



Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is a marriage that takes place without the consent of one or both spouses and duress is involved. This is now a criminal offence in England and Wales.

This could include both physical pressure (threats or violence) or emotional pressure to marry.

In some cases, people may be taken abroad without knowing that they are to be married. When they arrive in the country their passports may be taken by their family to try and stop them returning home.

Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and a form of domestic violence - it can also be a form of child abuse, including sexual abuse. Victims of forced marriage have included children below the age of legal marriage in the UK.

Consider forced marriage if you are aware of:

- A fear or anxiousness about a forthcoming holiday abroad/impending school holidays
- Extended absence or prevention from school/college, requests for extended leave
- Excessive parental restriction and surveillance, history of siblings leaving education early to marry
- Evidence of self-harm, suicide, treatment for depression, social isolation, eating disorders or substance abuse
- Evidence of family disputes, conflict, domestic abuse, running away from home

Individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender may be at additional risk of forced marriage. Consider this risk where there is pressure on the individual/family to marry or where their sexuality is seen to bring shame to their

family or community. For more information and advice: [LGBT communities at risk from forced marriage](#).

The Forced Marriage Unit is seeing a significant increase in the number of people with learning disabilities who are being forced into marriage for the purposes of securing care or visas for the person with learning difficulties. For more information and advice: [Learning difficulties and forced marriage](#).

Responding safely

It is crucial for agencies to listen to the victim or potential victim's concerns - remember that they may not be able to articulate why they believe they are at risk or provide tangible evidence of the risks.

- **Do not** approach the victim's family or community leaders - this could heighten the risk to the victim.
- **Do not** attempt any form of mediation or reconciliation with the family and/ or community members.
- **Do not** make assumptions or judgements based on perceptions of cultural difference.