

## Policy document for: **Forced marriage**

Updated: Autumn 2025

*This policy forms part of the Trust Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and gives specific school actions in relation to their context.*

### **Linked guidance**

- Keeping Children Safe in Education

### **Staff must remember contextual safeguarding**

When considering safeguarding incident or behaviour concerns, all assessments must consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. This is an approach to understanding and responding to children's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. This includes online abuse.

Forcing a person into a marriage is a crime in England and Wales. A forced marriage is one entered into without the full and free consent of one or both parties and where violence, threats or any other form of coercion is used to cause a person to enter into a marriage. Threats can be physical or emotional and psychological. In addition, since February 2023 it has also been a crime to carry out any conduct whose purpose is to cause a child to marry before their eighteenth birthday, even if violence, threats or another form of coercion are not used. As with the existing forced marriage law, this applies to non-binding, unofficial 'marriages' as well as legal marriages.

A lack of full and free consent can be where a person does not consent or where they cannot consent (if they have learning disabilities, for example). Nevertheless, some perpetrators use perceived cultural practices as a way to coerce a person into marriage. Schools can play an important role in safeguarding children from forced marriage.

It is important to distinguish between forced marriage and arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, families may play an active role in selecting a partner for a family member however, both spouses fully consent to the marriage

- Forced marriage is not specific to one country or culture.
- Victims include people thought to be at potential risk of future forced marriage, those currently going through a forced marriage and those who have already been forced to marry.
- Women, men and children are at risk of forced marriage regardless of age or background.
- Research shows there is no predisposed group at risk of forced marriage, however often lesbian, gay, transsexual or transgender people may be forced into marriage as a means seen to protect family honour.
- Persons with a physical or learning disability are at risk by being forced into a marriage in order to provide them with a carer.

Some of the key motives for facilitating a forced marriage are:

- Controlling unwanted sexuality, including perceived promiscuity and sexual behaviour of women;
- Controlling unwanted behaviour e.g. alcohol/drug use, wearing make-up, behaving in what is perceived as a westernised manner;

- Preventing unsuitable relationships e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural or caste group;
- Protecting family honour (also known as izzat);
- Responding to peer group or family pressure;
- Attempting to strengthen family links;
- Achieving financial gain;
- Ensuring land, property and wealth remain within the family;
- Protecting perceived cultural ideals; Protecting religious ideals which are misguided;
- Ensuring care for a child or adult with SEND where parents/carers are unable to fulfil that role;
- Assisting claims for UK residence and citizenship;
- Long standing family commitments.

Similar to domestic violence, those at risk of or trapped in a forced marriage commonly experience isolation and feel they have no one they can speak to or trust. They may be taken abroad without access to their passport, isolating them further from social contact or support. As such disclosure is rare. Victims within forced marriage relationships often suffer physical, emotional and sexual abuse including rape and forced pregnancy.

Staff are also aware that families where forced marriage has occurred are at greater risk of planning a forced marriage for their children. Forced marriage also has a negative effect on children within the marriage. Children are vulnerable as:

- They may experience direct harm as a consequence of the abusive setting;
- They may struggle to feel emotionally and or socially secure in settings outside the home;
- They may, from witnessing incidents within the home, think that physical violence or emotional abuse is justified when they are angry;
- They may suffer depression;
- They may develop low self-esteem in adulthood

### Teaching children about safe relationships

BA MAT schools use PSHE and Relationships education to teach the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships. See [Relationships education \(Primary\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/relationships-education-primary) In all our schools, this is delivered in an age and stage of development appropriate way.

### Links for further support

- <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/crime-law/forced-marriage/>
- [Forced marriage - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage)
- [Forced marriage resource pack - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage-resource-pack)
- The Forced Marriage Unit has published [Multi-agency guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage-unit-multi-agency-guidelines), with pages 32-36 focusing on the role of schools and colleges

### DSL support

Staff should report concerns regarding forced marriage to the DSL can contact the Forced Marriage Unit if they need advice or information. Contact: 020 7008 0151 or email: [fmu@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fco.gov.uk)