

# International parental child abduction



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

# **International parental child abduction**

**Has your child been taken or kept overseas by their other parent or a relative without your permission? Are you worried that this might happen? This leaflet will tell you what you can do and who to contact.**

## What can I do if I am worried that my child might be abducted overseas?

- > If you are not sure about your legal position in relation to your child, consider instructing a suitably qualified family lawyer immediately. You may need to get a residence (custody) or preventative court order to stop your child being taken out of the country. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, you may need to apply to have your child made a ward of court, through which the court becomes a legal guardian of the child and can exercise its powers to back up its decisions on what is in that child's best interests.
- > Contact **reunite**. This is a charity organisation which provides practical advice and information to parents and families whose children have been, or might be, abducted overseas. They can send you a pack that tells you how you can do your best to prevent child abduction.
- > Write to the Identity and Passport Service (formerly known as the UK Passport Service), enclosing a copy of a UK court order and giving the expiry date, to ask them not to grant a British passport to your child without your permission. They can only do this in certain circumstances – you will need to contact them to find out when they can do this.

- > If the other parent of your child is not British, they may be able to get a passport for the child from their own Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in this country. In that case, you or your lawyer may wish to write to the Embassy, High Commission or Consulate of the other parent's nationality asking them not to issue a passport to your child. They do not have to follow your instructions, but they may do so voluntarily.
- > Contact your local police station. If the police are satisfied that the threat of abduction is real and imminent (that is, you think your child is likely to be taken overseas within 48 hours), they can contact the National Ports Office and ask them to alert all UK points of departure to try to prevent the abduction. This is called a 'Port Alert'.

## What can I do if my child has been abducted overseas?

- > Report it to the local police **immediately**. The parent who abducts the child may have committed a criminal offence in the UK. If it is not too late, the police may be able to stop your child being taken out of the country. If your child has been taken overseas but you do not know exactly where, the police can contact Interpol on your behalf. Interpol may be able to work with overseas police forces to help find the child.
- > Contact **reunite**. This is a charity organisation which provides practical advice and information to parents and families whose children have been, or might be, abducted overseas.

- > Instruct a suitably qualified family lawyer in the UK who can provide you with legal advice. reunite has a list of lawyers who might be able to help. Depending on which country your child has been taken to, you may also need to appoint a lawyer overseas.
- > Contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on 0207 008 1500. We can tell you whether the country that your child has been taken to has joined the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction (see below), and provide information about what you can do.

## **What is the Hague Convention?**

The 1980 'Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction' is an agreement between various countries which aims to ensure the return of an abducted child to the country where he or she normally lives, so that issues of residence (custody) and contact (access) can be decided by the courts of that country.

## **What happens if my child has been taken to a country that has joined the Hague Convention?**

Contact the relevant UK Central Authority. There are contact details at the end of this leaflet:

- > In England and Wales, the Central Authority is the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit in the Ministry of Justice.
- > In Scotland it is the Scottish Government.
- > In Northern Ireland it is the Northern Ireland Courts Service.

The UK Central Authority will handle your case. They may be able to make an application on your behalf under the Hague Convention to the foreign Central Authority. The FCO will not normally become involved in the case, unless the UK Central Authorities ask for our help.

## **What happens if my child has been taken to a country which has not joined the Hague Convention?**

If your child has been taken to a country that has not joined the Hague Convention, there may be no international systems in place to help you. In these cases you can:

- > try to come to an agreement with the other parent
- > start legal proceedings in the courts overseas.

If you cannot come to an agreement with the other parent, you may need to apply to bring your child back to the UK through the courts overseas. The FCO cannot interfere in foreign court proceedings and we cannot guarantee that your child will be returned to you.

## **What can consular staff do to help if your child has been abducted?**

We and our consular staff overseas are committed to giving British nationals all the assistance we properly can.

