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Forced Marriage Initiative

A Framework for Identifying and Responding to Cases of Forced Marriage

Forced Marriage Initiative

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DISCLAIMER REGARDING THE USE OF GENDERED LANGUAGE:

While all victims of forced marriage deserve effective advocacy, protection, and support, the overwhelming majority of forced marriage survivors encountered by service providers are women and girls. Forced marriage is a gendered social problem, with women being disproportionately targeted and harmed. For that reason, adult survivors are often referred to as “women” and “she/her” throughout this framework document. This is not meant to minimize the experiences of men and boys or transgender individuals impacted by forced marriage or to exclude those experiences from the broader dialogue about this issue in the United States. Additionally, this framework as a whole focuses on marriages forced by family members and community; however, partner and predator-forced marriages have also been encountered by advocates and such cases can relate to dating violence.



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FACTS

WHAT IS FORCED MARRIAGE?

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or cannot) consent to the marriage, and typically involves elements of force, fraud, or coercion. It is important to understand that simply accepting the idea of being married is not the same as consent. Consent also requires an individual to approve of the timing of the marriage, as well as the marriage partner.

WHO DOES FORCED MARRIAGE IMPACT?

Forced marriages can happen to people of any gender, age, cultural or ethnic background, religion, or economic status. Forced marriage threatens the freedom, safety, and welfare of women and girls, as well as men and boys, worldwide. Individuals at risk of or fleeing forced marriages reside in both the United States and Canada and come from varied religious and ethnic backgrounds.

HOW IS FORCED MARRIAGE DIFFERENT FROM ARRANGED MARRIAGE?

In an arranged marriage, the ultimate choice of whether, when, and whom to marry remains with the individuals, regardless of any matchmaking role played by family members or others. In a forced marriage, one or both parties feel powerless to make decisions or feel that expressing their preferences may result in severe consequences. Forced and arranged marriages can be viewed as occupying two ends of a spectrum, with some situations that start as arranged marriages changing to forced marriages over time. Non-arranged marriage situations (i.e. consensual engagements) can also change to become forced marriage situations if over time an individual's wishes to terminate the relationship or to leave the marriage are not respected.

WHY DOES FORCED MARRIAGE HAPPEN?

The motivations for forced marriage can vary widely. Perpetrators may believe that the marriage is required based on family tradition or culture or to protect individual or family honor/reputation — for example to prevent or "correct" behavior the family views as "unacceptable" such as dating or sexual activity outside of marriage or a child identifying as LGBTQIA+. In other cases, a marriage may be seen as required to settle a debt or uphold a long standing agreement between families. In many instances families may believe that the marriage is truly in the best interest of their child. While religious motivations may be used by perpetrators to pressure and coerce individuals into marriage, it is important to know that no religion sanctions or promotes forced marriage. Immigration related motivations may also play a role in forced marriage situations.

examples of pressure, abuse, fraud & coercion

- Emotional abuse or blackmail (using shame, guilt, and other forms of psychological coercion)
- Isolation and control (being cut off from friends and other forms of support; monitoring of communication)
- Stalking
- Social ostracism (threats of being cut off from family and/or community)
- Economic abuse or threats (personal wages confiscated or controlled; threats of being cut off from financial support)
- Immigration-related threats
- Deception (not being told that a marriage was going to take place before traveling overseas)
- Being held captive or under house arrest
- Drugging or incapacitation



FORCED MARRIAGE & OTHER HARMS

CHILD ABUSE

While not all forced marriage cases involve minors, the results of several surveys and studies have indicated that a substantial number of victims are minors. A child or teenager being forced into marriage by her family may be subjected to multiple coercive tactics that, taken together, amount to child abuse. In the case of a minor, the harms that follow a forced marriage also amount to child abuse.

FAMILY/DOMESTIC/INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Forced marriage falls under the umbrella of family/domestic violence given that the forms of abuse, pressure, fraud, and coercion that are employed against victims are often similar to the forms of abuse and control utilized by perpetrators in abusive intimate partner and family relationships. Individuals at risk of and survivors of forced marriage may face emotional blackmail, isolation and control, economic abuse, immigration-related threats, deception, stalking, kidnapping or being held under house arrest, threats of violence, actual physical violence, death threats, and/or murder attempts.

STALKING

In a forced marriage situation, family and community members may use stalking behaviors as a tool of power and control and to create a severe sense of isolation and hopelessness. Stalking often continues following the marriage in order to restrict the survivor's independent mobility and privacy, again with the intent of limiting her ability seek help.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

While some forced marriages may look like human trafficking, most forced marriages involve complex and varied motivations, many of which do not involve a financial benefit for the family. However, some forced marriages may meet the requirements of human trafficking statutes, for example in cases where the driving motivation for the perpetrators is financial, such as to settle a debt, obtain a bride price or dowry, or other tangible benefits. In cases where the marriage involves an exchange of money or property as well as force or coercion, or forced labor such as in servile marriage contexts, then trafficking-related resources, remedies, and laws should be explored.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE

Advocates and researchers have found that sexual assault and rape can be not only a consequence - but also a cause - of forced marriage.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING (FGM/C)

While not all individuals who face forced marriage are also at risk of FGM/C, forced marriage can at times both necessitate and guarantee imminent FGM/C, and a survivor of forced marriage may have already experienced FGM/C in her lifetime. See appendix 5 for more information and tips on screening and referrals.



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of dynamics that are unique to forced marriage cases and challenges that may differentiate forced marriage situations from advocates' previous experiences providing services to individuals facing other forms of harm.

Forced marriage cases often involve multiple perpetrators who may take action to ensure that a marriage goes forward or to respond if a victim refuses or resists the marriage. Perpetrators can include members of the victim's immediate and extended family, the intended spouse and their immediate and extended family, as well as other community members. This creates a complex matrix of risk that can be more challenging to map and evaluate.

