



# CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

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## FROM THE CHILD ABDUCTION TASK FORCE

### Risk Factors of False Allegations of Child Abduction:

#### Insights from FBI Research

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Reports of missing or abducted children trigger an immediate and extensive law enforcement response. While many such reports are legitimate, there are challenging instances where the initial information provided by the reporting party is false. This often occurs when a parent or caregiver is responsible for a child's death and falsely claims the child was abducted to explain their disappearance and cover up their involvement. These cases are particularly difficult for investigators, as it can be hard to distinguish a legitimate abduction from a falsely reported one, potentially misdirecting crucial early investigative efforts.

To address this challenge, the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) conducted research into criminal behaviors related to child abductions, including false allegations. Based on their research, the BAU identified several factors commonly seen in false allegation cases that may help investigators assess increased risk and understand these cases' dynamics. The presence of one or more of these factors, when considered alongside other case details, suggests the possibility of a false allegation:

- The victim is **under the age of five**.
- There are **no confirmed witnesses to the alleged abduction** other than the reporting party.
- The victim's family environment suffers from **financial, relationship, employment, and/or other stressful domestic problems**.
- There was **prior criminal activity by parents/caregivers**.
- There is **instability in the makeup of the family household**.
- There were **periods of prolonged separation** from the household, or the victim had not always resided there.
- There was **prior physical abuse by parents/caregivers**.

It is important to understand that the presence of these factors does not definitively prove a false allegation. However, recognizing that many of these factors are present should alert investigators to the possibility, and should be a consideration in their investigative strategy. Parallel investigations should be conducted until all possible scenarios have been included or excluded.

Additionally, it is crucial that investigators do not alienate or accuse the parent or caregiver of wrongdoing if the child is still missing. Remember that the perpetrator may be the only one who knows where the child is located, and they likely had ample time to hide the evidence, including the child's remains, prior to reporting the victim as missing or abducted. According to BAU's research, the best chance of recovering the victim lies with securing the cooperation of the parent or caregiver who harmed the child and/or disposed of their remains.

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- **Cari Teran**, *Vice-Chair, CEO*, Healing To You
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