

What to Do if Your Child is Abducted

Parental abduction is illegal. It violates the laws and the rights of the custodial parent, both civilly and criminally. If your children are abducted by the non-custodial parent and their whereabouts are unknown.

1. Immediately report your child missing to a local law enforcement agency and have your child entered into the FCIC (Florida Crime Information Center)/NCIC (National Crime Information Center) system.
2. Gather photos and information about each of your children and the non-custodial parent.
3. Provide law enforcement with a copy of your custody decree. Out of state custody orders may have to be validated if the child is taken to another state.
4. Consider filing charges, such as Interference with Custody against your estranged spouse.
5. Once law enforcement has opened a missing person case, call the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (MEPIC) at 1-888-356-4774.
6. Provide law enforcement with any updates on your case, such as any communication you have with the noncustodial parent or family member.
7. If your child has been located, contact law enforcement to assist in the recovery of your child.
8. Take steps to prevent a repeat abduction by seeking legal advice to protect your parental rights.

International Parental Abductions

International parental abduction is a federal crime. The U.S. Department of State offers services to families in which a child has been abducted domestically and taken abroad. You can begin by contacting the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs at 1-888-407-4747. A person with "custody rights" has the right to seek the child's return under the Hague Convention.



For additional information regarding how to keep your child safe, contact:

Florida Department of Law Enforcement
Missing Endangered Persons
Information Clearinghouse

2331 Phillips Road
Tallahassee, Florida 32308
(850) 410-8585 • 1-888-356-4774

Or visit our website at:
www.fdle.state.fl.us

FAMILY ABDUCTION PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

A Parent's Guide on How to
Prevent and Survive a
Parental Abduction



The best way to keep your children safe is through preparation, healthy communication, and establishing an atmosphere of trust and support

What Parents Should Know

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, more than 200,000 children in the United States are abducted by a parent each year. Parental abductions occur when a child, who is missing and unemancipated (a non-adult), is in the company of a non-custodial parent. Parental abductions are often the act of a broken marriage or the accumulation of events that follow a divorce or separation. Many parental abductions are both a criminal and a civil matter.

Parents often abduct their children because they are frustrated with the left-behind parent, the legal system, or their own situation in life. The children may be forced to hide their identity, lie about their past, and change their name and appearance. The abducting parent may even tell their children that the left-behind parent has died, doesn't want them, or doesn't love them. Parental abductions are emotionally and psychologically traumatizing to children.

While finding your way through the court system may seem confusing, it is important to support and provide security for your children. The best way to prevent a parental abduction is to establish a good relationship with your children and their other parent. Assure your children that you will always want to be with them. Make sure they know how to call you or contact you if they are taken on a trip without your permission or told they aren't allowed to see you. Teach your children your address and telephone number, including the area code and how to dial the telephone.

Recognize Warning Signs

Possible warning signs that a former spouse or partner may be considering parental abduction:

- Having few ties to the community or an ability to move or work elsewhere easily;
- Making threats about what will happen if you do not agree to reconcile;
- Being angry or resentful of the custody arrangement;
- Violating or ignoring the custody arrangement on a regular basis; and/or
- Threatening to take the children.

Prepare Documentation of Custody and Provisions

Law enforcement can only enforce a custody arrangement if it is part of a written custody order; therefore, it is important to ensure that all changes in the custody or visitation schedule are documented in your custody order. Consider requesting special provisions in your custody order addressing visitation rights (exact dates and times for pickup and return of the child), removal of the child from the state, posting of bonds to ensure custody, and provisions for joint or shared custody to protect against abduction. Even if you are not legally married, you should obtain legal custody of your child and file legal papers called pleadings in family court. Obtain legal assistance by either hiring an attorney, seeking legal aid, or attending a self help legal clinic.

PREPARE FOR THE UNFORESEEN

If you suspect that a family abduction may possibly occur in the future, a well written custody decree is the most important line of defense to prevent a parental abduction. There are other measures that you can take to assist law enforcement for a parental abduction investigation.

COLLECT THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS FOR THE ESTRANGED SPOUSE OR NONCUSTODIAL FAMILY MEMBER:

1. Recent photograph
2. Social Security Number
3. Driver's license number
4. Vehicle registration tag
5. Bank account numbers
6. and custody decree

COLLECT THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS FOR EACH OF YOUR CHILDREN:

1. A recent, color photograph of each child
2. A written description of your child, such as hair and eye color, height, weight, date of birth, and other physical attributes.
3. Provide your child's school with a list of individuals who have permission to pick your child up.
4. If there is a protective order against the estranged spouse, notify your child's school of your family situation and provide them with a copy of your custody decree and a photo of your estranged spouse.