In forced marriage cases there may also be an international component to consider. By the time a victim comes forward for help they may be facing imminent travel abroad or may have already been taken abroad. Being overseas puts individuals at much greater risk and makes it extremely difficult to seek and receive help.

Individuals at risk of forced marriage often deal with significant barriers to coming forward and asking for help including:

- Fear of violence or retribution from their families or other perpetrators if it is discovered that they reached out for help.
- Concern about potential criminal, immigration, or other consequences for those same family members if authorities become involved in their case.
- Feeling unsure of where to go or whom to ask for assistance. For some this may be complicated by language barriers when reaching out for help.
- Fear of violence or retribution against family members left behind if they decide to leave home for their own safety.
- Struggling with feelings of shame and isolation as well as feelings of guilt for wanting to discuss what some may perceive as private family matters with outside advocates.

Many individuals are simply hoping that they can make the marriage stop without any negative consequences to their parents, other family members, or themselves. In addition, some may be unaware of their right to say no to a marriage they do not want and may have only seen and heard of individual acquiescence to family wishes regarding marriage in their community.

Ultimately, individuals at risk of or attempting to leave a forced marriage often face a stark choice – refusal to go along with the marriage can result in having to temporarily or permanently cut ties their family and community, and it is not uncommon for survivors to feel it necessary to go into hiding for their own psychological and physical safety. The resulting loss of emotional, social, and economic support can be devastating, particularly if they have been raised in a highly restrictive household and not been able to develop the necessary skills or form the types of connections that would enable them to live and thrive on their own. For many individuals at risk, this impossible choice can lead to decision paralysis and make it very challenging for them to determine and execute a course of action to keep themselves safe.

It is critical to take a client-centered approach to working with individuals affected by forced marriage. Seeking help and trying to stop or leave a forced marriage can be extremely traumatic for the service seeker. As outlined above, they may be faced with the choice of leaving the only home they have ever known combined with fear for the safety of and consequences for siblings, pets, family and friends that may be left behind and conflicted feelings about family and other loved ones. It is important to be ready for second thoughts and backtracking on decisions and to let the service seeker know you will still be there, no matter what they decide to do.



CONDUCTING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is essential to create a safe and empowering environment for screening individuals facing or fleeing forced marriage situations. Interview service seekers in a secure and private space, not in a public/waiting area. If they are on the phone with you, it is essential that you confirm they are in a confidential and private space.

Reassure them of confidentiality or explain the limits to confidentiality or mandated reporting requirements at the start of the conversation. The first concern of many service seekers is often whether or not you will contact their family or law enforcement. If you are not a mandated reporter, assure them that — unless they pose an immediate danger to themselves or others — you will not disclose any information they share to anyone outside your organization (including law enforcement) unless you have their express permission.

If possible, respect an individual's wishes to be or not be interviewed by someone from their cultural, ethnic, or religious background. Some service seekers may feel that someone of a similar background will be better able to identify with their situation, while others may be fearful of word getting out of their asking for help via community channels which may result in them feeling uncomfortable sharing the details of their situation and the risks they face.

Generally, it is also not advisable to act as a mediator between the individual and family or other perpetrators. It is important to recognize the limits of expertise when providing support to forced marriage survivors. Typically, family mediation in unfamiliar and nuanced family/community contexts is not something that advocates are experienced in, and it may compromise your ability to remain unbiased and advocate for the individual at risk.

Always keep in mind the “one chance rule.” A potential victim may only have *one chance* to reach out for help, and as a service provider you may only have *one chance* to assist them. Each potential case of forced marriage must be taken seriously and a service seeker should never leave without support being offered, particularly if the individual feels that they are in imminent danger. Whenever possible, do not send an individual away or return them to their family against their wishes.

a note on interpretation

When working with a service seeker who requires an interpreter, *never* use family or community members to interpret. To maintain confidentiality and safety, it is best to use a telephonic interpreter, letting the client know they do not have to share their name. Even in situations when a client may request the assistance of a family or community member they trust, it is best practice to enlist the help of an impartial and trained professional to serve as an interpreter to ensure accuracy and to protect the safety of the client and others.



BRIEF SCREENING

Keep in mind that, as with other forms of violence, many individuals at risk and survivors of forced marriage may not immediately identify as facing or having gone through a forced marriage. If you feel you may be working with an individual at risk of or currently experiencing a forced marriage, it is important to use language with which the service seeker is comfortable. Many service seekers will not want to use the word “forced” and may term their situation an arranged marriage even though some form of coercion is involved. When inquiring about a service seeker’s marriage, ask general, open-ended questions that will enable them to self-identify, such as:

- How has marriage taken place in your family/community in the past? How do you feel about that for yourself?
- Are you being pressured to marry someone whom you do not want to marry?
- Do you feel you have a choice in deciding whom, when, and if you will marry?

Throughout the screening process, let the individual know that they have the right to make their own choice about — and potentially say no to — a marriage. This may be the first time that the service seeker is hearing someone tell them that they have this choice.

It is also important to reassure individuals you are working with that no religion or culture sanctions forced marriage and that religion can in fact be a protective factor. Service seekers who are religiously observant may have a history of being told that rejecting a forced marriage would mean going against their religion. To the contrary, if religion is important to them, it need not be rejected in hand with the forced marriage.



