



Matthew Barber

Police & Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

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Date: 7th June 2023

Dear Head Teacher,

The Police and Crime Commissioner and Thames Valley Police are committed to working in partnership with Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Local Authorities, as well as other agencies, to protect the most vulnerable people in society, including children across our diverse communities.

We are writing to you to ask for your support in helping to identify and protect young children who may be at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage (FM) throughout the year, but specifically over the school holidays. FGM is a hidden crime, and one that causes severe long-term physical and emotional harm to the girls and women affected by it. Forced Marriage is where one or both people do not or cannot consent (e.g. for those with learning disabilities) to a marriage and they are pressurised, or abuse is used to force them, to do so. It is recognised in the UK as a criminal offence, a form of domestic/child abuse, and a serious abuse of human rights.

The pressure put on a person to marry can take different forms:

- physical pressure can include threats or violence (including sexual violence);
- emotional or psychological pressure might take the form of making someone feel they are bringing shame on their family, making them believe that those close to them may become vulnerable to illness if they do not marry, or denying them freedom or money unless they agree to the marriage.

Since 27th February 2023, with the coming into force of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022, it has been an offence under forced marriage legislation in England and Wales to do anything intended to cause a child to marry before they turn 18, without the need to prove that a form of coercion was used. The forced marriage offence will include ceremonies of marriage which are not legally binding, for example in community or traditional settings. That same Act also clarifies that a 16 or 17 year old in England or Wales can no longer marry legally, even with parental consent.

In some cases, people may be taken abroad without knowing that they are to be married. When they arrive in that country, their passport(s)/travel documents may be taken to try to prevent them from returning to the UK.



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It is important to report and refer children at risk of FGM and FM so we can be made aware of and understand the full scale of this issue. If FGM and FM are not reported, we can miss vital information and cannot respond.

Both sets of statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2021)' and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' make explicit reference to FGM and FM as safeguarding issues. Additionally, since 31 October 2015, regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales have been required legally to report known cases of FGM in under 18-year-olds to the police, which they identify in the course of their professional work.

Thames Valley Police have trained and experienced officers and staff, who are mindful and respectful of anyone who may feel reluctant to contact police due to cultural or religious beliefs. The circumstances for any victim are always of paramount consideration when the police investigate a case, acting at all times with integrity, courage and compassion.

Following this letter, your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead can contact your local Neighbourhood Policing Team, Safeguarding Team, Local Authority Safeguarding lead or Safeguarding Partnership website for information and support and with any questions they may have.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Barber
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

Katy Barrow-Grint
Assistant Chief Constable