

## The Issues

# Family Abduction



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## Overview

A Family Abduction occurs when a child is taken, wrongfully retained, or concealed by a parent or other family member depriving another individual of their custody or visitation rights. In some circumstances family abductions can be considered a crime under federal or state law, and criminal statutes vary across the country about what conduct is considered unlawful.

There are a number of preventative steps parents may choose to take if they fear that a family member may attempt to abduct their child.

- Obtain a custody determination from the court which specifically outlines custody and visitation rights.
- Request that the judge include abduction-prevention measures in a description of the visitation rights such as supervised visitation, posting a bond, entering a child's name in the Passport Issuance Alert Program, and surrendering a child's passport to the court.
- Advise the child's school or daycare of custody orders, flag passport applications for your child, and have children memorize essential information such as home address and phone number in case of emergencies.
- If a court order prohibits the child's removal from the country, enroll him/her in the "Prevent Departure" Program

[Click here if you would like to request training around this issue for your community or law enforcement organization.](#)

### Myth

Family abductions aren't harmful, because the child is with a parent or family member.

### Fact

Decades of research across multiple fields have illustrated the serious and harmful effects that family abductions can have on child victims and their families.

## Risk Factors

NCMEC has found that certain conditions may increase the risk that a family member may abduct a child. However, the absence of any of the following does not mean that an abduction will not occur. These risk factors include having a family member who:

- Has previously abducted or threatened to abduct a child
- Has a history of marital instability, lack of cooperation with the other parent, domestic violence, or child abuse
- Has a criminal record
- Has stronger ties to a different state, province, or country than those to where s/he currently resides
- Has no job, can work anywhere, or is financially independent
- Is engaged in planning activities such as quitting a job, selling a home, closing accounts, hiding or destroying documents, purchasing travel tickets for your child, altering their appearance, or applying for renewed or duplicate documents for the child such as:
  - New passports or visas
  - Birth certificates
  - School or medical records

A custody order is not required to report a child missing to local law enforcement. Similarly, a custody determination is not required to have a missing child's information entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File.

Federal law prohibits law enforcement from establishing a waiting period before accepting a missing child report, and requires law enforcement agencies to respond to in a specific way, regardless of the reason why a child is missing.

If a parent/guardian has difficulties getting law enforcement to take a report or enter a missing child's information into NCIC, contact NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

## By the Numbers

Of the 29,859 cases of missing children reported to NCMEC in 2020, **4.8%** were family abductions.

In 2020, **63%** of all AMBER alerts that were issued were for family abduction cases.

## What NCMEC is Doing About it

### Legal Technical Assistance for Families

NCMEC provides legal technical assistance concerning family abduction to parents/guardians, the attorneys who serve them, law enforcement, and judicial officials. This support includes:

- Information regarding legal assistance programs in the community and possible referrals to assist with the prevention of and response to family abduction
- Resources and assistance for attorneys representing parents/guardians and children
- Country-specific information and statistics regarding risks related to international family abduction and legal mechanisms for recovering a child abducted internationally
- Amicus Briefs about issues that NCMEC may be specially situated to address given its mission

### Providing Emotional Support and Professional Referrals

Coping with the experience of a family abduction demands courage and determination on the part of the victim, parents and guardians, and other family members. NCMEC offers victim and family support through a team of dedicated professionals who work with law enforcement and families to provide reunification assistance and referrals. NCMEC can also locate short and long term support for families through local victim advocates and mental health agencies.

### Publications & Informative Resources

NCMEC authors or provides expertise that informs the creation of many publications on a variety of missing and exploited child issues. The following publications on family abductions are available for free download.

- [Family Abductions: What We've Learned](#)
- [A Family Resource Guide on International Parental Kidnapping](#)
- [Family Abduction: Prevention & Response](#)
- [Litigating International Child Abduction Cases](#)
- [A Law Enforcement Guide on International Parental Kidnapping](#)
- [Family Abductions Fact Sheet](#)

### Team Adam

Team Adam is a specialized unit made up of former and retired law enforcement professionals which can be deployed directly to the scene of a child's disappearance to offer assistance to investigators and families in cases of critically missing children and long-term missing child cases.

### ADAM Program

The ADAM Program quickly distributes missing child posters to police, news media, schools, businesses, medical centers and other recipients within a specific geographic search areas. The public can also help by signing up to receive missing child alerts in their area.

[Sign Up to Receive Posters](#)

### Team HOPE

Team HOPE is a group of volunteers who have directly experienced having a missing or exploited child.

Team HOPE's trained volunteers:

- Help families in crisis with a missing, sexually exploited, or recovered child as they handle the day-to-day issues of coping and/or searching for their child.
- Help provide peer and emotional support, compassion, coping tools, and empowerment to families with missing, sexually exploited, and recovered children.
- Help instill courage, determination, and hope in parents and other family members.
- Help alleviate the feelings of isolation so often resulting from fear and frustration.