INTRODUCTIONS

1. Introduce yourself and describe your role, including your confidentiality policy and any limits to confidentiality.
2. How long do we have to speak together today? If time is limited confirm a future time to speak or meet and refer to the abbreviated intake on page 12.
3. What is your full name? Is this different from any legal names, nick names or your chosen name in the community?
4. Is there anything you need right away, such as food, a shower, clothing, or medical attention?
5. What is your date and place of birth?
6. What is your citizenship or immigration status?
7. Gather Contact Information:
 - a. **Phone number** – Is this number safe or not safe? Explore whether or not the phone is regularly monitored, if the bill is often checked to verify numbers called and texted, and whether or not the phone has always been in the sole possession of the service seeker. Assess risk of spyware or tracking devices having been installed on the phone to monitor the service seeker’s communications, location, and activities. If the client does not have access to a safe communication device explore options such as securing a burner phone or using a trusted friend’s device or a phone or computer at school or work.
 - b. **Email** – In order to safely communicate with advocates and allies, advise the service seeker to set up an anonymous new email account on a safe computer or smart phone - not on a family computer or shared device or smart phone that the family may have access to. The email address should have a completely anonymous user name, new password, and false identifying information.
 - c. **Messaging Platform Username** (WhatsApp, SnapChat, Skype etc.) – If you are able to communicate using other platforms, share this information with the service seeker and gather necessary information for their preferred platform.
 - d. **Social Media** (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) – What platforms are you active on? Advise that their location and/or other private or confidential information and images could be revealed through social media posts. Discuss safety and privacy needs and assist the service seeker in making the best, most informed choices for themselves in regards to social media and risk reduction.

Make sure to connect service seekers to key resources such as 911 and the following 24-hour hotlines:

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE:

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE:

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE

1-888-373-7888

tech safety planning

For in-depth guidance on tech safety planning you can find tip sheets, guides & much more through the National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net Project: <http://nnedv.org/resources/safetynetdocs.html>



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. What pressures exist in your community around marriage?
2. Was/is your family pressuring you to get married?
3. Who is involved in pressuring you to get married/remain married?
4. Is anyone pressuring your family members to force you into marriage/remain in an unwanted marriage?
5. What type of pressure has been put on you to get married/remain in an unwanted marriage?
6. How does your family justify pressuring you to get married? For example, have they indicated that they feel the marriage is in your best interest or is required to honor a longstanding agreement between your family and another?
7. Have you ever resisted decisions made by your family in the past? If so, what has their reaction been?
8. What do you think the reaction will be if you refuse to go through with the marriage/leave the marriage you no longer wish to be in? What do you think are the best case and worst case scenarios?
9. What has happened when you, your siblings, or your relatives have resisted your parents or extended family's wishes in the past?
10. Have there been any specific threats made? If so, what were they?
11. Who else may react to your decision to refuse/leave the marriage?
12. Of your siblings that are married, did they have a choice in their marriage partner?
13. Did any of your siblings resist getting married? If so, what happened? Would this sibling be supportive of your decision to resist?
14. Are any of your siblings marrying in the near future? If so, how do they feel about the marriage?
15. Has your intended spouse pressured you to get married or remain in the marriage? If so, what have they done?
16. Has your intended spouse's family used any type of pressure to get you to marry/force you to remain in the marriage? If so, what have they done?
17. Have there been any specific threats or any type of violence against you or your family?
18. Has anyone in your intended spouse's family ever been forced to marry? If so, did anyone resist or leave the marriage? What happened to those that resisted or left their marriage?
19. Is anyone opposed to the marriage, particularly anyone in a position of authority in the family or community?
20. What do you think will happen if you decide not to go through with/try to leave the marriage?
 - Best case scenario:
 - Worst case scenario:

a note about family mapping

It is essential that you map out all individuals involved in exerting pressure around the marriage, including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other community members. Be sure to note the location of those involved (i.e. whether or not they are in the home, in the same area of the state or country, in a different state, or abroad). For a family mapping tool, see Appendix 3.



RISK ASSESSMENT

1. What does safety look like for you? For your siblings? For other family members?
2. Safety means different things to different people and may not always involve wanting to leave home. Explore how the individual defines safety. For example, do they feel safe at home when certain other individuals are present, or when they are able to practice particular self-care tactics?
3. Do you feel safe in your home to express how you feel and your boundaries?
4. How would you describe your social life? Specifically, how would you describe your life outside of school or work?
5. Do you feel that your family isolates you from friends or outside contacts?
6. Do you feel that your activities and movements outside the home are limited or monitored?
7. Are any of your family members currently unemployed or experiencing financial problems?
8. If yes, how is this impacting your life at home or feelings of responsibility to your family or household?
9. Do you feel that there are people in your home, community, or extended family that could harm you?
10. Why do you feel this way?
11. What do you perceive as the biggest problem or threat at the moment? What is the worst that could happen? Did that happen already?
12. Is there a history within your family of stalking, making threats, or using actual violence or abusive behavior against children, other family members, friends, co-workers, or family pets?
13. If violence is present in your home, has the overall nature of the violence escalated recently?
14. For example, has there been a change in the frequency or intensity of violence or abuse towards you, other family members, pets, or another person?
15. Do any family or household members have a history of drug or alcohol abuse?
16. Is there a history of mental health concerns or depression with anyone living in your home?
17. If yes, who was affected and in what way? When was this and how did it impact you and the other members of your household?
18. Have any family members ever threatened or attempted to commit suicide?
19. Have any incidents ever been reported to the police, or Child Protective Services? Have they been reported to anyone else?
20. How have these incidents of violence changed your family relationships?
21. Does anyone in your home have a criminal record?
22. Does anyone in your home have access to weapons? This includes guns, knives, or other items that have been used as weapons in the past.
23. Have they ever threatened to use or actually used these weapons against others, including children or pets, in the home?
24. Have they ever threatened to use them or actually used them against you?
25. Tell me about the impact these incidents have had on you. This includes how you feel it may have impacted you emotionally, physically, sexually, psychosocially, and/or financially.
26. Do you believe that the perpetrators would disobey legal orders or have a negative response to law enforcement or court involvement?

a note about trauma and grounding

If you notice the individual you are working with exhibiting signs of distress (e.g. hyper arousal, flat listless affect, dissociation) you should assess for trauma. If the individual experiences a flashback, have the individual practice grounding techniques such as breathing in soothing scents (lavender or peppermint oil), describing their surroundings out loud and in detail, or running water over their hands while describing how it feels, as this can help to bring them back to the present moment.



