

2-minute briefing

Breast ironing

Breast ironing (sometimes known as breast flattening) is the term used to define the pounding and massaging of a girl's breasts (usually during puberty) using hard or heated objects to try to stop them developing or to make them disappear entirely.

Breast ironing is typically carried out by the girl's mother with the belief that she is:

- protecting her daughter from sexual harassment and/or rape
- preventing the risk of early pregnancy, which would tarnish the family name
- preventing her daughter from being forced into marriage, so she will have the opportunity to continue with her education

Indicators

Breast ironing is a well-kept secret between the girl and her mother. Often the father remains

completely unaware. Some indicators that a girl has undergone breast ironing are as follows:

- Unusual behaviour after an absence from school or college including depression, anxiety, aggression, withdrawn etc
- Reluctance in undergoing normal medical examinations
- Some girls may ask for help, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear
- Fear of changing for physical activities due to scars showing or bandages being visible.
- Depression, anxiety, aggression, withdrawn etc

Responding to an incident

- Take the child seriously.
- Provide a confidential space to talk
- Inform your DSL immediately via the normal reporting procedures
- Record verbatim what has been reported to you by the child

The law and breast ironing

There is no specific law within the UK around breast ironing, however it is a form of **physical abuse** and if professionals are concerned a child may be at risk of or suffering significant harm they must refer to the [Children's MARS Policy and Procedure for Assessing need and providing help](#)

Further information

[Breast Ironing](#)

[Breast Flattening - Childline](#)

[Breast flattening - The National FGM centre](#)

[Children's MARS Policy and Procedure for Assessing need and providing help](#)

<http://www.thebluedoor.org.uk/>

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