

## After Recovery...

### Reunification Tips For Caregivers

The process of reintegrating back into family life after abduction can be very complicated whether the abduction was brief or extended. While a child may initially be happy and compliant, they may also test limits and act on their underlying feelings and/or may not have the verbal skills to express what they are feeling.

- Expect issues and seek out therapy for support; look for a therapist with training and experience in abduction and trauma recovery (DA Victim Witness office and insurance company can provide referrals).
- Set clear and loving boundaries (with appropriate consequences) and provide positive reinforcement for good behavior.
- Encourage the child to talk about their feelings and experience without passing ANY judgment or expressing feelings of your own.
- Help the child feel safe; reinforce security measures, alarm, locks, etc.
- Inform the school of any safety concerns and provide a custody order, with specifics about who can and cannot pick up the child.
- Ensure that the necessary custody orders are current and several certified copies are readily available at all times.
- Ask neighbors to advise of any cars/people monitoring the house.
- Have the child photographed and fingerprinted; keep current records (along with medical and dental, birth certificate, immunizations) in a safe location.
- Make sure the child knows his/her/their full name, address, phone number, their parents full name and to whom they can go to for help when they are not in their parent's care.
- Establish a "New Normal".

### Common issues that abducted children may experience after recovery include:

#### Emotional Challenges:

- Parental alienation/brainwashing - believing the false or negative information about the left behind parent
- Continued contact with abductor
- Safety
- Regression
- Social delays in development – missed opportunities for socialization
- Education – Academically behind, underlying learning disorders that weren't addressed, difficulty focusing on academics due to trauma symptoms

*Children may exhibit some of the following as a result of the **emotional abuse** they experienced during abduction: lying, deception, gaslighting, manipulation. Interactions impact a child's core beliefs about themselves and their worldview. These are appropriate issues for therapy.*

*Common behavioral issues in **young children** post-abduction:*

- Physical symptoms: Stomach aches, change in appetite, sleep disruptions.
- A need for control expressed through making demands, seeming inflexible or rigid, defiance, and tantrums if they don't get their way.
- Increased distress or anxiety when separating from a parent/caregiver.
- Regressive behaviors: Return to thumb sucking or toileting issues and a decrease in language skills in younger children; increased need for assistance with things they've previously mastered. Length of time the child was gone has a big impact.

*Common behavioral issues in **teens** post-abduction:*

- Depression, withdrawal from others, sadness, loss of pleasure in activities, food hoarding or restricting
- Confusion about identity and a strong need to rebel against the left-behind parent, particularly in teens
- Alignment with the abducting parent and possible attempts to contact them
- Physical symptoms: Stomach aches, change in appetite, sleep disruptions
- Anxiety: worry, fears, hyper-aware of surroundings

## **Finding a New Normal**

For some families, it may be easy to adjust to life after abduction. But for many, there will be triggers and barriers to navigate. Therapy can help the child reduce symptoms, improve relationships and heal from their trauma exposure.

Some common treatment goals include:

- Address differences between child and parent experiences
- Grieving the loss of time and events
- Readjusting to new family dynamics and school
- Work to resolve trauma/abuse related symptoms
- Address differences in documented reality of the abduction, if applicable
- Separate the Abduction from the Abductor

With the help of a trauma-informed clinician who is aware of these unique issues, healing is possible.