

## Strategies to Prevent Child Abduction

It is important for parents to understand that children are at risk of abduction regardless of who their family is or where they live. 99% of all child abductions are perpetrated by a parent, family member, or another adult that the child knows and trusts. Whether a child is taken by a parent or another family member, research shows that it causes significant trauma to the abducted child, and it is a crime.

Below are best practices for preventing child abduction followed by specific strategies to help prevent a parent or family abduction.

### What Every Parent/Guardian Can Do to Help Prevent Child Abduction

- Download the **FBI's free Child ID App**: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/apps/child-id-app>  
*This free mobile app provides a place to keep photos and other vital information about your children, so that it is on your phone and ready to share with law enforcement in an emergency.*
- Help your child memorize at least one family phone number and their address.
- Talk with family and close friends about how they can help keep your child safe by paying attention to their body language and respecting their boundaries if they are afraid and/or don't want to be touched.
- Tell your child that no one has the right to hurt them, and it is not their fault if anyone ever tries to hurt or take them. They can yell and do whatever they have to do to get away. Tell your child that it is your job to keep them safe, so they should tell you if anyone, no matter who it is (family or stranger), makes them uncomfortable or afraid.
- Explain that you will always tell your child if someone else is going to take them somewhere. Schools have emergency cards, and those 2 to 3 people are *the only people* allowed to pick them up or take them. *No one else* is allowed to take them anywhere (on foot or in a car) unless you tell your child that it is okay.
- Agree on a **Code Word** with your child that they can ask for if *anyone they don't expect* tells them they are supposed to go with them. This is especially important if there are custody disputes or concerns.
- Ask your child what they would do to be safe if you were late picking them up. Discuss and agree on a safety plan that includes where they should wait, who they can call, and who they can ask for help if someone offers to drive them home and/or scares them.
- Talk with your child about having a safety plan should they get separated from you in a public place. Teach them to yell their adult's name and if they don't hear or see you, discuss where they should go and/or who they should ask for help in different real-life situations, e.g., the cashier at a store or a parent with young children.

- Teach your child that adults should not ask children that they don't know for help. Adults should ask an adult for help not a child (it could be a trick). If an adult they don't know talks to them from or near a vehicle, they should immediately run away and yell for help.

**Create and maintain a file for your child that includes the following:**

1. Birth certificate
2. Fingerprints
3. Immunization records
4. Medical and dental records
5. Recent photos
6. Child's cell phone number, tablet other device number, IP address of laptop (login and password information)
7. Video footage of the child(ren)
8. DNA sample (a cotton swab rubbed on the inside cheek of a child, clean fingernail clippings, or a used bandage, may be put in a paper envelope that is taped (only use a plastic bag if the samples are kept in a freezer).
9. Three certified copies of the most current child custody decree
10. Passport
11. Name, address, telephone number of current school and a contact person

**Preventing Child Abduction by a Parent or Family Member**

Risk Factors for Parental Abduction include if a parent has:

- previously violated custody or visitation agreements.
- threatened to abduct a child.
- a history of domestic violence or child abuse.
- strong connections in a different state or country.
- no job, can work anywhere, or is financially independent.
- recently engaged in activities that would make it easier for someone to move, such as quitting a job, selling a home, closing accounts, destroying documents, purchasing travel tickets, or changing their appearance or the child's.

**What to do if there is a reason to believe a family member may try to abduct a child:**

- Obtain a custody determination order from the court which specifically outlines rights to custody and visitation as well as restrictions on traveling with the child.
- Request that the judge include abduction-prevention measures in a description of the visitation rights such as supervised visitation, posting a bond, entering a child's name in the Passport Issuance Alert Program, and/or surrendering a child's passport to the court.
- Advise the child's school or daycare of your concern and provide a copy of the custody order. If there are any questions or concerns on the part of school personnel, it is

important that they call their local law enforcement agency before releasing a child from the school or childcare center if the other parent provides conflicting documents. Law enforcement can take the child into protective custody if it appears likely that a parent might abduct or conceal a child and the child custody decrees are in dispute.

- **Document violations of custody and any problematic behaviors including:**
  - Date
  - Time
  - The specific behavior or statements
  - To whom the behavior was directed
  - Who was present at the time
  - The responses or action taken by those present
  - Photographs or videos of any physical injury or damage

**If your child is at risk of being abducted and taken to another country (international):**

- Obtain a valid, enforceable U.S. court order that includes prevention provisions, such as restrictions on removing the child from the U.S.
- Contact U.S. Department of State (DOS) **Office of Children's Issues** for 24/7 assistance:
  - Phone: 1-888-407-4747 (U.S. or Canada) or +1-202-501-4444 (International)
  - Email: **PreventAbduction1@state.gov**