



C A L I F O R N I A C h i l d A b d u c t i o n T A S K F O R C E

Ongoing Reunification Tips for Parents

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After the Initial Homecoming...

1. The child may be compliant initially, but will later need to express some independence by acting out and testing the limits.
2. Establish clear, loving boundaries.
3. Encourage the child and give him/her positive reinforcement for good behavior.
4. The consequences for inappropriate behavior should be discussed with the child in advance and should not include physical punishment. The consequences might include time out or the removal of toys/privileges for a period of time. Consequences should also be employed in a calm manner and followed through completely. The child should never feel that a parent's love is conditional or that the child's behavior could impact that love.
5. Involve the child and family members in individual or family therapy. Interview therapists and select one who has a positive track record in working with missing or abducted children, abused children, or victims of crime. Check with the local Victim Witness program for referrals. Verify if the victim parent, child, or family qualifies for state victim compensation to cover some, or all, of the therapy costs.
6. When the child attends school, inform the school of safety concerns. Provide the school with a copy of the custody order if applicable. Determine the school's release policy, adult office check-in policy, and insure that the school has a school callback program.
7. Ask the neighbors to advise the parent(s) or other family members of people or cars that appear to be monitoring the family's residence, the child's school, or play areas.
8. Parents should ensure that the necessary custody orders for the child(ren) are current and that several certified copies are readily available at all times.
9. Have the child photographed and fingerprinted. Keep a current identification information (photos, dental records, medical records, etc.) on hand and in a safe location at **HOME**.
10. It is very likely that at some point the child will have contact with the abducting parent. If it appears that this may occur, seek supervised visitation and/or require the abducting parent to post a sizeable bond.
11. Make sure the child knows his/her correct name, address, telephone, their parent's full name and to whom they can go to for help when they are not in their parent's care.

12. Parents can communicate their feelings of anger about the situation in many different ways, especially through verbal communication (tone of voice) and body language. Be aware, however, that young children are naturally self-centered; they are the center of their universe, so they may feel responsible for things that happen around them. Consequently, children may assume the blame for what has happened to them; and they may also feel that they have caused their parent's/family's anger or pain.
13. Many parents live day-to-day hoping and dreaming of the recovery of their child(ren). This fantasy often includes a scenario where the family lives happily ever after once they are reunited. However, the reality is that most children do not come back as the same child. Just as the parent has been changed by the experience, so has the abducted child... perhaps even more. Although the child is now home, the clock cannot be turned back. Instead, a **"new normal"** must be established.
14. It is difficult to assess the long-term ramifications of the abduction of children. Each case is different, spanning the entire spectrum of recovery scenarios. Some children and families may experience positive reconstruction of their lives, while others suffer from various psychological disorders. Consequently, parents are encouraged to acquire the appropriate family intervention services early in the reunification process so the likelihood of long-term negative consequences can be reduced.
15. Allow children to speak about their ordeal and encourage them to share both positive and negative experiences they had while missing. Remember, if children express a positive feeling or experience about the abductor, it's not a reflection on the reunited family. In the long run, by allowing open and honest communication, parents will serve as a catalyst to the child's healing.
16. Develop a support system for the parent and family members even after the child returns home. Parenting is a big job and no one is superhuman! It's not selfish for parents to take care of themselves. On the contrary, by modeling self-care and self-respect, the child may also develop these characteristics. If parents model victim or martyr-like behavior, children are also likely to view themselves as victims. Parents must remember they cannot change the past, but they can change how they view the situation, thus creating a brighter, more optimistic future.