

## APPENDIX 4

### **Domestic Abuse Guidelines for School Staff in North Somerset**

#### **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage has been recognised in the UK as a form of domestic abuse and a serious abuse of human rights. Every major faith in the world condemns forced marriage. While the issue of forced marriage is not restricted to a particular racial, ethnic or religious group, it appears to be more common where the practise of arranged marriage is the cultural norm. Children as young as 8 years old may know that they will be expected to marry by the time they are 16 years old.

A forced marriage is different from an arranged marriage, which is where there is free and valid consent of both parties. In arranged marriages, the families of both spouses take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the choice whether or not accept the arrangement remains with the young people.

A forced marriage is where one or both parties do not consent to the marriage, or consent is extracted under duress, which can involve anything from emotional and social pressures, to assaults, threatening behaviour, imprisonment and abduction. Abduction can involve deceiving or forcing a man or woman to go abroad, and then subjecting him/her to forced marriage and other abuses once they arrive.

Most cases involve young women and girls aged between 13 and 30. In many cases, women within a forced marriage may be subjected to violence and rape at the hands of their husband and the husband's family. Men too, can also be victims of forced marriage and may leave the marital home. These situations can have a detrimental affect on the children of forced marriages.

Young people at risk of forced marriage are usually subject to strict controls from family members. School is often the only place they are allowed to visit outside the family home. They may be accompanied to and from school and even watched at break-times. Schools are perhaps the only place that such pupils can be identified or offered essential advice.

The Forced Marriage Unit is the Government's central unit that deals with forced marriage, casework, policy and projects. Their contact details are [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)

This Unit asks that education professionals be alert to potential warning signs and consider (whilst being careful not to assume) that a forced marriage may be being planned for the pupil.

The DfES and the Forced Marriage Unit have produced a document to raise awareness of the problem within schools – **Dealing With Cases of Forced Marriage: Guidance for Education Professionals (2005)**  
[http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Dealing%20with%20cases%20of%20Forced%20Marriages.p  
df](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Dealing%20with%20cases%20of%20Forced%20Marriages.pdf)

The warning signs can include:

- a sudden drop in performance, low motivation – “what’s the point? I’ll be married next year”;
- low self-esteem;
- truancy from lessons;
- conflicts with parents over continued or further education;
- excessive parental restrictions and control (not attending extra-curricular activities);
- working hard to achieve educational attainment – in an attempt to avoid marriage;
- self harm, eating disorders, substance misuse, attempted suicide;
- running away from home;
- a history of older siblings leaving education early;
- the early marriage of siblings;
- other young people within the family reported missing;
- criminal behaviour e.g. shoplifting;
- a history of domestic abuse within the family;
- extended absence through sickness or overseas commitments.

Although staff working in schools should be alert to these warning signs they should also be mindful that many of these signs are not linked solely to forced marriage and may be indicative of other forms of abuse or neglect. Forced marriage can happen to pupils from all backgrounds. School staff should not automatically assume that pupils who may be exhibiting any of these signs and who are also from an ethnic minority background are at risk of forced marriage. Forced marriage is not necessarily restricted to school pupils and can also affect teachers, trainees and other staff working in schools and colleges.

School staff need to be aware that pupils in this situation may be too frightened to tell anyone. In all cases, if there is an immediate concern for the safety of a pupil under 18 years of age, Child Safeguarding Procedures should be activated.