

case to check with the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS). FPLS can access records from many federal agencies including the Social Security Administration, Department of Treasury, and the Department of Defense.

- Contact the Motor Vehicle Registration Department for information regarding the vehicle the abductor may be driving.
- Check with the banks, employers, insurance companies, post office, subscription lists, utility companies, or other places where an address change may be requested by the abductor.
- Check past telephone bills for out-of-town numbers that may give a possible destination.
- Check credit-card bills that may show out-of-town purchases.
- If the abductor is employed in a profession requiring a license by the state or a union, check with the appropriate agency in other states or localities.
- If your child is of school age, check the previous school to determine if another school has made requests for school records. Ask the previous school to flag the child's record and notify you if a request for the record is made.

- Check with the Department of Vital Statistics in the county where your child was born to put a flag on the birth certificate in an effort to prevent the child's name from being changed. Also request notification if a copy of the birth certificate is requested by anyone.
- Contact family abduction support groups to help you through the process of finding your child.
- Have fliers or posters made of your child, using the poster format in this brochure.
- Search for your child on your own as well as working with law enforcement.

For more detailed information regarding what to do if your child is abducted, contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to order a copy of the book titled *Family Abduction*. It may be viewed, downloaded, or ordered online from the "More Publications" link on www.missingkids.com. It may also be ordered by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

POSTER FORMAT

Have You Seen This Child?

OPTIONAL
PHOTO
OF ABDUCTOR
(If warrant
issued for
arrest)

(Date of Photo)

Missing Child

CHILD'S
PHOTO

(Date of Photo)

NAME OF ABDUCTOR
Date of Birth:
Sex:
Race:
Hair:
Eyes:
Height:
Weight:
(Optional if
warrant issued
for arrest)

NAME OF CHILD
Date of Birth:
Date Missing:
Age Now:
Sex:
Race:
Hair:
Eyes:
Height:
Weight:
Missing From:

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Officer's Name, Law-Enforcement Agency:
Telephone Number (with area code):
Case Number:
Warrant Number (if secured):

**1-800-THE-LOST®
(1-800-843-5678)**

NOTE: A missing child **must** be registered with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children before adding the organization's name or telephone number to this flier.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs of and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.*; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in Canada, Mexico, and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The "phone free" number when dialing from other countries is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline® is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number when dialing in the United States is 703-274-3900. The NCMEC business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

For information about the services offered by other NCMEC offices, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-756-5422, New York at 585-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free-of-charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at



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699 Prince Street
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Printed on Recycled Paper

Just in case...

Guidelines in case you are considering family separation



National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®

**1-800-THE-LOST®
(1-800-843-5678)**

www.missingkids.com



OJJDP Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs • U.S. Department of Justice

Guidelines in case you are considering family separation

Although abductions by nonfamily members receive more public attention, a significant number of child abductions are committed by family members—commonly called **family abduction** or **parental kidnapping**. Contrary to what many think, a family abduction can have a deeply traumatic effect on a child who suffers the consequences of being uprooted from the home, deprived of the left-behind family members, and forced to live a life “on the run.”

Often a family abduction is provoked by the breakup of the child’s father and mother. Other events that may lead to a family abduction include the actual court filing of divorce papers; the remarriage or serious emotional involvement of one parent with another partner; and conflict over child support, child custody, or visitation. If you are considering divorce, separation, dissolving a nonmarital partnership, or are going through any of the other events that may lead to a family abduction, you may need to consider making provisions for the safety of your children. This brochure describes the actions family members can take to prepare in the event that their child is abducted, prevention provisions to include in the custody decree, and steps to take to help recover an abducted child.

Preparation and Prevention

The most important means of prevention is one you must work on every day—healthy communication with your children. Repeatedly assure your children you love them. Tell them you always want to see them, no matter what anyone else says. Teach your children your telephone number and area code and how to dial the telephone. Instruct them how to contact your family or a close friend. Establish in your home

an atmosphere of trust and support, without dwelling on abduction concerns or any other problems you may experience related to the separation, so your children will feel secure in discussing with you situations that may have made them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

If you feel that a family abduction is likely, keep lists of information about the potential abductor such as his or her Social Security, driver’s license, vehicle registration, checking and savings account, and credit-card numbers, and other information that may be of assistance in locating the abductor. Be discreet in obtaining this information so you do not provoke an abduction or cause the person to change these pieces of identification.

There are several steps you should take to be prepared in case your child is abducted. Keep a complete written description of your child including hair and eye color, height, weight, date of birth, and specific physical attributes. Take color photographs of your child every six months. Head and shoulder portraits from different angles, such as those taken by school photographers, are preferable, although candid photographs may be more representative of how your child actually looks. Maintain a copy of your child’s fingerprints, dental and medical records, and names of dentists and physicians.

