

Forced marriage is wrong. If this is happening to you, or someone you know, this is not your fault and you are not alone.

You can get help.

- 👉 Talk about your concerns to your teacher or
- 👉 Call the Forced Marriage Unit on **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday (UK time)
- 👉 Outside those hours, call **(+44) (0)20 7008 1500** and ask for the Foreign Office Response Centre.
- 👉 Email: **fmufco.gov.uk**

We offer confidential help and advice:
we will not contact your family.

For more information go to **www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage**, or look inside this booklet for details of other organisations that can help.

If you are in immediate danger of harm or being taken abroad against your will, call the police.

**Marriage:
It's YOUR choice**



Marriage: it's YOUR choice

Marriage is something that most of us dream of happening... one day. But for some people, marriage can become a nightmare – when they're forced to marry someone against their will.

- 👉 They might be threatened or beaten to make sure they get married
- 👉 They might be told that they are bringing shame on their family if they don't marry
- 👉 They may even be taken abroad, without knowing they are going to get married, and then not be allowed to return home.

Forced marriage, like this, is a violation of human rights and it is seen in the UK as a form of domestic violence or child abuse. It can affect men and women, girls and boys, from every community.

“Speaking to the Forced Marriage Unit gave me hope. I felt that somebody who understood me was on my side – no gossip, no judgement, and no conditions. I didn't always like the options the FMU gave me, but they helped me take my life into my own hands and understand that I have the right to choose.” **Aisha**

If any of these things are happening to you, or someone you know, you can do something about it. It is not your fault and you are not alone. There are lots of organisations you can contact who are able to advise you on how you may be able to stop the marriage going ahead, or what you can do to avoid it. This leaflet tells you more about those organisations and how to get in touch with them.

What about arranged marriages?

An arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. In an arranged marriage, families take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but both the bride and groom are part of the decision process and consent freely to marrying each other. In a forced marriage, either the bride or groom (or possibly both) aren't given any choice.

Are you being forced into marriage?

If you are being forced into marriage either in the UK or abroad, or have already been forced into marriage, you can contact the FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT (FMU) for confidential help and advice.

The Forced Marriage Unit is a government organisation which exists to help people who are being forced into marriage. We deal with about 400 cases a year, so our advisers understand the issues, the family pressures and how difficult it is to talk about these situations. We offer support and information on your rights and what you can do. **We will not contact your family.**

If you are in immediate danger of harm or being taken abroad against your will, call the police on 999.

- People of all ages can contact us. Some of the most important things that we can help you with are:
- **Finding somewhere to live** if you don't go through with the marriage – for instance, we can recommend safe places to stay and where to get both emotional and practical help, for example on staying in education
- **Protecting yourself from harm** – we can put you in contact with agencies whose job it is to help protect you from anyone threatening you
- **Preparing for going abroad** – if you are about to go abroad and you think you may be forced into a marriage while you are there, we can advise you on what to do before you go
- **Just listening** – if you are concerned about a planned marriage or want to know more about your options then we can help. You don't have to give your name: just tell us what your concerns are, and we will do what we can to help.

Get in touch

To contact the Forced Marriage Unit:

- 📞 Call **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday (UK time). We can call you back if you are low on credit.
- 📞 Outside those hours, call **(+44) (0)20 7008 1500** and ask for the Foreign Office Response Centre. It may take longer to get through, but please keep trying.
- ✉️ Email **fmufco.gov.uk** – you will receive a response within 24 hours.

What you can do if you're abroad

If you are a British national abroad and you realise that you are being forced into a marriage, you or a trusted friend should contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy or High Commission (some phone numbers are on page 7, or go to www.fco.gov.uk for full contact details). They will contact the FMU in the UK, and staff will try to help you get out of the situation and back to the UK.

Is someone you know being forced into marriage?

If you're worried that someone you know is being forced into marriage, or may be taken abroad to be forced into marriage, please contact us for help and advice. All information is treated in confidence.

The more information you can give us the better. For example, if you have a photograph, a passport number or contact details of where they may be staying, that can be of real help in finding the person.

To get in touch with us,

- 📞 Call **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday (UK time).
- 📞 Outside those hours, call **(+44) (0)20 7008 1500** and ask for the Foreign Office Response Centre.
- 📞 Email fmufco.gov.uk – you will receive a response within 24 hours.

If the person is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

Who else can help?

As well as the Forced Marriage Unit, there are a number of organisations that can give you confidential advice and information. More organisations are listed on the FMU website at www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

National services

Police 999 in an emergency or look in the phonebook for your nearest police station

National Domestic Violence Helpline (24 hour Freephone)
0808 200 0247

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline (help for adults worried about a child)
0808 800 5000

Shelter (for housing advice)
0808 800 4444

ChildLine (help for children and young people) 0800 1111
Muslim Youth Helpline
0808 808 2008

Calls to 0808 or 0800 numbers are free from BT landlines, but you may have to pay to call from a mobile phone.

