

News story: International child abduction: free sources of advice and support

International child abduction is when one parent takes or keeps their child outside the country in which the child usually lives, without the permission of the other parent. Many parents don't realise this could be classified as abduction and that they may be committing a criminal offence and could face a prison sentence.

If you suspect that your child may be abducted, you should contact the charity Reunite, which provides advice and information to parents and families whose children have been, or might be, abducted overseas. You can call them at any time on 01162 556 234.

You can also contact the FCO on 020 7008 1500 at any time. Assistance the FCO can offer includes providing information about overseas lawyers who speak English, arranging consular visits and contacting overseas courts to express interest in a case and ask about progress.

In 2016/17, the FCO provided assistance in 449 new child custody and international parental child abduction cases and so far in 2017/18 the FCO has dealt with 301* new cases.

Rory Stewart, FCO Minister for Consular Policy, said:

With the school holidays coming up, it is important to highlight the impact abductions can have, especially at Christmas, when many families go abroad to visit relatives.

We assist hundreds of families going through this ordeal every year as once children are taken abroad it can be extremely difficult to secure their return.

Our consular staff in the UK and overseas are committed to giving British people high-quality, helpful and supportive assistance in these cases.

Alison Shalaby, CEO of Reunite, said:

International parental child abduction can cause great distress to a child who is removed from their home country and taken away from one parent, their extended family and friends, and everything that is familiar to them. This can cause long lasting harm to a child's wellbeing and is something that may continue to affect them well into adulthood.

Saying that, there is almost always the possibility that such cases can be resolved positively for all involved, especially the children. We would urge parents to seek help and support as through co-operation, mediation or swift court action, many children do return home and are able to continue to have a meaningful relationship with both parents.

1. More detail on FCO support relating to child abduction is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-parental-child-abduction>
2. Reunite (<http://www.reunite.org/>) is a charity specialising in parental child abduction and the movement of children across international borders.
3. *Data covers period from April to November 2017