

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Children's Rights

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/familyabduction>

Campaign and Advocacy

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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.

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.

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:

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).

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.

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

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.

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.

[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.

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

[Team HOPE](#) is a group of volunteers who have directly experienced having a missing or exploited child.

Team HOPE's trained volunteers:

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