

Screening for Forced Marriage Cases

TIP SHEET FOR HOTLINE ADVOCATES

WHAT IS FORCED MARRIAGE?

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not consent to the marriage or lack the capacity to do so, and it typically involves elements of force, fraud, or coercion. It may be a threatened marriage, or one that has already taken place.

WHO IS IMPACTED BY FORCED MARRIAGE?

Forced marriages can happen to people of any gender, age, religion, cultural background, national origin, or economic status. The Forced Marriage Initiative has responded to over 500 emergency requests for assistance and served individuals from almost every state in the U.S. from every walk of life.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON MANDATED REPORTING

Current child protection systems in the U.S. often face challenges when confronted with forced marriage cases involving minors. Without proper planning, standard responses may potentially put an individual at greater risk of harm. It is essential that hotline advocates explain mandated reporting requirements and limits to confidentiality at the beginning of the conversation.

RED FLAGS

- Siblings' or other family history of forced or early marriages
- Family disputes or conflicts - mentions of "honor" violence
- Individual or siblings reported missing, or frequent running away
- Unreasonable restrictions by parents such as "house arrest," not being allowed to speak on the phone or communicate with others alone
- Planned or threat of unusual travel overseas ("to visit a sick family member" or "for someone else's wedding")
- Unexpected or unfamiliar visitors or houseguests
- Health concerns such as FGM/C, virginity tests, and increased attention to gynecological health or fertility; early, unwanted or concealed pregnancy
- Unusual decline in behavior, performance, or attendance at school or work
- Fear of upcoming holiday breaks, expressing uncertainty about whether they will return to school or work
- Sudden withdrawal from school or work, especially if pressured by family
- Mental health concerns including: depression, anxiety, isolation, emotional withdrawal, self-harm, or suicide attempts

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS WHEN RED FLAGS ARE PRESENT

- How does marriage typically happen in your family or community and how do you feel about that for yourself?
- How did your marriage happen?
- How did you meet your partner/future spouse/spouse?
- Does your family want you to get married and how do you feel about that for yourself?
- Has your family selected a partner for you or are they actively trying to find a spouse for you?
- Have your siblings or any other relatives been forced to marry in the past?
- Have you told your family that you do not want to get married/or stay in the marriage? If no, why not?



ALWAYS

- Let the individual know they have the right to say no to a marriage they do not want, even if they are a minor.
- Reassure the individual that no religion sanctions forced marriage.
- Remind the individual that marriage does not remove the requirement for sexual consent, and rape and sexual assault can occur within a marriage.
- Reassure the individual that they are not alone and that there is specialized help available for them.



NEVER

- Tell someone forced marriage is a “cultural” or “family” issue.
- Use family or community members as interpreters.
- Activate a law enforcement or CPS response without first making a plan with the caller.
- Call, text, email or leave a voicemail unless they have explicitly said it is safe to do so.
- Act as a mediator. Even things that seem helpful, such as sharing information about U.S. laws with parents as a way of warning them, can reveal that an individual has asked for help, and this can have serious consequences.

If a caller is facing the threat of forced marriage or is in a marriage they are being forced to remain in, they may be eligible for services from the Forced Marriage Initiative at the Tahirih Justice Center and a referral should be considered.

The Forced Marriage Initiative at the Tahirih Justice Center provides free, confidential support to individuals from anywhere in the United States that are facing forced marriages either in the U.S. or overseas. Our services include risk assessment, safety planning, relocation assistance and comprehensive case management.

Between the hours of 9:30am-6pm Monday-Friday callers may be warm transferred to the Tahirih Justice Center at 571-282-6187. Callers can also email us at FMI@tahirih.org or use the anonymous “Request Assistance Online” portal at our website www.preventforcedmarriage.org.