

Forced Marriage

Signs that a child may be at risk, or a victim of forced marriage.

Understanding Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is one conducted without the free and full consent of one or both people. The majority of victims are female, but males can be victims too. It can happen at any age: the Forced Marriage Unit has supported victims as young as five years old. Forced marriages happen in this country and abroad.

Anybody who is being forced into marriage is at risk of significant harm. Those threatened with forced marriage can be subject to physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse; perpetrated by parents, siblings, extended family, or even the wider community. Refusal to go through with a forced marriage has sometimes been linked to so-called 'honour-based' violence, including murder. **Forced marriage also places individuals at risk of domestic abuse within the context of the marriage.**

Forced marriage is never acceptable. It is a criminal offence in the UK that can carry a prison sentence of up to 7 years. It is a violation of human rights and where a child is involved, it is child abuse. For more information, visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>
<https://www.facebook.com/forcedmarriage>
<https://twitter.com/FMUnit>

Many young people who face a forced marriage will not discuss their worries, even with their friends, for fear their families may find out, or that if they express concern they will bring 'shame' on their family.

It is also possible that some children will not realise that there is support available, believing that forced marriage is 'normal'. Others might not even be aware that they are going to be forced into a marriage.

It is important therefore that all staff become familiar with signs that a child may be at risk of, or already in, a forced marriage.

If you observe signs and/or hear information suggesting that the child may be at risk of, or already in a forced marriage, raise these concerns with the DSP immediately.

There is often only one chance to prevent a forced marriage from happening.

Education

- absence or sudden disappearance;
- request for extended leave of absence and failure to return from visits to family's country of origin;
- fear about forthcoming school holidays;
- surveillance by siblings or cousins at school;
- decline in behaviour, engagement, performance or punctuality;
- being withdrawn from school by those with parental responsibility;
- not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities;
- sudden announcement of engagement;
- prevented from going on to further/higher education.

Health

- isolation;
- depression;
- self-harm;
- attempted suicide;
- FGM;
- early/unwanted pregnancy
- eating disorders

Family History

- Siblings forced to marry
- Early marriage of siblings
- Self-harm or suicide of siblings
- Family disputes
- Running away from home
- Unreasonable restrictions e.g. "house arrest"

Forced Marriage:

Prevention, Early Intervention and Support

The All Wales Practice Guide on **Safeguarding children from abuse related to cultural and religious beliefs** highlights the seriousness of this form of abuse and the potential threats to the safety of individuals who resist or refuse to go through with a forced marriage.

Getting the response right the first time a concern is raised is crucial.

In addition to making a report to Social Services under schools' **'duty to report'** (Wales Safeguarding Procedures and Keeping Learners Safe guidance), practitioners can **seek specialist advice:**

Forced Marriage Unit: 0207 008 0151
fmu@fco.gov.uk

Bawso 24/7 Helpline: 0800 7318 147
info@bawso.org.uk

Karma Nirvana: 0800 5999 247
info@karmanirvana.org.uk

Prevention, Early Intervention and Support

A Social Services investigation may conclude that the child is not at risk of forced marriage, and therefore does not meet the threshold for statutory intervention. It is important that these individuals can still easily access support if they want it, especially if they are still concerned about the possibility of being forced to marry.

- **Bawso** is the lead organisation in Wales providing advice and support to BME individuals and families who have faced Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV). They specialise, among other areas, in preventing and supporting victims of forced marriage. Bawso provides:
 - specialist support and advice to young people who are concerned about the possibility of forced marriage;
 - support young people to apply for a Forced Marriage Protection Order;
 - help young people with wider support needs, and, if safe to do so, support their family to help to challenge harmful beliefs and educate them about children's rights.

You can contact Bawso on their helpline to enquire about the support available in your local area.

- **Local Domestic Abuse Services** can also offer support to children and young people - you can find your local service on Welsh Women's Aid's website [here](#).
- **Community groups working to educate, empower, develop leadership, and/or raise awareness can** help children, young people, women, and families to learn about their rights and where to seek support if they need it in a non-stigmatising environment. They often run various projects. EYST have mapped various BME services operating in Wales: see [here](#).