SERVICE SEEKER RESILIENCY

1. Setting aside this marriage as a factor, tell me about your hopes and plans for the future. Where would you like to see yourself in six months, one year, five years, or ten years?
2. When you are worried or stressed, how do you care for yourself? What makes you feel better?
3. Are you currently in a relationship with a significant other? If so, are they aware of the pressure you are facing? Have they been supportive in healthy ways?
4. Do you attend school?
5. If so, what is the name and location of the school you attend? Would you be open to sharing your school schedule?
6. Do you have student loans?
7. Do you feel you have meaningful connections with any peers, coaches, teachers, or counselors at school?
8. What are your sources of income?
9. If you have a job, where do you work (name and location)? Would you be open to sharing your work schedule?
10. Do you have access to a bank account?
11. If so, is the account in your name? Is anyone else's name on the account? Does anybody else have access to it?
12. Are you connected with a counselor or any other supportive person? Is there anyone that you have spoken to about this before?
13. If yes, do you feel that the person may be at risk because they know about the situation?
14. Do you have access to medical care?
15. If no, is this something that you need or have been denied in the past?
16. Are you able to see your doctor privately? Do you feel in control of decisions regarding your health?
17. Have you been tested for pregnancy and STIs (if violence was of a sexual nature)?
18. Do you wish to discuss family planning and available contraceptives (particularly important for those considering going through with the marriage)?



SERVICE SEEKER DOCUMENTATION

1. Do you have personal control over your important documents including:
 - Birth certificate
 - Passport
 - Driver's license or other state identification card
 - Social Security card
 - Immigration documents (Green Card, Naturalization Certificate, Work Permit, etc.)
 - Health insurance card
 - Court orders/documents (marriage certificate, custody agreement, protection order, etc.)
 - Medical documents (vaccination records, prescriptions, medical records)
 - School records
 - Lease/rental agreement
 - Insurance papers
 - Journals
 - Pictures of family members/household members
 - Confirmation of co-habitation (e.g. shared bills)
 - Car title and registration
2. If not, who has these documents or where are they kept?
3. If you do not have the documents in your possession, are you able to take photographs of these documents safely?
 - If so, advise the service seeker to take pictures with a cell phone or other device, email them to you using the anonymous email account, and then immediately delete them from the device. If possible, they should also be saved to a secure cloud-based system such as Google Docs or Dropbox.
4. If you are unable to obtain or photograph these documents, we may be able to obtain new copies. Is this a step you would be interested in taking at this time?

END OF INTAKE FORM

When you have completed the intake, make sure you and the service seeker are clear on your tasks and next steps. Confirm when and how you will next check in and discuss the actions you should take if you do not hear from the service seeker at that time. Make sure the service seeker understands that **911** is the best contact during a life-threatening emergency and share other **24-hour** resources in the event that an urgent need arises over a weekend or after your regular work hours.

Remember that to the best of your ability, you should never send a service seeker home against their wishes or if they feel it is unsafe. When appropriate, explore shelter options or alternative solutions such as staying at the home of a trusted third party. If you are working with a minor in need of shelter, see Appendix 4 for tips on creative problem solving with clients under the age of 18.



INTRODUCTIONS

1. What is your full name? Is this different from any legal names, nicknames, or your chosen name in the community?
2. Is there anything you need right away, such as food, a shower, clothing, or medical attention?
3. What is your date and place of birth?
4. What is your citizenship or immigration status?
5. Gather contact information:
 - a. **Phone number** – Is this number safe or not safe? Explore whether or not the phone is regularly monitored, if the bill is often checked to verify numbers called and texted, and whether or not the phone has always been in the sole possession of the service seeker. Assess risk of spyware or tracking devices having been installed on the phone to monitor the service seeker's communications, location, and activities. If the client does not have access to a safe communication device explore options such as securing a burner phone or using a trusted friend's device or a phone or computer at school or work.
 - b. **Email** – In order to safely communicate with advocates and allies, advise the service seeker to set up an anonymous new email account on a safe computer or smart phone - not on a family computer, shared device, or smart phone that the family may have access to. The email address should have a completely anonymous user name, new password, and false identifying information.
 - c. **Messaging Platform Username** (WhatsApp, SnapChat, Skype etc.) – If you are able to communicate using other platforms, share this information with the service seeker and gather necessary information for their preferred platform.
 - d. **Social Media** (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) – What platforms are you active on? Advise that their location and/or other private or confidential information and images could be revealed through social media posts. Discuss safety and privacy needs and assist the service seeker in making the best, most informed choices for themselves in regards to social media and risk reduction.
6. What kind of support are you looking for?
7. Do we need a cover story for this meeting or phone call? For example, starting a study group at your school or that you are doing research on the immigration process.
8. If we get cut off, when is the next time you think it will be safe to talk?
9. If I do not hear from you, do I have your permission to contact you for follow up?
 - Make a contingency plan in the event you are not able to get in touch with the service seeker again. Ask what steps they would like you to take should you not hear from them and are unable to reach them. For example, ask if 24 hours pass following the time the service seeker was supposed to be in touch whether you should you contact a trusted third party such as a friend or school counselor, or if you should call the police on their behalf.
10. What is your exact address?
 - If the service seeker is uncomfortable disclosing, at a minimum ask for city and state.



