

Community discussion guide

Forced marriage

Session overview

This session uses a short video to explore the concept of marriage and to guide discussion and reflection with the participants around choice, and free and full consent.

How to run the session

- Pause after each scene where it says, 'community discussion' and guide a reflective discussion using the questions and prompts provided in the guide.
- Total session time: approximately 60 mins.

Session objectives

- Understand the difference between arranged and forced marriage.
- Learn about the role of choice, pressure, and the concept of free and full consent.
- Understand the personal, social, and legal impacts of forced marriage.
- Know where to get help and support.

Definition: forced marriage

When a person gets married without freely and fully consenting because of coercion, threat or deception, or because they're incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony because of age or mental capacity, or the individual is under the age of 16 years.



Opening the session:



Acknowledgement of Country

- We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Trigger warning

- This session includes sensitive content related to forced marriage. Please take care of yourself during the session. You can step out of the room at any time and speak with the facilitator if needed.

Safe space

- This is a respectful and confidential learning space with no right or wrong answer.
- Please use only deidentified information.
- Participate as you feel comfortable.

Community discussion guide

Forced marriage

Introduction

(facilitator speaking notes)

“

Today we're watching a video about marriage. This session isn't about blaming anyone, but building our awareness and understanding about choice, pressure, and what free and full consent means.

Background to share

15-year-old Sara lives with her parents and three siblings - one older brother, a younger sister, and a younger brother. Sara's parents migrated to Australia when Sara was two years of age to provide a better life for the family. Sara wants to be a marine biologist when she grows up. She has a lot of career aspirations and wants to do well in life and make her parents proud. Sara is very close to her parents.



Ripples of a Promise:
youtu.be/ELFmSOKrto8
(show the video)

Scene 1 - Breaking the news

“

Summary:

Sara is informed by her father that he has promised her hand in marriage to his friend's son.

Q 1: What is happening here?

Prompt:

What do you observe? Get the group to reflect on the scene and how the father is making decisions and whether Sara has a say in those decisions.

Q 2: Why do parents take the lead in organising marriage?

Prompt:

Culture, family honour, tradition, safety, fulfilling a promise, preventing shame, protective factor.

Q 3: Do conversations about marriage usually happen like this?

Prompt:

How much choice is the person given? Is there a discussion or is it decided? Try to explore the concept of choice with the participants.

Community discussion guide

Forced marriage

Scene 2: Talking to friends

“

Summary:

Sara confides in her friends, fears getting parents in trouble, and feels isolated.

Q 1: What pressures might Sara be feeling?

Prompt:

Identify emotional conflict: fear of disappointing her family, shame, being isolated, fear of legal trouble for her parents.

Q 2: Who could she talk to for help, and what might be the challenges?

Prompt:

Who might be a trusted person — family member, teacher, social worker?
Discuss challenges such as cultural barriers, fear of not being believed, or not wanting to shame her family, isolation, or being ostracised by the community.

Q 3: What might happen if she goes ahead with the marriage?

Prompt:

Explore potential impacts like dropping out of school, losing independence, health risks, early pregnancy, mental health issues, domestic, family and sexual violence, financial dependency, domestic servitude, limited or no career prospects.

Scene 3: Family pressure

“

Summary:

Sara tells her parents she doesn't want to marry Zac. Her father insists. Her mother suggests delaying the marriage.

Q 1: How do Sara's parents try to convince her?

Prompt:

Love, saying Zac is good, future security.
Ask the participants - Do they try to guilt her, express love, or talk about what's best for her?
Ask the participants about their understanding around coercion and in what ways it can manifest.

Q 2: Does Sara have a genuine choice in this situation? Why or why not?

Prompt:

Explore what free and full consent looks like.
Ask the participants if there is space for Sara to say no without pressure or consequences?

Q 3: Is delaying the marriage a real solution?

Prompt:

Does it still feel like pressure?
Ask the participants if delaying the marriage changes the power dynamic or just postpones the issues?

Community discussion guide

Forced marriage

What does the law say

- Forced marriage is illegal in Australia and it carries jail time.
- Marriage under 16 years of age falls under forced marriage.
- Irrespective of age, for a marriage to be legal, one must freely and fully consent to the marriage. Coerced consent does not equal to free and full consent.

To learn more visit:

mybluesky.org.au/i-might-be-getting-married



Conclusion

Tell the participants that parents' involvement in marriage decision in and of itself is not wrong. It becomes wrong when the person is not being given a choice and when the person is being coerced into making the decision. An individual must give their free and full consent to the marriage.

The impact of forced marriage is lifelong. The right to decide around who, when and whether to marry is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which everyone is entitled to.

Thank you again for attending the session and for all your valuable contributions. Please feel free to reach out with any further questions.

Where to get help

- **My Blue Sky**
mybluesky.org.au
- **Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program**
lwb.org.au/services/forced-marriage-support/
- **The Additional Referral Pathway**
salvationarmy.org.au/additional-referral-pathway/

Facilitator tips

- Observe non-verbal cues and offer check-ins for any participants who appear distressed.
- Normalise pauses or silence – these are signs of processing complex emotions.
- Remind participants regularly that their contributions are valued, and it is a learning space, and the intention of the session is not to pass judgement on anyone.
- To further enhance your knowledge and understanding about modern slavery you can undertake this free e-module developed by Anti-Slavery Australia open.uts.edu.au/uts-open/study-area/law/modern-slavery/