

# Chest Ironing



# What is it?

Chest ironing (also known as breast flattening) is one form of cultural abuse and is the process during which young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged, flattened and/or pounded down over a period of time (sometimes years) in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.”

In some families, large stones, a hammer or spatula that have been heated over scorching coals can be used to compress the breast tissue. Other families may opt to use an elastic belt or binder to press the breasts so as to prevent them from growing. Breast flattening usually starts with the first signs of puberty, which can be as young as nine years old and is usually carried out by female relatives.

It should also be acknowledged that some adolescent girls and boys may choose to bind their breast using constrictive material due to gender transformation or identity, and this may also cause health problems.

Source: <http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/breast-flattening/>

# Health Implications

Due to the type of instruments that may be used, the type of force and the lack of aftercare, significant health and developmental issue may occur, such as:

- Abscesses
- Cysts
- Itching
- Tissue damage
- Infection
- Discharge of milk
- Dissymmetry of the breasts
- Severe fever
- Even the complete disappearance of one or both breasts.
- There may also be an impact on the child's social and psychological well-being.



# The Law and Chest Ironing

Although there is no specific law within the UK around chest flattening or chest ironing, 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 their local safeguarding procedures.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy7SIYEQwXw>

# What are the signs a girl is at risk?



- A girl is embarrassed about her body
- A girl is born to a woman who has undergone breast flattening
- A girl has an older sibling or cousin who has undergone breast flattening
- If there are references to breast flattening in conversation, for example a girl may tell other children about it
- A girl may request help from a teacher or another adult if she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk
- A girl from an affected community is withdrawn from PSHE and/or Sex and Relationship Education as her parents wish to keep her uninformed about her rights
- One or both parents or elder family members consider breast flattening integral to their cultural identity
- The family indicate that there are strong levels of influence held by elders who are involved in bringing up female children and support breast flattening
- A girl/family has limited level of integration within UK community

# What to do if you are worried:

If you are concerned that a girl is at risk of chest ironing, a referral must be made to the local children's services team.

If you are concerned that the girl is in immediate danger, contact the police by calling 999.

You should also contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office if the girl has been taken abroad:

Telephone: 020 7008 1500 from overseas: +44 (0)20 7008 1500

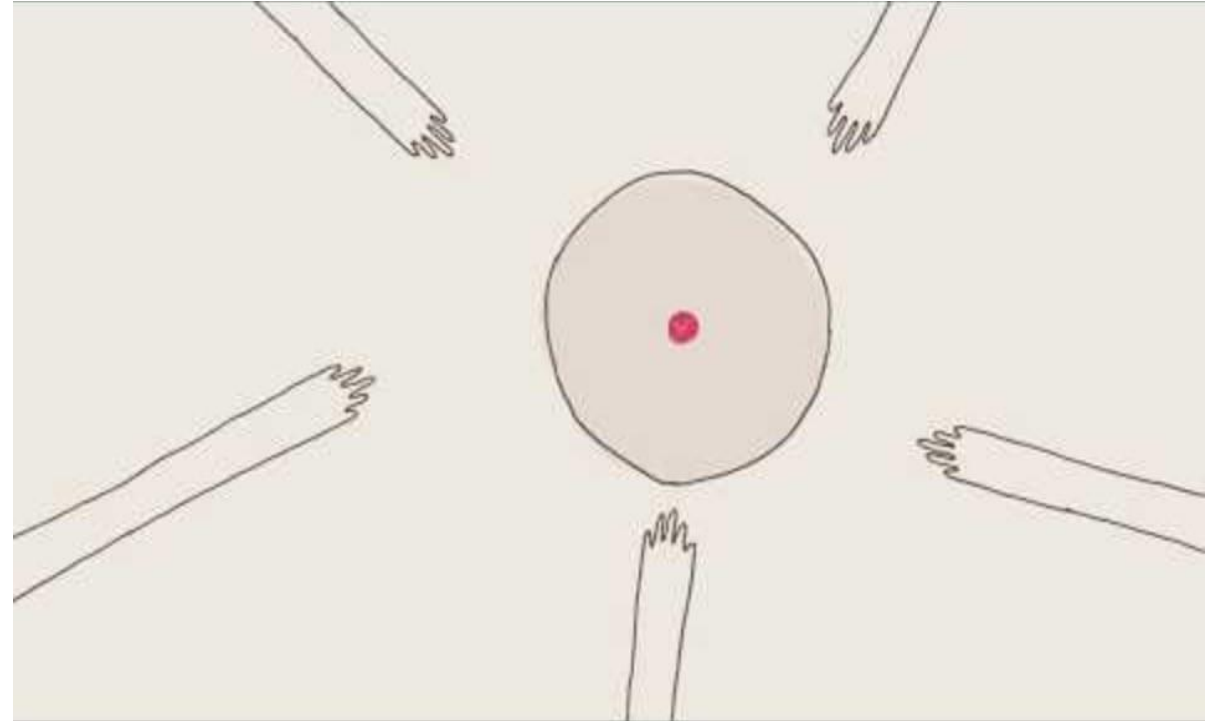


# Other resources:



A Survivor's Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUsP3ZjFrU8&t=1s>



*What is breast ironing? An Animation.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imCmlG3\\_3tc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imCmlG3_3tc)