INTRODUCTION, CONTINUED

11. Who do you live with at that address?
 - Be sure to conduct a thorough family mapping. Identify all individuals living in the home including siblings, in-laws, aunts and uncles, grandparents, nieces and nephews, as well as those who may only live in the home during certain times of the week or year and other community members who may be involved in the forced marriage. See Appendix 3 for a family and community mapping guide.
12. Are there plans for you and/or other family members to travel abroad soon for vacation or any other reason?
 - If yes, make sure to refer to the imminent travel abroad risk assessment and safety planning guide in Appendix 2.
13. Do you feel safe in your home to express how you feel and your boundaries?
14. Do you feel that your family isolates you from friends or outside contacts?
15. Do you feel that your activities and movements outside the home are limited or monitored?
16. What opportunities do you have to be outside of the home on your own?
 - Job:
 - School:
 - Running errands:
 - Other:
17. Do you feel that there are people in your home or in your community or extended family who could harm you? If yes, why do you feel this way?
18. What do you perceive as the biggest problem or threat at the moment? What is the worst that could happen? Did that happen already?
19. Is there a history in your family of stalking, making threats, or using actual violence or abusive behavior against children, other family members, friends, co-workers, or family pets?
20. Have any incidents ever been reported to the police or Child Protective Services? Have they been reported to anyone else?
21. Does anyone in the home have a criminal record?
22. Does anyone in the home have access to weapons? This includes guns, knives, or other items that have been used as weapons in the past.
23. Has anyone in the home threatened to or actually used these weapons against you or others, including children and/or pets, in the home?
24. When you are worried or stressed, how do you care for yourself?
 - For example: taking walks outside or exercising, writing in a journal or creative writing, cooking, reading, watching movies, listening to music, drawing or painting, spending time with a pet, or talking to a close friend.



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. What pressures exist in your community around marriage?
2. Was/is your family pressuring you to get married?
3. Who is involved in pressuring you to get married/remain married? Make sure to ask about parents, siblings, aunts/uncles, cousins, grandparents, and community and religious leaders.
4. Is anyone pressuring your family members to force you into marriage/remain in an unwanted marriage?
5. What type of pressure has been put on you to get married/remain in a marriage?
6. How does your family justify pressuring you to get married? For example, have they indicated that they feel the marriage is in your best interest or is required to honor a longstanding agreement between your family and another?
7. What do you think the reaction will be if you refuse to go through with the marriage/leave a marriage you no longer wish to be in?
 - Best case scenario:
 - Worst case scenario:

a note about family mapping

It is essential that you map out all individuals involved in exerting pressure around the marriage including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other community members. Be sure to note the location of those involved (i.e. whether or not they are in the home, in the same area of the state or country, in a different state, or abroad). For a family mapping tool, see Appendix 3.



SERVICE SEEKER DOCUMENTATION

1. Do you have personal control over your important documents including:
 - Birth certificate
 - Passport
 - Driver's license or other state identification card
 - Social Security card
 - Immigration documents (Green Card, Naturalization Certificate, work permit, etc.)
 - Health insurance card
 - Court orders/documents (marriage certificate, custody agreement, protection order, etc.)
 - Medial documents (vaccination records, prescriptions, medical records)
 - School records
 - Lease/rental agreement
 - Insurance papers
 - Journals
 - Pictures of family members/household members
 - Confirmation of co-habitation (e.g. shared bills)
 - Car title and registration
2. If not, who has these documents or where are they kept?
3. If you do not have the documents in your possession, are you able to take photographs of these documents safely?
 - If so, advise the service seeker to take pictures with a cell phone or other device, email them to you using the anonymous email account, and then immediately delete them from the device. If possible, they should also be saved to a secure cloud-based system such as Google Docs or Dropbox.
4. If you are unable to obtain or photograph these documents, we may be able to obtain new copies. Is this a step you would be interested in taking at this time?

END OF INTAKE FORM

When you have completed the intake, make sure you and the service seeker are clear on your tasks and next steps. Confirm when and how you will next check in and discuss the actions you should take if you do not hear from the service seeker at that time. Make sure the service seeker understands that 911 is the best contact during a life-threatening emergency, and share other 24-hour resources in the event that an urgent need arises over a weekend or after your regular work hours.

Remember that to the best of your ability, you should never send a service seeker home against their wishes or if they feel it is unsafe. When appropriate, explore shelter options or alternative solutions such as staying at the home of a trusted third party. If you are working with a minor in need of shelter, see Appendix 4 for tips on creative problem solving with clients under the age of 18.



SAFETY PLANNING & RELOCATION ADVICE

Advise the service seeker that should they find themselves in immediate danger, they should call 911 as they are best suited to assist in an emergency.

If they plan to remain in their home, ask them what their plan of action would be if they found themselves in a threatening situation or in need of urgent assistance. Work with them to safety plan around how to stay safe in the home and who to contact in an emergency.

Connect service seekers to key 24-hour resources including:

- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN): 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH): 1-888-373-7888 (TTY: 711)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Ask the service seeker if they have a safe location to go to should they need to leave home. If they do not, provide information about shelter resources in their area – do not send them away without offering options.

If they are thinking of leaving home and believe they have a safe place to stay with a friend, relative, or other legal guardian, make sure to verify that the address is not known to the perpetrator(s) and cannot be easily ascertained by the perpetrator(s). If the address is unknown to the perpetrator(s) and the service seeker believes they would not be found should they relocate to this location, assist them in making a safe relocation plan. Advise them to keep the following tips in mind:

- If possible, safely gather up important personal documents such as ID, passport, and birth certificate and other important items that you use every day including clothes, medications, and mementos. Keep these items in a safe and secure location so that the bag is ready when you decide to leave the home. If you cannot safely remove these items, try to take digital photographs to have as a record if it is safe to do so.
- Think about the safest time and method for relocation. How might you leave? Try doing things that get you out of the house – taking out the trash, walking the family pet, or going to the store. Consider whether it would be best to leave on the way to or from school or work or when your abuser is out of the home. Practice how you would leave. Is it safer to take public transportation, arrange a ride from a friend or use your own car?
- Avoid using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram during relocation as this is an easy way for your location to be tracked and for you to be found after leaving.
- If taking a digital device such as a smartphone, cell phone, tablet, or laptop, turn the device off completely during relocation to avoid being tracked. Disabling GPS on your device is not enough to avoid being tracked – many apps include GPS technology which will continue to function even when the device's GPS is deactivated. Use the device with caution during the relocation period. If you are willing, it is often best to remove the battery. If this is not possible (such as with iPhone and other Apple products) wrap the device in ten layers of tin foil after you have turned it off in order to disable satellite capability to send signals to or from the device.
- Keep in mind that email can be used to locate you and to monitor your communications. It is advised that you set up a new anonymous email and a new unique password and to use that account moving forward only from the location masking internet browser TOR which functions just like Chrome or Firefox but masks your IP address.