We can:

- > provide a list of overseas lawyers (see note 1 below) who speak English (some will be specialists in family law)
- > arrange for a consular visit; if you have contact details for your child and if the other parent agrees;
- > if you do not know where your child is, we can contact the relevant authorities overseas to check what progress has been made in finding him/her
- > offer travel information and help with finding accommodation locally
- > help you contact the relevant local authorities and organisations when you are overseas
- > where appropriate, contact the courts overseas to express our interest in a case and ask about progress
- > **in exceptional circumstances only**, go to court hearings overseas
- > provide information about translation services
- > where appropriate, issue travel documents.
- > consider making appropriate representations to the local authorities to ask that your case is resolved quickly and in your child's best interests. We cannot, however, interfere in foreign court proceedings.

**Note 1:**

Neither the Government nor the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can make any guarantee in relation to the professional ability or character of any person or company on the list, nor can they be held responsible in any way for you relying on any advice you are given.

We cannot:

- > **'rescue' a child or get involved in any** illegal attempts to bring a child back to the UK
- > locate your child if you do not know where he/she is
- > offer legal advice or interfere in the legal system of another country
- > pay your bills, including legal, translations, travel or accommodation.

## Dual nationality

Dual nationality means being the national of more than one country. A child may be a dual national if they were born or lived overseas or if one of his or her parents holds the nationality of another country. If your child has been taken to the country of their second nationality, the authorities there may view your child as a national of that country. This may limit what we can do to help.

## Taking the first step

Before you call anyone, be prepared to provide the following information that can help others to help you:

- > Your child's name, age, date of birth, passport details and nationality.
- > Details of the abducting parent and his or her relatives, both in the UK and overseas.
- > Details of any court orders giving you residence or contact.

## Useful addresses

### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Consular Directorate  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Tel: 020 7008 1500

**[www.gov.uk/international-child-abduction](http://www.gov.uk/international-child-abduction)**

### **Central Authority for England and Wales**

The International Child Abduction  
and Contact Unit  
Viceroy House  
30-34 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6EX

Tel: 020 3681 2608

Email: [enquiries@offsol.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@offsol.gsi.gov.uk)

Fax: 020 3681 2763

**[www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk)**

Central Authority for Scotland  
International & Human Rights Branch  
St Andrews House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Tel: 0131 244 4827 or 0131 244 4826/7

**[www.scotland.gov.uk/childabduction](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/childabduction)**

### **Central Authority for Northern Ireland**

Central Business Unit  
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service  
4th Floor  
Laganside House  
23-27 Oxford Street  
Belfast BT1 3LA

Tel: 028 9072 8808

Fax: 028 9072 8945

**[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)**

## **Identity and Passport Service**

Globe House  
89 Eccleston Square  
London SW1V 1PN

Tel: 0300 222 0000

(The passport advice line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls to this number are charged at standard national rates.)

**[www.ips.gov.uk](http://www.ips.gov.uk)**

## **reunite International Child Abduction Centre**

PO Box 7124  
Leicester LE1 7XX

Tel: 0116 2556 234 (advice line)

**[www.reunite.org](http://www.reunite.org)**

## **Missing People**

UK Missing Persons Bureau  
Foxley Hall  
Bramshill  
Hook  
Hampshire RG27 0JW

Tel: 0845 000 5481

**[www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons](http://www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons)**



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## Tell us what you think!

### Giving us feedback

**We welcome your views on the support we provide.** They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. Visit **[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research)** for our customer satisfaction survey, or ask your local Embassy or Consulate for a copy. Information about our official complaints procedure is also on this website.

If you prefer to contact us directly our contact details are:

#### Consular Directorate

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

**Email:** [feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk](mailto:feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk)

**Tel:** +44 (0)20 7008 1500



The FCO work closely with Reunite and support them in their work but they are an independent organisation and we cannot be held responsible in any way for you relying on their advice in making any decisions about your case.

travel  
aware  
[gov.uk/travelaware](http://gov.uk/travelaware)

**[www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)**

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