Forced Marriage (KCSIE 2026)

What Forced Marriage Is

Forced marriage is a **crime** in England and Wales. It occurs when one or both parties **do not or cannot give full and free consent**, and **violence, threats, coercion or pressure** are used. Since February 2023, it is also a crime to **cause a child to marry before 18**, even without threats or violence. This includes:

- legal marriages
- non-binding "traditional" ceremonies
- religious or cultural ceremonies viewed as marriage

Forced marriage is **not the same as arranged marriage**. In arranged marriage, both parties freely consent.

Forced marriage is a form of:

- honour-based abuse (HBA)
- domestic abuse
- child-on-child abuse when both parties are under 18

It can happen in the UK, abroad, or online.

Who Is at Risk

Forced marriage can affect **women, men and children** of any background. Risk factors include:

- perceived need to protect "family honour"
- controlling sexuality or behaviour
- preventing relationships deemed "unsuitable"
- SEND (used to secure a future carer)
- LGBTQ+ children pressured to conform
- long-standing family commitments
- immigration or citizenship motives

Children may be:

- unaware of the significance
- pressured into "promises" or "engagements"
- unable to consent due to age or disability

Families where forced marriage has occurred may be at **increased risk** of planning it for children.

Indicators of Forced Marriage

Staff should be alert to:

- sudden or unexplained travel plans
- concerns about passports being taken
- family surveillance or monitoring
- online coercion or pressure
- emotional distress linked to family expectations
- withdrawal, fear or secrecy
- talk of "promises", "engagements" or "being chosen"
- threats linked to honour, shame or reputation
- AI-generated threats or digital manipulation
- isolation from peers or support networks

Victims may experience:

- physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- rape or forced pregnancy
- trauma, depression or suicidal thoughts

Children living within forced marriage situations may experience direct harm, emotional insecurity, low self-esteem and normalisation of violence.

Staff Actions — What You MUST Do

Forced marriage concerns require **immediate action**.

1. **Speak to the DSL immediately** — *before* logging on CPOMS.
2. **Do NOT approach the family**, attempt mediation, or involve relatives.
    - This is a statutory requirement.
    - Contacting the family increases risk and may lead to the child being taken abroad.
3. **Record accurately on CPOMS**, including the child's exact words.
4. Treat **any concern** — even minor or uncertain — as an **immediate safeguarding risk**.
5. Maintain confidentiality and reassure the child.

The DSL will:

- complete an urgent risk assessment (including siblings)
- consider Police involvement
- make a **Front Door referral** and share information proactively
- consider referral to **MACPT**
- contact the **Forced Marriage Unit** for advice (020 7008 0151 / fmu@fco.gov.uk)
- ensure all risk information is logged and transferred if the child moves school

Online Risks

Forced marriage may involve:

- digital monitoring
- surveillance of messages or devices
- coercion via social media
- AI-generated threats or pressure

Staff must be alert to disclosures involving online control.

Training & Curriculum

Staff receive training in:

- harmful sexual behaviour
- misogyny
- mental health
- honour-based abuse (including forced marriage)

BA-MAT schools teach safe, healthy relationships through PSHE and Relationships Education, delivered in an age-appropriate way.

Support for Staff & Volunteers

Forced marriage may also affect staff or volunteers.

- Under 18: follow child safeguarding procedures.
- Over 18: follow adult safeguarding procedures. Staff can contact the **Forced Marriage Unit** for support.

Bourne Alliance
Multi Academy Trust

Policy document for: **Forced marriage**

Updated: Autumn 2026

This policy forms part of the Trust Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and reflects the latest KCSIE guidance. Keeping children safe in education 2026 (comes into force from 1 September 2026) See page 171- for full details. ***All staff must read KCSIE Part 1 as a minimum.***

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.
- The minimum age for marriage and civil partnership is 18. This includes 'traditional ceremonies' which are legally non binding but viewed as marriages by the partners and their families
    - Children may be unaware of the significance
    - Unable to consent
    - Pressured into 'promises' or 'engagements'
- Forced marriage is child on child abuse when both parties are under 18 and must be treated in line with KCSIE Part 5
- Forced marriage takes place in the UK and is not only something that takes place abroad and may involve online coercion or community pressure
- Misogyny, gender based abuse and harmful sexual behaviour are safeguarding risks of forced marriage
- Forced marriage is a safeguarding risk even when the child appears to agree. "Apparent consent" does not mean free consent. Coercion can be hidden and subtle

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, religious 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. Victims often suffer with poor mental health such as depression, trauma and suicide ideation.

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

Online risks relating to forced marriage

Forced marriage cases have been identified to frequently involve digital monitoring or online pressure. Staff must be aware of disclosures which relate to:

- Coercion via social media
- Monitoring of communications
- Digital surveillance by family members
- AI-generated threats

Staff actions

Staff must be clear that forced marriage is a form of Honor Based Abuse (see **HBA** policy for more details) and so must remain vigilant for honour based control, surveillance, threats and family/community pressure. It is also a form of domestic abuse.

There are risks of children being taken abroad and abandoned or having their passports taken away. Staff must be vigilant to children disclosing sudden travel plans.

- Where there is a concern raised, staff MUST NOT approach the family, attempt mediation or involve relative. This is a statutory requirement from KCSIE since approaching the family increases risk and could lead to the child being taken abroad.
- Staff must also report any concern which includes the indicators even when these appear minor or uncertain
- Speak immediately to a DSL before logging in CPOMS. Logging must be accurate and include the actual words of the child
- Any concern or risks identified must be treated as immediate safeguarding risk and require immediate DSL involvement

DSLs will:

- Immediately risk assess the concern – giving consideration to siblings of the children concerned
- Consider Police involvement
- Take the appropriate action with a Front Door referral with proactive information sharing and Family Help pathways so that early help can be put in place
- The DSL can contact the Forced Marriage Unit if they need advice or information. Contact: 020 7008 0151 or email: fmu@fco.gov.uk
- Consider referral to MACPT (Multi Agency Child Protection Team)
- Any risk information identified must be logged on CPOMS, shared with wider agencies and will then be part of the transfer of records when the child leaves the school

Staff training

As part of annual and ongoing safeguarding training, staff are trained in

- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Misogyny
- Mental health
- Honour based abuse – which includes forced marriage

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) In all our schools, this is delivered in an age and stage of development appropriate way.

Supporting staff and volunteers

Staff are trained to be aware of safeguarding concerns around forced marriage since this could be a risk for staff themselves or for volunteers. Where this affects those under the age of 18, safeguarding procedures apply. For those over the age of 18, adult safeguarding procedures will be followed.

Staff can contact the Forced Marriage unit Forced marriage - GOV.UK who can offer help, support and protection. DSLs will contact the Front door for additional assistance and guidance.

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)
- Forced marriage resource pack - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- The Forced Marriage Unit has published Multi-agency guidelines, with pages 32-36 focusing on the role of schools and colleges

DSL flowchart

