Conversation Starters - Forced Marriage

If you are a teacher and you suspect that a student might be at risk of forced marriage, it is essential to handle the situation with sensitivity, discretion and without judgement. The priority should be to create a safe and trusting environment where the young person feels comfortable and is encouraged to talk. To help initiate this kind of conversation, here are some gentle question starters that open the door to discussion.
Never promise you won't tell anyone!

Building trust and encouragement

- I've noticed you've been a bit quiet lately, how are things going at home?
- You seem a bit distracted recently, is everything OK?
- Is there anything worrying you that you would like to talk to me about?
- Is there anything on your mind that you would like to talk about?
- Some things are difficult to talk about, but it is OK to chat with someone who can help.
- If anything is worrying you, we are here if you want to talk about it.

Understanding pressure

- Have you been thinking about your plans once you finish school?
- What would you like to do when you're older? Does your family support you with that decision?
- What plans for the future do you have that you are excited about?
- What do your parents hope you will do after school finishes?
- What plans does your family have for you?

Signs

- I have heard you are going on a trip! Are you excited about it?
- So, are there any big plans for this holiday abroad?
- Is this a long trip?
- Will you be missing classes for this trip?
- You seem a bit anxious about this trip, is there anything you are concerned about?
- I am a bit worried about your attendance, is everything ok at home?
- I have noticed your performance has been dropping a little, is there anything I can do to help? Is there anything worrying you that you need help with?
- I have noticed your cousin/sibling 'watches you' in school, did you have an argument?

Safeguarding

- If a student is under 18, reassure them for having talked to you and advise them that for their safety, you have a duty to talk to the local authority. Reassure the student this is to

protect them. You can explain to the young person that forced marriage is not legal and there are agencies which can help.

- Refer immediately to your DSL and to Children's Social Care, if the student is under 18 years old.
- If the student is over 18 years old, encourage them to seek support and ask for their consent to speak to authorities and support agencies. You should also consider a vulnerable adult referral to social care.
- Explain that there are legal remedies available to support young people in this situation, such as Forced Marriage Protection Orders.
- Under no circumstances should you share information or attempt mediation with the student's family. This can increase risk of harm and, in some cases, bring forward the marriage. The family may also punish the student for trying to get help.
- Always complete safety planning and agree to a discreet means of contact with the student.