

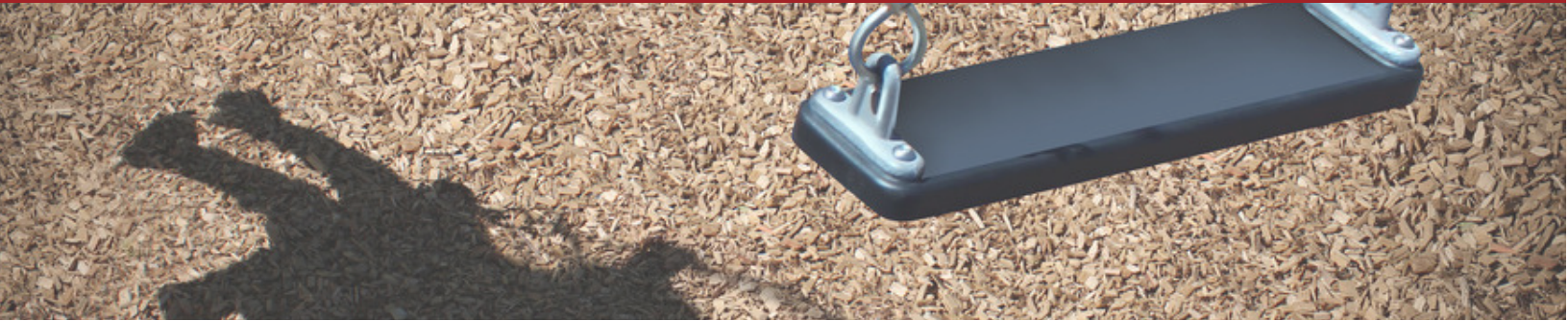


CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

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COVID-19 Impact on Parental Child Abduction Cases

By Heidi Brennan, Deputy District Attorney, Sacramento Co. District Attorney's Office

The recent pandemic has increased the difficulty in missing children cases involving children who have been abducted by their own parent. The Sacramento County District Attorney's Child Abduction Unit endured various complications in locating and returning children to their lawful custodians over the past year. Initially COVID-19 caused an influx of cases where parents were refusing to return their children to the other parent when it came time to exchange the children for the other parent's legal custody or visitation time. The withholding parents would justify their actions by claiming it was not safe to travel or claim that the other parent's home was not safe from exposure to COVID-19. This claim was sometimes based on someone in the household not socially distancing or someone in the residence going to work at a job that was high risk for exposure, for example a nurse or grocery store clerk COVID-19. Other parents used the stay at home order as an excuse to not honor their custody exchange time. Often the parent withholding a child was in a different state or county which always makes it more difficult to locate or recover the child, even absent COVID-19. Overtime the number of cases where parents used COVID as an excuse for withholding their children dissipated, but the virus continues to present other challenges to the DA Child Abduction Unit.

Investigation in these matters frequently starts with locating the missing child(ren) and taking parent. COVID-19 has made this more difficult as people are working from home and children are doing distance learning. For example, if a parent is hiding a child and DA investigators get information as to where they may be staying, pre COVID the investigators would do surveillance to confirm the missing child and taking parent are at that location. During COVID this surveillance is now often futile. The taking parent and child may not leave the residence for days or weeks or longer making it much easier to hide. Since they do not have to go anywhere to work or attend school, it makes surveillance a poor option. Additionally, using schools to locate kids was a great tool until COVID. Knowing where a child attends school no longer helps to locate a child since most schools allow or mandate distance learning. Distance learning has created a means for a parent to keep a child out of state or continue to travel and move around to hide without having to take the child out of school. COVID also limits knocking on doors to talk to neighbors who may have helpful information as in person contact is a safety risk. These same obstacles exist when trying to serve a parent with family law orders or court dates when the taking parent is evading being served.

In addition to investigative difficulties, new challenges in other facets of child abduction cases have emerged during the pandemic. The closing of courts and help centers posed problems for parents trying to get necessary orders to seek help from law enforcement. Overtime the courts have improved as they found ways to hold hearings over zoom and have a drop box to file documents. The hardest part of a Hague case during COVID is no longer getting the court hearing and order, but the logistics of returning a child to another country. Finding COVID tests with results back 72 hours prior to flights and finding a travel companion willing to risk exposure was also problematic. The above examples are just a few of the difficult challenges COVID-19 brought to the DA's Child Abduction Unit. Concerns about arresting an abductor and having them released before booking to keep germs out of jail became a reality. Hopefully as more and more vaccinations are distributed in 2021 the DA child abduction units in California will not face the additional complications that stem from COVID-19 and parents will continue to be reunited with their missing children.

www.cirinc.org/abduction

Early Learning Services

By Jannell Violi, Program Specialist - Orange County Office of Education

As you know, COVID-19 has impacted organizations in several different ways across California. The purpose of this content is to share some of the partnerships the Orange County Department of Education has been part of during the past year. These successful partnerships are the reason why Orange County has been able to move meaningful work forward during the Pandemic. In this section, specific resources connected to Early Childhood Education are highlighted due to the high demand for child care and quality early learning services during this challenging time. For comprehensive information regarding the Orange County Department of Education and all division services including mental health and wellness, please visit <http://www.ocde.us>

Orange County Together <https://ocde.instructure.com/courses/669> With support from public health experts, including our local Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA), the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) and school districts across the county have developed a comprehensive guide with recommendations and best practices for reopening more than 600 schools in a safe and responsible manner.

Instructional Continuity <https://ocde.instructure.com/courses/224> To promote instructional continuity across California, OCDE has created Flexible Learning with Integration & Personalization (FLIP) Modules.

COVID-19 Child Care Assistance <https://sites.google.com/view/ecoc-covid-19/home> Early Childhood OC works with the Orange County Emergency Child Care Task Force to compile a database of currently open child care centers and family child care homes serving children aged birth -12. This database is updated regularly.

Practice Based Coaching & Professional Learning

<https://ocde.us/EducationalServices/STEMandHumanities/ELS/Pages/Quality%20Start%20OC.aspx>. Start OC coaches are trained in Practice-Based Coaching, which is a strength-based process for guiding practitioners' use of evidence-based practices to promote positive child outcomes. The Practice-Based Coaching cycle involves the following components, each of which may be conducted synchronously (coach and teacher meet together virtually at the same time) or asynchronously using the Coaching Companion tool to house messages, videos, and resources that can be reviewed at any day or time. Further, all Professional Learning is virtual for this year and our offerings for Early Learning Professionals can be found on the website.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS



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