important items for emergency bag:

- Money
- Extra clothes
- Medicine
- Passport
- Immigration documents
- Birth certificate
- Social security card
- School/medical records
- Bank records/credit cards
- Driver's license/State ID
- Car registration



TRAVEL ABROAD NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. Do you have any reason to believe or suspect that these travel plans could be related to getting introduced to potential marriage partners or getting forced into marriage or engagement?
2. What country will you be traveling to? Gather as much information as possible:
 - Country (note that this may be different from service seeker country of origin):
 - City:
 - Street address:
 - Nearby landmarks (shopping center or market, monument, religious center, distance from airport, etc.):
3. Will you be passing through any other countries on your way to your final destination? If so, do you know where and if you will be staying there for any amount of time, or will you just be passing through the airport?
4. If you do not know the location of where you will be traveling, tell me about who you might be visiting overseas:
 - Relative's name:
 - Relationship to you:
 - Address/location information:
5. When will the travel take place?
 - Date of departure:
 - Date of return:
6. Have you lived in/traveled to this country before?
7. What is the local language and do you speak that language?
8. Who will accompany you on this trip?
 - Name:
 - Relationship to you:
9. Do you have any trusted allies or friends on the trip or at the final destination?
 - Name:
 - Relationship to you:
 - Contact information:
10. Will you have a phone or other device that would allow you to communicate with advocates or allies while abroad? If yes, what apps or email addresses will you be using while overseas?
 - Communications overseas may be in the form of a smart phone
11. Do you have any trusted friends or allies here that you plan to stay in contact with while you are abroad?
 - Name:
 - Relationship to you:
 - Contact information:
12. Do you know if plane tickets have been purchased?
 - If so, can you safely take a picture of your ticket and share it with me?
 - If the service seeker does not have flight information, explore whether they know which airline their family usually uses and, if so, whether they would like to call the airline to find information or a reservation confirmation that may be in their name.
13. Do you have a photo of the relatives that you will be visiting abroad? If so, can you safely take a picture of it and share this with me?
14. Do you have your passport information?
 - Country of issue:
 - Passport number:
 - Name on passport:
 - Date of issue:
 - Expiration date:
15. Do you currently have personal control over or access to your passport?
 - If yes, can you take a picture and share it with me via email?
 - If no, are you able to safely ask about your passport so that you might be able to take a photo?

See next page for information about the risks of traveling overseas and how best to prepare a client if travel overseas is unavoidable



SAFETY TIPS FOR TRAVELING ABROAD

1. **Try to stay in the United States.** Advocates simply cannot assist you as well from abroad. Use every opportunity to avoid traveling. Even if you're at the airport you can reach out to authorities (security or TSA) and ask for help. The U.S. State Department (the U.S. embassy in the country you are visiting) may be able to provide some limited assistance if you get taken overseas, but the level of help they can provide varies by country and often only extends to U.S. citizens. Little things like making a phone call or hiring a taxi to get to the embassy for help returning home can be challenging or impossible depending on local laws and whether or not you speak the local language. Bottom line - you may have a great deal of difficulty getting to the embassy to ask for help. These challenges increase the more remote the location.
2. If you think you will be forced to travel abroad, alert those you trust here in the United States and provide them with information about when and where you will be traveling, including the location and contact details of where you will be staying, your passport information, and all of your flight and travel details.
3. If you are a U.S. citizen, it is also important to use a safe device or computer in a secure location such as the library, school, or work to register with the State Department's *Smart Traveler Enrollment Program*: <https://step.state.gov/step/>. This provides the U.S. government with information about you and your travel plans and may make it easier to assist you if needs arise while you are abroad.
4. Keep a list of overseas resources with you at all times. Write this information on a small piece of paper and keep the paper in your sock or bra or another place where no one will be able to find it:
 - The phone number and address of the **U.S. embassy or consulate** nearest to where you are traveling. You can find this information here: <http://www.usembassy.gov/>.
 - **U.S. Office of Overseas Citizens Services**: call **1-202-501-4444** between 8:00AM-8:00PM EST or **1-202-647-4000** after-hours and request to speak with the OCS duty officer.
 - The phone number for the Tahirih Justice Center **Forced Marriage Initiative**: **571-282-6187**.
 - **Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center**: a free resource for anyone from the United States facing interpersonal and gender based violence (including forced marriage) overseas who are in need of help returning home: crisis@pathwaystosafety.org (E-mails will be responded to within 72 hours)
 - The number for **emergency help** in the country you are traveling to [the 911 equivalent].
5. Try to obtain some local currency to bring with you overseas. If this is not possible, try to bring some U.S. cash and keep it in a safe and secure place along with the emergency contact information.
6. **Safe word**: Agree on a code word or phrase that only you and your advocate know to ensure that your advocate knows that he/she is in contact with you or someone whom you have authorized to speak on your behalf. This prevents families from putting others on the phone to pretend to be you and claim everything is fine.
7. Set up a **check in schedule**: Determine a way in which you will let your advocate know that you are safe and still planning to return. This can be a quick email, text, or message every other day which contains the pre-determined safe word or phrase and a plan for your advocate in case they do not hear from you. For example, if 48 hours go by and you are not heard from, what action should your advocate take? Should they contact another friend or ally to see if they have heard from you, contact the State Department and request a welfare and wellbeing check in order to give you a chance to speak with their staff about your fears and potential need to return home, or should your advocate wait another 24 hours before taking action?
 - **IMPORTANT**: Remember to delete all traces of communication with advocates after your message has been successfully sent.
8. Work with your advocate to identify some local NGOs or shelters near where you will be traveling. If resources are not immediately available, set up a way for your advocate to try and find this information and get it to you before you travel.