General advice

Asian Family Counselling Service
020 8571 3933 or 020 8813 9714
Karma Nirvana (Asian men and women's project) 01332 604 098

Honour Network (helpline for survivors of honour crimes and forced marriages) 0800 5999 247
The Iranian Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation
020 7490 0303

Regional advice

Southall Black Sisters
020 8571 9595
Newham Asian Women's Project
020 8472 0528
Ashiana Project (London)
020 8539 0427
Ashiana Project (Sheffield)
0114 255 5740

Bangladesh

Dhaka (00880) (2) 8822705
Sylhet (00880) (821) 724695

India

Chennai (0091) (44) 42192151
Mumbai (0091) (22) 6650 2222
New Delhi (0091) (112) 6872161

Pakistan

Islamabad (0092) (51) 2012000
Karachi (0092) (21) 5827000

For High Commissions, Embassies and Consulates in other countries, please visit the FCO website, www.fco.gov.uk



Your questions answered

If I think I might be forced into a marriage when I go abroad, what should I do?

Think very carefully before you go abroad. Once you are abroad, it will be much harder to get help. **If you decide to go or have to go, please contact the FMU first.** Make sure you take the address and contact numbers of a trusted friend and of the High Commission/Embassy in the country you are visiting and keep them somewhere safe. Take some money with you in pounds and the local currency, a spare mobile phone and a copy of your passport and tickets.

If I tell a teacher, will she/he tell my family?

No. If you talk to your teacher about this, let them know that you are scared that if they tell your family it will put you at risk. Guidance to teachers is clear that they must take your concerns seriously and should not talk to your family without

your permission. Your teacher should know and understand this, but it may be helpful to remind them.

I can't afford to leave home. So how is being homeless with no money a better life than a forced marriage?

- If you are under 16, there are various ways of finding you a safe place and support. Please talk to your teacher or call the FMU for help.
- If you are over 16 and female, you can go to a refuge. A refuge is a safe environment which can provide you with emotional and practical help such as access to counselling, and sorting out benefits and housing. You will also meet other women there who have been through a similar experience. You will be encouraged to become independent and to make your own decisions about your future.

- If you are over 16 and male, please call the Forced Marriage Unit to discuss your options.

Is it right that I have to do this because of my religion?

All major religions support your right to choose and do not support forced marriages. Sometimes, though, families may wrongly use religion to put pressure on you or to try and justify why they are forcing you into marriage.

My parents had an arranged marriage and want me to have one. But I'm too young to think about marriage.

How do I tell them?

An arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. It is important that it is your choice whether to get married, and that you explain this to your parents. You might also think about talking to someone about how you feel and about your options. This could be your teacher, the Forced Marriage Unit, or an outside agency like Karma Nirvana (see page 7 for contact details of organisations you can talk to).

My mum says if I don't marry something will happen to dad and it will be my fault.

Some families use emotional blackmail to try and get their way. This is wrong and you must not feel guilty. It is important that you talk to someone about how this is making you feel so that you do not feel lonely and know your options.

If I don't get married my family will disown me, and I can't live without my family. What can I do?

Some young people leave and are then disowned. Though it is difficult, many manage to rebuild their lives successfully. For example, at Karma Nirvana most of the team are survivors and now doing great things with their lives, even without their families. It may be an idea for you to talk to someone who has been disowned to find out how they coped. See page 7 for organisations that can help.



Case Studies

→ Jamila

When Jamila was 16 years old, her parents found out that she had been seeing a 17 year old boyfriend for a while. Jamila was worried that they would send her abroad and force her into a marriage. She was scared about what might happen to her if she went home, so she spoke to a teacher with whom she had a good relationship.

The teacher took Jamila's concerns seriously, and spoke to the Forced Marriage Unit and the local police. With their help, the school prepared a plan to monitor and support Jamila, and to prevent her from being taken out of the country, involving Jamila at every stage. The Police visited Jamila at school and gave her practical advice about what to do in various situations, for example how to alert staff at the airport if she needed help. Jamila felt supported and able to return home. She feels confident that she would know what to do were her parents to try and take her out of the country, and knows that whenever she has any concerns she can talk to her teacher. The school monitors her attendance every day, and would investigate straight away if she didn't turn up.

Jamila is taking her exams this summer, and the school have supported her in applying for a college place.

→ Maya

At the age of 15, Maya was pulled out of secondary school by her parents and kept at home. When she was 17, Maya's parents said that they were all going to Pakistan on a family holiday. Maya was very excited, as she had not been on holiday before and she wanted to see her extended family. However, once there, Maya was forced to marry her first cousin, with threats that if she did not agree she could not come home. After the marriage, Maya was left in Pakistan for 5 months, feeling completely betrayed by her parents.

Once back in the UK with her husband, Maya was not allowed to work, and was kept isolated at home. She was not allowed to use the house telephone and her parents took her mobile. However one night she managed to get to the phone and called a friend. She asked him to contact the police, explain what was going on, and say that she wanted to leave the house the next evening. The police arrived at 6.30 pm and escorted her to the police station.

Maya moved into a refuge run by an Asian women's project, where she felt supported and has rebuilt her life. She gained a university qualification although she had left school with no qualifications, and is now working as a young person's project worker.

