How to Search for a Child Abducted Abroad

(From www.travel.state.gov)

Where to Report Your Missing Child

1. If your child is missing or has been abducted, file a missing person report with your local police department and request that your child’s name and description be entered into the “missing person” section of the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer. This is provided for under the National Child Search Act of 1990. The abductor does not have to be charged with a crime when you file a missing person report. It is not always a good idea to file criminal charges against the abducting parent at the same time you file a missing person report, although local law enforcement authorities may urge you to do so. In addition, through INTERPOL, the international police organization, your local police can request that a search for your child be conducted by the police in the country where you believe your child may have been taken. If your local law enforcement is unaware of the legal requirements for immediate entry into NCIC computer please contact the Office of Children’s Issues at 1-888-407-4747.

2. Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) (http://www.ncmec.org/), at 1-800-THE LOST/1-800-843-5678. With the searching parent’s permission, the child’s photograph and description may be circulated to the media in the country to which you believe the child may have been taken.

3. Request information about a possible United States passport and have your child’s name entered into the United States Children’s Passport Issuance Alert Program. A United States passport for a child under 16 years expires after 5 years. If you do not know where your child is, but information about the child is in the name check system, it may be possible to locate him or her through the passport application process. All United States passport agencies and United States embassies and consulates are on-line with the name check system (see information on passports here).

After Your Child Is Located

A consular officer overseas, working with this information, will try to confirm the location of your child. If the consular officer is unable to find the child based on the information provided, he or she may also request information from local officials on your child’s entry or residence in the country. Please note, however, that most countries do not maintain such records in a retrievable form, and some countries will not release such information.

We may also ask you for photographs of both your child and the abducting parent because these are often helpful to foreign authorities trying to find a missing child.

The Department of State, when requested to do so, may conduct visits to determine the welfare and whereabouts of American citizens abroad. The Office of Children’s Issues communicates such requests to the United States embassy or consulate responsible for the area to which you believe your child has been abducted. A welfare and whereabouts visit cannot be conducted if the abducting parent refuses access. Your signed letter requesting such a visit and containing the following information can be faxed to The Department of State at 202-736-9133:

- Child’s full name (and any aliases);
- Child’s date and place of birth;
- Full name (and any aliases) of the abductor; and
• Information which may assist the embassy or consulate in locating the abductor, such as the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of friends, relatives, place of employment, or business connections there.

Further Steps to Take in Your Search

It is possible that none of the institutions mentioned (the police, NCMEC, or the Department of State) will succeed in locating your child right away and you will need to carry on the search on your own. As you search, you should, however, keep these institutions informed of your actions and progress.

One of the best ways to find your child overseas is through establishing friendly contact with relatives and friends of the other parent, either here or abroad. You may have more influence with such persons than you suspect, and their interest in your child’s welfare may lead them to cooperate with you.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement maintains the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS). The primary purpose of this service is to locate parents who are delinquent in child support payments, but the service will also search for parental abductors when requested to do so by an authorized person. Generally speaking, an authorized person is a state court judge, police officer, prosecutor, or other state official seeking to enforce a child custody order. Please ask your local law enforcement to request a search.

To learn how to access the services of the FPLS, contact your local or state Child Support Enforcement office. These offices are listed under government listings in your telephone directory.

You can contact the principal of the school to obtain information on requests that may have been made by the abductor to your child’s school for the transfer of your child’s records.

How to Prepare a Poster on Your Child

A poster may assist foreign authorities in attempting to locate your child. You can find out from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

You can ask your district attorney to contact the United States Postal Inspection Service to see if a "mail cover" can be put on any address that you know of in the U.S. to which the abductor might write.

It may be possible for local law enforcement authorities to obtain, by subpoena or search warrant, credit card records that may show where the abductor is making purchases. Check with state and local authorities if anything can be done. In the same manner, you can try to obtain copies of telephone bills of the abductor’s friends or relatives who may have received collect calls from the abductor. Law enforcement may also be able to track usage of a cell phone or emails the abductor may be sending.