FAMILY MAPPING: FAMILY & COMMUNITY

1. Who are the other people living in your home? For each person, it is helpful to have as much of the following information as possible:
 - Full name:
 - Nickname(s) or community name(s):
 - Relation to you:
 - Age and/or date of birth:
 - Current location/address:
 - Immigration status:
 - Marital status:
 - Employer:
2. Who are your main caregivers? (e.g. parents, brother and mother, sisters, aunt, etc.)
 - How do they communicate with each other?
 - How do they communicate with you?
3. How are decisions made in your family?
 - Who imposes decisions?
 - Who typically supports decisions?
 - Does anyone regularly oppose decisions?
4. Is anyone else in your family or community — living outside of your home — involved in major decision making or putting pressure on you or your family in relation to your marriage?
 - Full name:
 - Nickname(s) or community name(s):
 - Relation to you:
 - Age and/or date of birth:
 - Current location/address:
 - Immigration status:
 - Marital status:
 - Employer:
5. Would these individuals also enforce decisions made around your marriage/engagement?
6. Is anyone else's marriage or marital prospects linked to yours? For example, is the marriage of a sibling or cousin dependent on your also agreeing to be married at a specific time to a specific person?
7. How do people in your community perceive your parents/family?
8. Who are leaders in your community?
9. Does your family have any powerful allies such as religious leaders or individuals in the government, military, or law enforcement?
10. Are there people that absolutely cannot know about what is going on in your family?

the importance of family mapping

When working on forced marriage cases, it is essential that you map out all household and family members as well as other individuals involved in exerting pressure around the marriage including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and other community members. Be sure to note the location of those involved (i.e. whether or not they are in the home, in the same area of the state or country, in a different state, or abroad).



FAMILY MAPPING: SPOUSE/INTENDED

11. Do you have information about your current/intended spouse? If yes, please complete the following:

- Full name:
- Nickname(s) or community name(s):
- Relation to you:
- Age and/or date of birth:
- Current location/address:
- Immigration status:
- Marital status:
- Employer:

12. Information about current/intended mother-in-law:

- Full name:
- Nickname(s) or community name(s):
- Relation to you:
- Age and/or date of birth:
- Current location/address:
- Immigration status:
- Marital status:
- Employer:

13. Information about current/intended father-in-law:

- Full name:
- Nickname(s) or community name(s):
- Relation to you:
- Age and/or date of birth:
- Current location/address:
- Immigration status:
- Marital status:
- Employer:

14. Do you know your spouse/intended spouse's feelings about the marriage? Does he/she want to get/remain married?

15. Are there any other influential decision makers in your spouse/intended spouse's family or community? If yes, please complete the following:

- Full name:
- Nickname(s) or community name(s):
- Relation to you:
- Age and/or date of birth:
- Current location/address:
- Immigration status:
- Marital status:
- Employer:



WORKING WITH MINORS

A minor being threatened with a forced marriage is in an extremely vulnerable position — under the U.S. Constitution, parents have a right to the care, custody, and control of their children, which grants them the absolute right to make decisions for their children unless and until those decisions are deemed to be harmful to the child. This includes decisions regarding religion, school, travel, and access to the phone or internet.

Minors at risk of forced marriage also face numerous practical and legal challenges in the United States. Often minors may not understand their rights or where and how to find help and protection. Many struggle to be able to show “proof” of a pending forced marriage when they ask for help, and when confronted with a minor who reaches out for help, law enforcement often defer to the rights of the parents and believe that the child is “just acting out” or “making up stories.” Those advocates and service providers who do take the claims of a minor seriously may not feel empowered to assist without first having to notify their parents or make a mandated report.

Unfortunately, forced marriage cases are often perceived as not falling under the mandate of Child Protection Services (or their equivalent), and as not qualifying as abuse or neglect. Despite the fact that minors forced to marry against their will often experience forced consummation and marital rape as well as domestic violence, cases are dismissed because they are perceived as concerning a private family decision or a situation that deserves cultural deference.

Shelter and alternative housing options may be limited, and youth or runaway shelters and domestic violence shelters often - but not always, depending on the state and the age of the minor - have mandatory reporting to Child Protection Services if they are working with a survivor under the age of 18. This lack of alternative safe housing options can present a real barrier to minors getting help, particularly as Child Protection Services and courts may not initially deem it necessary to remove the minor from the home prior to a pending protective order, abuse and neglect, child in need of services, or other hearing.

Given these barriers and challenges we encourage you to be honest about the limits to your confidentiality and let individuals at risk and survivors lead these conversations. Listen to the needs of any minor who comes to you for help and take their claims seriously, especially those that may face imminent harm or travel abroad. **It is essential to connect minors with expert service providers who can safety plan creatively and to reach out for technical assistance from an experienced forced marriage advocate when seeking solutions, as minors often risk serious repercussions if they are unsuccessful during their first attempt to get help and their family is notified by law enforcement, Child Protection Services, school staff, or others during that process.**



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and Forced Marriage

While not all individuals who face forced marriage are also at risk of FGM/C, it is essential that service providers recognize the potential for these two harms to intersect. An individual at risk of forced marriage or trying to exit a marriage they felt forced into or forced to remain in may have experienced FGM/C in their lifetime. Likewise, individuals may be at risk of FGM/C in preparation for a marriage that they do not want.

What is FGM/C?

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is a term used to describe practices that involve the complete or partial removal of, or other injury to, the external female genitalia. These procedures have no health benefits, and the United Nations and the World Health Organization both recognize female genital mutilation as a human rights violation.

FGM/C is usually done at a young age to children or young adolescents. However, it can take place at any age and individuals may be at risk of FGM/C before or after a marriage, or after giving birth. FGM/C is usually carried out by medically untrained individuals, often without anesthetic and with unsterilized equipment.

