

Forced Marriage

Everyone has the right to choose who they marry. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland you must be 18 to marry, unless your parents give you permission then you can be married from 16. In Scotland, you must be at least 16. To marry someone below these ages or make someone marry someone they do not want to is illegal in the UK.

Arranged marriage (when people help match the people getting married) and forced marriage are not the same. An arranged marriage is defined as: when the families take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the choice of whether to enter the marriage is left to both people. The marriage is entered into with the full and free consent of both people. Forced marriage is defined as: when one or both people do not, or cannot, consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used.

Forced marriages happen in many religions and nationalities, and can affect both boys and girls. It doesn't only happen to young people, it can happen to adults too. There are some people and communities that think forced marriage is okay. Because forced marriage is illegal, it can happen in secret and can also be planned by parents, family or religious leaders. It may involve physical abuse, sexual abuse or emotional abuse. But it's important to remember that all major religions (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Jewish) are against forced marriage.

Some families force their children to marry because they:

- think it's an important part of religion or culture
- are worried about the family's reputation and honour (in some cultures also known as 'izzat')
- want all of the family's money to stay together
- want to marry their children off in exchange for money
- don't approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
- don't want their children to have relationships
- feel pressured by the community or other family members to follow traditions
- want to keep family values and honour.

But none of these reasons are okay and nobody has the right to force anyone into marriage.

Everyone has the right to:

- choose who they marry, when they marry or whether they want to get married or not
- make decisions and to be able to tell someone about what's happening to them
- feel safe and to ask for help
- say no and explain that they don't feel happy with what is happening.