Do not ignore threats of abduction made by the family member because they may indicate a growing frustration motivating him or her to abduct the child. It may help to consult a family counselor to explore the problems of “coparenting” and abduction fears. Be sure to notify your attorney of these threats.

Your Custody Decree

Even if you are not legally married, you should obtain legal custody of your child. Many unmarried mothers feel they are automatically entitled to custody unless there is a court order to the contrary, or they will have custody if they have not put the father’s name on the birth certificate. This is not true in every state. Furthermore, if the father takes the child to a state where the laws are different, the mother may encounter great difficulty in obtaining assistance in recovering the child. Be safe, and get a **custody order**.

To obtain a custody order, you must file legal papers, called pleadings, in the family court. It will be much simpler to do this if you get the assistance of an attorney. Lists of attorneys are available from the lawyer referral service of your local bar association. If you cannot afford an attorney, you may qualify for legal aid, or a law school in your city may have a legal clinic to help people in your same situation. There also may be a self-help legal clinic for use at low cost in your community. Books regarding family law are available in many libraries if you decide to go through the process yourself.

If you hire an attorney, make sure he or she is familiar with key laws helping you obtain and enforce your custody order. These laws are the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act (UCCJA) or Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act, whichever is in force in your state, and the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA). Go to a law library and obtain copies of these laws as well as your state’s kidnapping laws.

You should consider requesting special provisions in your custody order to protect against family abduction. These provisions include

- **Visitation.** It is important for court orders to be sufficiently specific to be enforceable in regard to all people who have visitation rights with your child. Specify exactly the beginning and ending dates and times of visitation. Also specify who will pay for the transportation of the child.
Visitation rights of a noncustodian are also enforceable under federal law. The noncustodian can request in the custody order a provision requiring the custodian to get the court’s approval before moving out of the state or country, both to keep each other informed of the current address and telephone number of the child, and the custodian to post a bond to help ensure compliance with court-ordered visitation. In some states the custodian who deprives the noncustodian of visitation rights may be in violation of state law. Check your state law regarding this issue.
- **Restrict the removal of the child.** You might think about including a clause prohibiting the removal of the child from the state without the consent of the judge or child’s custodian.
- **Post a bond.** Investigate the possibility of having the judge require people with visitation rights to post a bond to help ensure custody and visitation rights will not be violated. In the event a substantial violation occurs and per the stipulations in the bond, the insurance company issuing the bond would be required to pay you the proceeds of the bond. You could then use these funds to finance the search.

- **Joint custody.** In cases of friction in families having joint custody decrees, it is especially important the custody order specify which family member is to have the child at what times and which person is the primary physical custodian.
- **International abduction.** You may request the court to prohibit the removal of the child from this country without your written permission or prior court approval. In the event your child does not yet have a passport, send a certified copy of your custody order to the Passport Services Office of the U.S. Department of State and ask them not to issue a passport to your child without your written permission. If there is a possibility someone with foreign citizenship could take your child to that country, consider sending a certified copy of your custody order to the embassy maintained in the United States (U.S.) by that country. Ask them to honor the U.S. custody order and not issue a passport to that citizen in your child’s name. They are not obligated to honor your request, but some countries will do so voluntarily. In the event your child is taken to a foreign country, get assistance from the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Children’s Issues at the U.S. Department of State.

A custodian who feels that his or her relationship with the child is threatened may be likely to abduct. For this reason you should treat child support and visitation as separate issues. In most areas the refusal to pay child support is not a legal ground for denying visitation. Also the denial of visitation is not a legal ground for

failing to pay child support. The custodian should allow visits and at the same time go to court to collect the child support. The noncustodian with visitation rights should pay child support and at the same time go to court to enforce visitation rights. Consider **custody mediation** rather than a heated court trial as a way of working out an agreement for custody, visitation, or joint custody. Always maintain current **certified** copies of your custody order.

If Your Child Is Abducted

To help locate your abducted child, immediately take the steps noted below.

- Report the kidnapping to local law enforcement. Ask them to enter descriptive information about your child into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer, and make sure law enforcement passes this information on to your state clearinghouse.
- Call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**.
- If you have not already done so, obtain custody of your child. It may be possible to secure a felony warrant for child kidnapping by working with your state attorney or district attorney. If there is reason to believe the subject has fled the state and the attorney agrees to extradite and prosecute, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) can become involved and a federal felony warrant can be issued for Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution (UFAP).
- Ask the FBI Agent, U.S. Attorney, or local law-enforcement officer who is working the