The World Health Organization classifies FGM/C into four types, which are:

- Type One (Clitoridectomy) – partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce;
- Type Two (Excision) – partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora;
- Type Three (Infibulation) – narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal, which is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner or outer labia, with or without removal of the clitoris;
- Type Four¹ – all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterization.

FGM/C is practiced worldwide including in many countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia and among many communities in North America, Europe and Australia. Globally, it is estimated that 125-140 million women and girls have undergone FGM/C and another 30 million are at risk in the next decade.² Recent research estimates that over 500,000 individuals living in the United States have undergone or are at risk of FGM/C.³ The performance of female genital mutilation in the United States on anyone under 18 is a criminal offence punishable by up to 5 years in prison.

Motivations that drive FGM/C include: tradition and culture; control over the sexuality of women and girls; aesthetics and hygiene; misperceived religious obligation; and gender identity. In some communities FGM/C is a strong and persistent social norm, with prevalence rates up to 90%.⁴

FGM/C can cause severe ongoing health complications including damage to organs, infections, and difficulties during urination, menstruation, sexual intercourse, and childbirth. Survivors of FGM/C may also experience psychological and emotional harm including trauma, depression, anxiety, and feelings of loss, anger, or betrayal. FGM/C can also contribute to difficulties with family or intimate relationships including estrangement, domestic violence, and marital rape.



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

Screening for FGM/C In the Context of Forced Marriage

Discussing or asking about FGM/C can be extremely sensitive – advocates should keep in mind that they are asking a survivor to answer very private questions about personal anatomy and may be raising a topic that the client has never discussed with others, or perceives as taboo. Some survivors may find discussions about their experience triggering and traumatic.

Advocates should also be aware of the wide and varied range of experiences around FGM/C. Not all survivors suffer the health or psychological implications of FGM/C, and many do not connect implications they do have to going through FGM/C. In taking a client-centered approach, advocates should discuss possible health and psychological implications in a manner that is factual and non-judgmental and avoid stigmatizing or victimizing language or assumptions about survivors' experiences. For example, use language such as “some who have undergone FGM/C experience...” or “it is very common to experience...”

When screening for FGM/C, advocates should:

- Demonstrate understanding of sensitivities and the reasons for asking – for example: “I understand that this is a sensitive question, but it is one we ask to better understand your whole experience and ensure that you receive services you may need.”
- Be aware of differing terminology and make efforts to use language that survivors are familiar and comfortable with. Keep in mind that some survivors may not be comfortable or familiar with the term FGM/C. When discussing FGM/C with clients, you should ask about the term they wish to use.
- When asking about FGM/C, ensure that the client understands what you are referring to and the full range of practices constituting FGM/C. Use questions that are simple – for example, “have you had any procedures to change your genitalia/private parts?” or “have you been cut?”
- Reassure survivors that they do not have to discuss their experience if they do not wish to, but make information and resources available to them.

Survivors of some forms of FGM/C who are pregnant may have a significant and time-sensitive need to access appropriate pre-natal services with awareness around FGM/C to prevent further complications around childbirth. Also, advocates working with survivors of FGM/C and having conversations about consummation of a potential forced marriage should be aware of the effects of FGM/C on sexual intercourse.

Local services working on FGM/C vary and you may wish to look into services in your area. National organizations working on FGM/C that may be able to offer advice include: Safe Hands for Girls, There is No Limit Foundation, and the Global Women P.E.A.C.E. Foundation.

Control over sexual behavior is often an underlying motivation for both forced marriage and FGM/C, and advocates should also bear in mind the varied abusive tactics used to ascertain or evidence sexual history and exert power over survivors to this end. Survivors of forced marriage may also be at risk of or subject to forced “virginity tests,” hymen reconstruction procedures, or other means to evidence or validate virginity in anticipation of an upcoming marriage. Advocates may wish to use the questions on the next page to work through these concerns with clients, keeping in mind the similar principles of sensitivity, privacy, and respect for survivor autonomy and choice.



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

Extended Screening Questions for FGM/C

1. Have you undergone female genital mutilation/cutting? If yes:
 - Have you been able to access medical services around this?
 - Do you have any health concerns that you feel are connected to your FGM/C?
2. Were the individuals involved with your FGM/C the same as those pressuring or forcing you to marry?
3. Do you know if other members of your family or your spouse/potential spouse's family have been through FGM/C?
4. Do you perceive any risk of being expected to undergo FGM/C before being married?
5. Have you ever been forced to undergo any other medical procedures related to your sexuality? For example:
 - Virgidity tests
 - Hymen reconstruction

While we have used the term female genital mutilation/cutting in this guide to maintain consistency with widely used terminology, we acknowledge and encourage advocates to bear in mind the experiences of survivors of FGM/C who do not identify as female. As with all survivors, advocates working with transgender or gender non-conforming survivors should work with them to find appropriate terminology to use together.

Endnotes

1. WHO, 2014
2. UNICEF, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: a statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change, 2013.
3. Population Reference Bureau, 2015: <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2015/us-fgmc.aspx>.
4. UNICEF, 2013



Forced Marriage Initiative

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ABOUT THE FORCED MARRIAGE INITIATIVE AT THE TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER

Launched in 2011, Tahirih's Forced Marriage Initiative works to end forced marriage by building a national movement to protect the rights of anyone facing forced marriage, supporting collaborations across communities, and opening space for dialogue among diverse voices. We coordinate the National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage and chair the National Forced Marriage Working Group, which is composed of a core group of advocates and survivors with the energy, experience, and commitment to contribute deeply to efforts to address the problem of forced marriage in the United States.

Website | www.preventforcedmarriage.org | www.tahirih.org

Facebook | <https://www.facebook.com/TahirihJusticeCenter/>

Twitter | www.twitter.com/tahirihjustice

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