

# Parental Child Abduction — The Impact

The victimization and harm experienced by a child who has been abducted by a parent continues with each day the child is not returned to their home and community. The impact on the child, the searching parent, and the extended family is significant. This impact can also be felt by the surrounding community who are suddenly faced with the child’s absence.

**The notion that parental abduction is ‘not that bad’ because the child is with a parent is unrealistic and untrue. Denying a child access to their other parent, their family, and their community deprives them of important relationships and can cause a great deal of psychological and physical harm.**

The abduction of a child by their parent can have a range of consequences.

## Short-Term Abductions

Short-term abductions (e.g., keeping the child for a day longer than expected) may cause harm to a child by making them feel:

- Confused and scared
- They have betrayed one or both parents
- They have to choose between parents
- They are the cause of their parents’ fighting

## Long-Term Abductions

In addition to the impacts listed above, when a child is abducted for a longer period of time (e.g., moving the child to another province or removing them from the country), there are additional concerning impacts. Possible impacts to the child can include:

- Removing them from their home community and the stability of their surroundings
- Impacting their bond with their other parent
- Isolating them— sometimes, these children are not placed in school and have limited social interaction for fear of being discovered
- Causing them culture shock (particularly if it is not addressed), depending on where they are taken
- Alienating them from their other parent, siblings, and extended family
- Isolating them so much that they form an unhealthy bond with the abductor
- Impacting their ability to form trusting relationships
- Subjecting them to potential emotional, physical, or sexual abuse

Following a recovery, the reunification experience for the abducted child may be very different from those around them. While others may be overjoyed with the child’s return, the child may feel a range of emotions, including sadness, confusion, and anger. The child needs to know that their feelings are okay and do not have to be hidden.

It is important to consult with professionals regarding the reunification process as early as possible to ensure the child is appropriately supported through this transition.

Caseworkers are available at MissingKids.ca to provide reunification guidance to both families and professionals. For more information call us toll free at 1-866-KID-TIPS (543-8477).

Alternate formats may be available upon request.

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