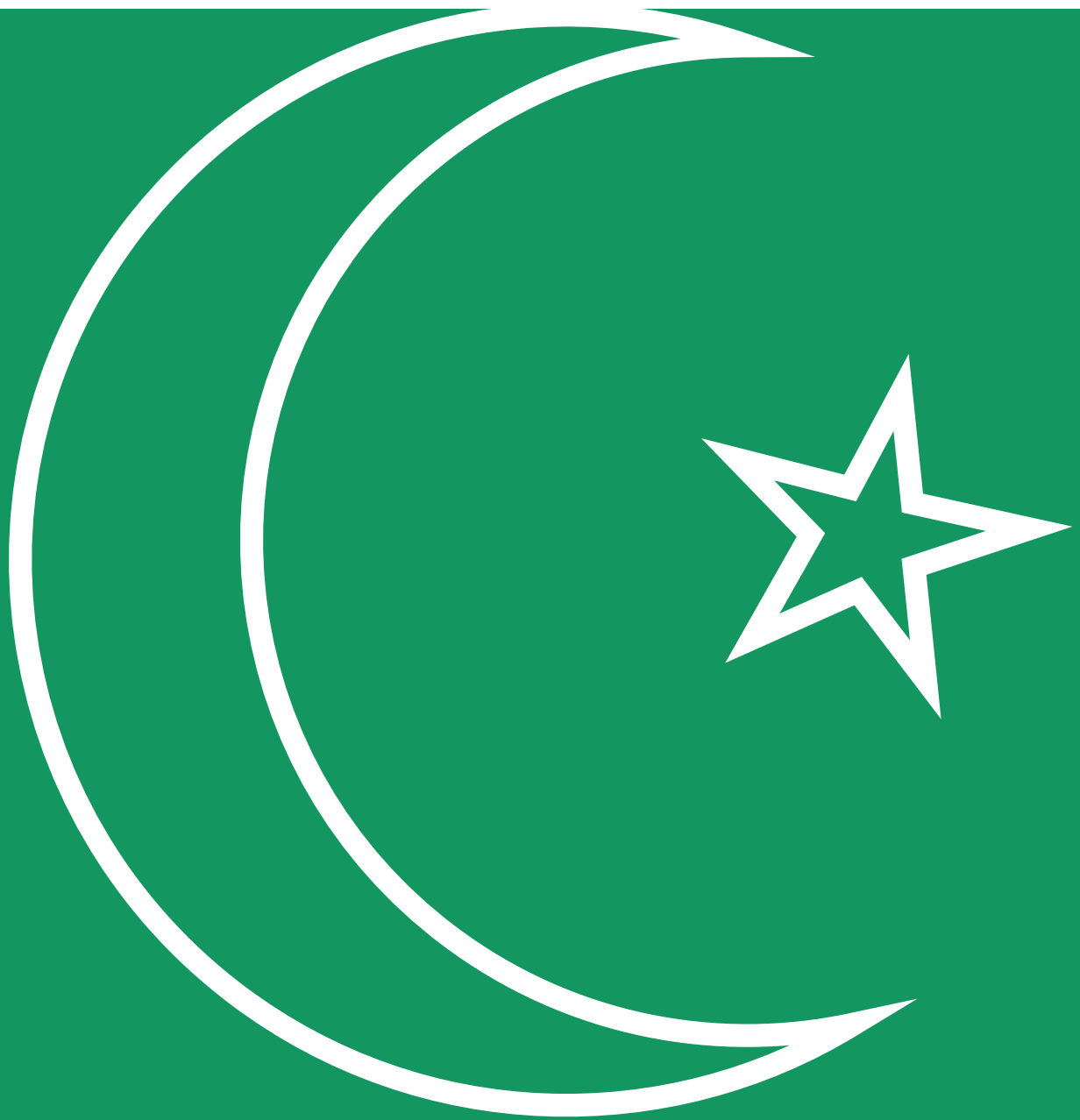
FRONT



BACK

Picture D





Early Marriage Flipchart





Illustration #1

Illustration description: “This is the Menkir family. Hussein and his wife Fatuma have four children. Merima, their youngest daughter, is 8 years old. Awel, their son, is 11 years old. Their second-oldest daughter, Kedija, is 15 years old. Finally, their oldest, Zeyneba, is 19 years old, and she has finished school. They are devoted Muslims and attend salaah [as appropriate]. They have a small farm, and while they are not poor, money is tight. It is often hard for them to find money to keep their children in school – however, both Mr. and Mrs. Menkir know that keeping all of their children in school is very important, for they want them to have bright futures, healthy marriages, and be able to support themselves and help the rest of the family when they are too old.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Is this family similar to many that you know?
- 2) What similarities/dissimilarities are there between the Menkir family and your own family?
- 3) Which of the Menkir daughters would commonly be requested for marriage?



