

Child Abduction

What is child abduction?

International child abduction occurs when a parent or other person:

- takes or sends a child under 16 out of the country without the permission that they need from others with parental responsibility or a court order, or,
- has the right permission to take the child out of the country temporarily but keeps them abroad for longer than agreed/allowed.

There are two main things to know about.

First, child abduction is a criminal offence and very serious. The Child Abduction Act 1984 covers abduction by (or on behalf of) a parent, guardian, or someone thought to be the child's father (s1) and abduction by someone else who has taken or kept the child from someone with lawful control of him.

Second, whether or not a crime is committed, there is an international agreement called the Hague Convention under which countries who have signed the agreement agree to order the return of children who have been brought into their country. Not all countries are part of this agreement and therefore prevention of abduction is very important. The basis of this agreement is that any issues about care of the child should be decided in the country in which the child usually lives, and not the country to which they have been taken.

There are defences to being ordered to return the child.

Immediate risk of abduction

If you think that your child is at imminent risk of abduction - that is, that an abduction is about to happen or is happening:

Do not delay

- Ring the police emergency line (999). Ask the police to notify all ports and airports using a Port Alert, to try to prevent the children leaving the country. Do not wait for an appointment with a lawyer to take this action.
- Immediately contact the government's Child Abduction Unit on 020 3681 2756. They can help you find a lawyer who can make an immediate High Court application if this is necessary.

[Reunite](#) are a charity specialising in child abduction. Their helpline is 0116 2556 234. They also have a [downloadable guide on preventing abduction](#) which tells you what to do. It is available in several languages.

Worries about abduction but abduction is not imminent

If the abduction is not imminent or underway, you should still seek legal advice as soon as possible as there are steps you can take to try to prevent an abduction. We recommend that you read the [Reunite guide on preventing child abduction](#) which sets out what you can do.

Remember that while many parents fear abduction and some parents threaten abduction, that doesn't mean they will abduct the child. However, it is much better to take steps to prevent abduction than to risk the abduction.

Please contact us if you would like this guide in another language.

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