

Marriage is a BIG Decision

Marriage is something that you should feel good about and the decision to get married is one you should have ownership of.

- ✓ Consent is key. If you or the other person to be married does not want to or cannot consent, that is considered a forced marriage.
- ✓ Forced marriage impacts people of every gender, age, religion, cultural background, and economic status in the United States.
- ✓ If you are facing the threat of a forced marriage or were forced to marry in the past you are not alone. As many as 3,000 known or suspected cases of forced marriage happened in the United States over a period of just two years.

Forced Marriage is NOT Arranged Marriage

In an arranged marriage, family members may take the lead in identifying a potential partner, but the ultimate choice remains with YOU.

- ✓ Consent and the ability to ask questions, express your preferences or doubts, change your mind, or reject a proposal WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES is critical.
- ✓ Both you and the person you are going to marry should be enthusiastic, not only about the idea of a marriage, but also the timing of the marriage and your potential partner.
- ✓ Lack of consent can be caused by a variety of factors including force, fraud and coercion from members of your family and community, religious leaders and others.

Force, Fraud, and Coercion

When you question or refuse a planned marriage or express a desire to leave a marriage, have people around you:

- ✗ Monitored your communication or refused to let you leave home?
- ✗ Threatened to cut you off from family or community?
- ✗ Confiscated paychecks or threaten to cut you off from financial support?
- ✗ Threatened deportation or overseas abandonment?
- ✗ Claimed that refusing or leaving a marriage goes against your religion?



**TAHIRIH
JUSTICE
CENTER**

Forced Marriage Initiative

www.preventforcedmarriage.org

Email: FMI@tahirih.org

Phone: 571-282-6187

The Forced Marriage Initiative can offer support to individuals of any age, race, gender, immigration status, nationality, sexual orientation, or religion.

The National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN)

1-800-656-4763; www.RAINN.org

National Human Trafficking Hotline

www.humantraffickinghotline.org

1-888-373-7888

Adapted with permission from Futures Without Violence, 2019.



Marriage Is YOUR Choice

Marriage Can Affect Health

Experiencing pressure to marry or remain married when you don't want to, or having your spouse or family members hurt you or make you do sexual things you don't want to can affect your health:

- ✓ Depression, anxiety, trouble sleeping, self-harm, suicidal thoughts
- ✓ Asthma, diabetes, chronic pain, high blood pressure, cancer
- ✓ Substance use, alcohol dependence, unplanned pregnancies, STIs

Talking to your health provider about these connections can help them take better care of you.

Consequences of Marrying Too Young

While some young people may willingly enter into a marriage, studies show that marrying young increases the risk of negative health and quality of life outcomes:

- ✗ Higher rates of psychiatric disorders
- ✗ Increased risk of chronic health conditions like cancer, heart attack, and stroke
- ✗ Increased likelihood to drop out of high school and decreased likelihood of graduating from college
- ✗ More likely to live in poverty later in life

Worried About Someone You Know?

Pay attention to risk factors and red flags, including:

- Siblings forced to marry or had early marriages
- Ongoing family disputes or conflicts
- All socialization and communication controlled and monitored
- Fear of upcoming holidays, break, or graduation
- Decline in behavior, grades, punctuality, performance, and frequent absences
- Run away attempts

- Sudden withdrawal from school or work, especially if pressured by family
- Discussion of fertility or gynecological health, virginity tests, or female genital mutilation/cutting
- Out-of-the-ordinary visitors or houseguests or unusual or unexpected travel overseas

Listen without judgement and understand that feelings of hurt, fear and anger are often mixed with feelings of love, sympathy, confusion and concern for others members of their family. Encourage those you are worried about to reach out for help if they need it and reassure them that they are not alone.

Everyone Has Rights!

Remember: Everyone, **even if you are under the age of 18**, has rights and no one - not even your parents - is allowed to force you to marry someone you do not want to marry or to get married when you are not ready. While some parents may truly feel that marriage is in their child's best interest, no matter the motivation, **you have the right to decide whether, when and whom to marry.**

There is confidential and free help out there to support you as you navigate these complicated relationships and decisions. See the back of the card for places you can contact.

