



# Ask Arita



Preventing crime, protecting the public and helping those in need



## He's not capable of making such a huge decision

**Dear Arita**

I'm a teacher working in a school for children who have very complex needs, both medically and socially, with many of my pupils needing 24 hour support. There is a student I look after called Aaftab who is 18 and due to leave our care soon. I was chatting with his mum recently (a really nice lady!) about what Aaftab will be doing after he leaves, and I found out that they are taking him away in the summer to be married to a young woman, who will then come to live with them and help care for Aaftab. I can't help but feel this is wrong for two reasons - unfair on the girl he is marrying and unfair on him. Due to his disability, he cannot possibly understand what he is entering into. I don't know what to do as I know I have a responsibility for Aaftab while he is still in my care, but I don't want to poke my nose into someone else's family business. What do I do?

*Anonymous, West Bromwich*

**ARITA SAYS**

Thanks for writing, you are right to be concerned.

Being professionally

curious is not 'poking your nose in', and many opportunities to safeguard people have been missed in the past due to professionals being too

### FM facts!

Many families are not aware that organising marriages for their relative with learning disabilities could potentially be forcing them into marriage. If a person lacks the capacity to understand what marriage entails then they cannot give their consent to get married.

'culturally sensitive' and allowing that to grey what is happening in front of them. There are real concerns about whether Aaftab has the mental capacity to consent to such a complex decision around marriage. Where a person cannot consent to a marriage, then they are exposed to all sorts of potential abuse including rape and other forms of sexual assault. If a person is unable to understand the concept of marriage they are also highly likely not to understand or consent to sexual intercourse and any repercussions that this may bring, such as pregnancy. Victims can also be exposed to financial and domestic abuse and as you have rightly highlighted, the person who is potentially going to marry Aaftab may not know the extent of his needs and therefore they also may not give true consent to the marriage. From what you have described, it is highly likely that this is a forced marriage which is a criminal offence and as such you need to report it immediately to the police who have specialist officers to deal with these issues. These officers will work very closely with social services to safeguard Aaftab and assess his mental capacity to consent to marriage.

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## TRICKED INTO BECOMING HIS FULL TIME CARER

**Dear Arita**

My brother, who I adore, has a mental disability which needs constant care. Last year he was married to a girl over the phone, and she has recently moved in with my parents and my brother. My parents chose her so that when they pass away, there will be someone there to look after my brother, as I am married myself and don't live at home anymore. My brother's new wife is so lovely and we've become friends since she arrived. I feel so sad for her as before she came over, no one told her how badly my brother was disabled. She didn't realise she would become his full time carer and not have the happy marriage sold to her by my family. She's desperately unhappy and it's also affecting my brother, he doesn't really understand what being a husband is about, I can tell he's frustrated that his wife doesn't seem happy when she's around him. It's an awful situation for them both and I don't know how I can help.

*Anonymous, Coventry*

**ARITA SAYS** What we have here is a double forced marriage. There is your brother with a learning disability who does not have the mental capacity to consent to marriage and there is your sister-in-law

who didn't realise the extent of your brother's needs and therefore did not give her true consent to the marriage. In some cultures, parents will seek to marry off their son or daughter if they have a disability so that they know that they will be looked after by someone when they pass away. This can have real sinister consequences for both parties involved. If there is an expectation that a child will be born from the marriage and your brother may not also understand sexual intercourse; he may also suffer from domestic abuse and rejection through the frustrations from his wife and in some circumstances may suffer financial abuse if his wife keep his benefits for her own gain. His wife may also be suffering from depression and stress having to care for your brother and may feel isolated and alone. All of these emotions can lead to domestic abuse. A forced marriage protection order can still be obtained for a person even if they are married. You must let the police know straight away what has happened and they will work with social services to assist both your brother and your sister-in-law, putting their needs at the heart of what they do.

## Pregnant, scared and so alone

**Dear Arita**

I was married two years ago to a man my dad had chosen for me. I have a learning disability and I don't think my dad thought anyone else would want me. My parents wanted me to be married like my brother and sister. It started out okay but after a while he started to call me names and telling me I am stupid. He then began beating me when he was angry, or if I said something he didn't like. He's started to take all of my benefits off me and send them back to his family, which is really worrying me because I'm pregnant and we need to buy things for the baby. I'm scared to tell my parents what is happening as I know they will feel guilty for setting up the marriage, and I'll be a burden and embarrassment to them if I leave my husband.

*Anonymous, Coventry*

**ARITA SAYS** It is difficult to tell from your letter whether you were truly consenting to the marriage or whether you just went along with it to please your parents, in which case if you did, it would be a forced marriage. If that is the case, then

your family have committed a criminal offence. You are suffering from domestic and financial abuse and need to leave this toxic and dangerous relationship. Both you and your unborn child are at risk. You must go to the police immediately where you will be able to speak to specially trained officers who, because of your learning disability, will work with adult social services to help and support both you and your unborn child. The police will also put you in touch with specialist agencies, many of whom are survivors of forced marriage and honour abuse and can support you with your next steps. The Anne Craft Trust and Respond are both organisations who can support adults with learning disabilities.

### Need Help?

If you are worried about forced marriage, please call West Midlands Police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.

### Arita's photo story

DAY 6

NO ONE SHOULD PUT ANY EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL PRESSURE ON YOU TO GET MARRIED

YOU'RE RIGHT

101 PLEASE. I'D LIKE TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP ME, I'M BEING FORCED INTO MARRIAGE

Dad: If you don't stop seeing that girl we will never speak to you again

You have to get married to the girl we chose, you have no choice

### Charities of the week

If you're at risk of forced marriage or scared you might be there are so many places you can go to seek help. This week we're highlighting:

#### The Ann Craft Trust

The ACT works to safeguard vulnerable adults and disabled children, and raise awareness of forced marriage and disability. They work to ensure that there is legislation and guidance for professionals who may deal with a person with learning disabilities who has been forced into marriage.

Web:

[www.anncrafttrust.org/Forced\\_Marriage](http://www.anncrafttrust.org/Forced_Marriage)

Tel: 0115 9515400

### It's not culture...



...it's crime

For help call 101