Illustration #2

Illustration description: “This is Merima, the youngest daughter in the Menkir family. She is 8 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. She laughs and giggles a lot, and enjoys playing [local game] with her two best friends. While she is very helpful around the house and on the farm, she is not physically strong enough to do the work that her older brother and sisters do. She loves her parents and her brothers and sisters. She is not yet old enough to work outside the house for money. She does not know what “sex” means, only that there are boys and there are girls, and they are built differently.”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does this sound like many of the girls in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) Is Merima ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 3) Would Merima commonly be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 4) What do you think of that?



Illustration #3

Illustration description: “This is Awel, the Menkir’s son. He is 11 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. He is very active, and sometimes causes a bit of trouble for his parents. He enjoys playing football (soccer) with his friends. He often helps his father with the cattle, and around the house – his mother will not let him get out of helping with the cooking! He would like a job, so that he can have extra money and help his parents, but his parents want him to stay in school. He thinks Adina next door is “very pretty,” but when asked if he would marry her, says, “no way, I don’t need a wife!” He understands the very basics of sex, but does not know yet about how to stay safe, or the responsibilities that come with it.

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does this sound like many of the boys in your community/your son, if you have one?
- 2) Is Awel ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 3) Do you think he needs more schooling before he finds work? Why or why not?



Illustration #4

Illustration description: “This is Kedija, the Menkir’s second-oldest daughter. She is 15 years old, and is in [appropriate local grade level] in school. She enjoys talking and laughing with her friends. She is very shy, and sometimes does not like going to school, because many of her friends have dropped out, and the boys tease the remaining girls on the way there and in the classroom. She has more responsibility around the house and on the farm than her younger brother and sister, because she is older. She would also like a job, and her parents believe that it would be good for her to earn money, but her parents want her to stay in school, because the payoff for waiting will be better. She has received some sex education, and knows how the physical act works. However, she is unsure if she is ready to love someone unconditionally and bear children – even though some of her friends have had their first child already!”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does Kedija sound like many of the girls her age in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) Some of Kedija’s friends have had their first child by 15 – is this common in your community?
- 3) Is Kedija ready for marriage? Why or why not?
- 4) Would Kedija commonly be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 5) What do you think of that?



Illustration #5

Illustration description: “This is Zeyneba, the oldest daughter in the Menkir family. She is 19 years old, and has finished school. She enjoys talking and laughing with her friends, cooking [complicated local dish], and listening to music, especially [artist popular with young adult population in the area]. Her favorite subject in school was math, and she uses this to help her parents with the family finances, balancing their accounts. She is very friendly, confident, and self-assured. She bears the most responsibility of all the children around the house and on the farm – she often holds things together when her mother and father have to go away. She has a job, earning money through [either selling crafts or some other attainable job for a girl out of high school in a rural setting that is still slightly more accomplished than the average girl her age]. She knows she has a young man, Nesru Mohammed, who is 24 years old, interested in her, and she believes that he is a good, upstanding Muslim man. She received sex education in school, and then went with some of her friends to talk to the nurse at the local health clinic when she had any other questions that her school teacher could not answer. She loves her brother and sisters, and her parents, and is glad they chose to keep her in school.”

Discussion questions:

- 1) Does Zeyneba remind you of any girls in your community/your daughter, if you have one?
- 2) If you have a younger daughter (under age 18), would you like your daughter to be like Zeyneba at 19? Why or why not?
- 3) Is Zeyneba ready to be married? Why or why not?
- 4) Would Zeyneba be requested for marriage in your community? Why or why not?
- 5) What do you think of that?

Before you flip to Illustration #6, ask the group the following question: “Who, of the Menkir children, do you believe is prepared for marriage?” Flip to Illustration #6 only after the group has answered.



Illustration #6

Illustration narrative: This is Zeyneba, the oldest daughter of the Menkir family, with her parents, on the third day after her wedding to Nesru Mohammed. They are involved in the traditional coffee ceremony – you can see Nesru and his parents seated next to Zeyneba and her parents. The two families get along very well. The Menkir family thinks Nesru is an upstanding young man – even though he is not rich, he supports himself as a [steady local job], and knows he can support a wife and children. Zeyneba was happy to marry Nesru: she especially appreciated that both of their families asked her for her opinion, and did not force her into a decision. The Mohammeds think Zeyneba is a wonderful match for their son Nesru, especially since she is mature, educated, and well-prepared for marriage. Nesru thinks Zeyneba is very beautiful, and admires how smart and level-headed she is – he could use some help balancing his accounts, and she is very good at that!

Both Zeyneba and Nesru have agreed that they will consult with each other throughout their marriage, and especially communicate on things like division of work, finances, and family planning – they want their children to be happy, healthy, and well-educated! Both Zeyneba and Nesru chose to be married to each other, and their families couldn't be happier.

Discussion questions:

- 1) What do you think of Zeyneba and Nesru's marriage?
- 2) Is this the type of marriage you would want for your daughter or son?
- 3) How does this compare to a typical marriage in your community?



