



Forced Marriage: INFORMATION SHEET

For information about forced marriage, visit www.mybluesky.org.au. You can seek free, confidential legal advice, or report possible cases of forced marriage, by contacting the national forced marriage helpline, *My Blue Sky*: call 02 9514 8115, SMS 0481 070 844, or email help@mybluesky.org.au. If you want to report someone in, or at immediate risk of, a forced marriage, call the Australian Federal Police on 131 AFP (131 237). In an emergency, dial Triple Zero (000).

What is forced marriage?

Everyone in Australia is free to choose whether to get married. Forcing anybody to get married is never acceptable and is a crime in Australia. A forced marriage happens when a person gets married without **freely and fully consenting**, because they have been **coerced, threatened or deceived**, or because they are **incapable of understanding the nature and effect of a marriage ceremony**, for reasons including age or mental capacity. Some types of coercion are obvious and easy to identify and can include the use of physical or sexual violence or refusing to let somebody leave a particular place or location until they accept the marriage. Other types of coercion are less obvious because they involve psychological and emotional pressure. These types of coercion can include making a person feel responsible for, or ashamed of, the consequences of not marrying, such as bringing shame on their family.

Forced marriage is a slavery-like practice, a form of gender-based violence and an abuse of human rights. Anybody can be a victim of a forced marriage, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation or religious or cultural background. The crime of forced marriage applies to cultural, religious or legal marriages that occur in Australia (including where a person was brought to Australia to get married), as well as where a person is taken from Australia to get married overseas.

It is important to know the difference between a forced marriage and an arranged or sham marriage. While an arranged marriage involves the introduction of potential spouses through the involvement of a third party or family member, it requires the consent of both parties, who can agree or refuse to marry. A sham marriage is a fake marriage willingly entered into by both parties for fraudulent purposes.

How can I tell if someone is in, or at risk of, a forced marriage?

If someone you know is in, or at risk of, a forced marriage, they may have difficulty telling you about their situation. However, a combination of the following signs may indicate that a person is in a forced marriage, or at risk of being made to enter into a forced marriage:

- a sudden announcement that the person is engaged
- the person's older brothers or sisters stopped going to school or were married early
- the person's family have a lot of control over the person's life which doesn't seem normal or necessary (e.g. the person is never allowed out or always has to have somebody else from the family with them)

- the person displays signs of depression, self-harming, social isolation and substance abuse
- the person seems scared or nervous about an upcoming family holiday overseas
- the person spends a long time away from school, university or work
- the person often doesn't come to, or suddenly withdraws from, school, university or work
- the person doesn't have control over their income
- the person is unable to make significant decisions about their future, including without consultation or agreement from their parents, and/or
- there is evidence of family disputes or conflict, domestic violence, abuse or running away from home.

It can be difficult to identify the signs of forced marriage and these descriptors are not intended to be exhaustive. You should always seek help and advice as soon as possible.

How can I get help?

If someone you know is in, or at risk of, a forced marriage, you can seek help.

The *My Blue Sky* website www.mybluesky.org.au provides people in, or at risk of, forced marriage with important information and links to support services, as well as useful resources for frontline responders, service providers and the general community.

Preliminary assistance, including free, confidential legal advice about forced marriage, is available from *My Blue Sky*, the national forced marriage helpline, on 02 9514 8115. The *My Blue Sky* helpline operates Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm, with an out of hours recorded message. You can also get help by emailing help@mybluesky.org.au, or sending an SMS to 0481 070 844.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) can assist people who are in, or at risk of, a forced marriage, including where a person needs help to make sure he or she won't be taken overseas. The AFP can refer victims for support, including safe accommodation, financial support, legal advice and counselling. Initial support is available for victims even where they don't want to assist with an investigation or prosecution. In cases where the victim is a child, the AFP will always act in their best interests. Contact with the AFP can be anonymous if you wish. You can complete the online form on the AFP website: https://forms.afp.gov.au/online_forms/human_trafficking_form or call 131 AFP (131 237).

In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000) immediately.

The following specialist community organisations may also be able to provide help and advice:

Anti-Slavery Australia

Phone: 02 9514 9662

Email: antislavery@uts.edu.au

Website: www.antislavery.org.au.

Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

Phone: 03 9481 3000

Website:

www.ausmuslimwomenscentre.org.au.

Salvation Army

Phone: 02 9211 5794

Email: endslavery@aue.salvationarmy.org.au

Website: www.endslavery.salvos.org.au.

The National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence Counselling Service

Phone: 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Email: Online counselling is available through the website

Website: www.1800respect.org.au.

- **The Family Law Courts National Enquiry Centre**
Phone: 1300 352 000
Email: enquiries@familylawcourts.gov.au
- **The Translating and Interpreting Service**
can be contacted on 131 450.

Example

- Ayla is a 17 year old high school student in Australia. Ayla's teacher notices that Ayla seems depressed and has taken a lot of time off school for overseas travel. Her teacher also observes that Ayla's family seem to be very strict and controlling. Ayla always has someone with her outside school hours and the teacher has heard from Ayla's classmates that she isn't allowed to go out with friends without a family member going with her.
- When the teacher asks Ayla if she is okay, Ayla says that her parents took her to visit relatives overseas. When they arrived, her parents told Ayla that she would only be able to go back to Australia if she agreed to marry her cousin, who she had never met. With no passport or money, Ayla was forced to marry her cousin overseas so that she could return to Australia. Ayla's parents have also told her that, when she turns 18, she will have to sign migration papers for her cousin so that he can come to Australia to live with her. Ayla tells her teacher that she feels like a slave and never wanted to marry her cousin. Ayla says that she feels trapped and is scared about what might happen if she tries to leave. Ayla asks her teacher for help.
- Ayla's teacher contacts the AFP for help. Although Ayla does not want her parents or 'husband' to be prosecuted, the AFP are able to help her access support, including safe accommodation, financial support, legal advice and counselling. As a result of this assistance, Ayla is able to work towards establishing the future she wants for herself.

How can I help a person in, or at risk of, a forced marriage to stay safe?

It is important that you always act in the best interests of a person in, or at risk of, a forced marriage, including by being mindful of their safety as well as your own. When seeking assistance, you can help protect a person in, or at risk of, a forced marriage, and yourself, by:

- Making sure that they use a phone or computer that nobody else in their family or community group has access to.
- Remembering that other people may read your emails, text messages or other written communications.
- Completing the forced marriage safety plan available online at www.ag.gov.au/forcedmarriage.
- Contacting the AFP or a specialist community organisation for help and advice, including to make sure the person is not taken overseas.
- Meeting in a safe and private place.