

"Why Do Parents Abduct?"

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, over 354,000 children are kidnapped by a parent each year in divorce custody disputes. Some of the children are recovered or returned quickly while others may be on the run for years. Unfortunately many of these children are never found. Generally, people are concerned with the traumatic effects of these events on the child involved. However, both the searching parent and the abductor have many pending issues with which to deal. Some people believe that children "kidnapped" by their own parents are the lucky ones. In fact, because revenge is often the driving force for these abductions, the child may become subject to physical, sexual and mental abuse. While "When Families Are Torn Apart," is written by Mary Morrissey, the majority of the article is quoted from Geoffrey Greif and Rebecca Hegar. In the article, Greif and Hegar explain how they attempted to fill in the gap of information about the trauma of long-term abduction. Their findings appear in the book When Parents Kidnap. Each parent, child, and abductor may deal with the kidnapping differently. For some it is very frightful and requires years of psychological evaluation to overcome. According to Greif and Hegar, abducted children develop extremely close bonds with their abductors. Often the abductors lie to the children about the other parent. They may say that the other parent does not want the child or is dead. The longer the child is away the harder it is for everyone involved. At these times, professional help is strongly suggested.

Issues for Parent

- their own feelings about the abduction
- helping them to be able to care for the child
- helping them to bring the whole family together
- helping them to help readjust the other children
- helping them to cope with any odd behavior that may be exhibited by the abducted child
- developmental changes of the child

Issues for Children

- trust
- sexual abuse
- anti-social behavior
- why the child thinks the abduction occurs
- dealing with the length of the abduction and the time that they missed with the rest of their family
- experiences during the abduction
- they child may have been brainwashed by the abducting parent
- whether or not she wants to return to the abductor
- being scared about the chance of being abducted again
- + many others

Issues for Abductor

- anger against court
- anger at the other parent
- anger or confusion about the child's new outlook on them
- sense of loss because they are not seeing the child
- inability to move on with their life
- concern about the child's welfare
- guilt if they think the child has suffered
- realizing the harm they have done to the child
- dealing with the behaviors that led to the abduction

The article, "Parents Who 'Kidnap,'" recaps specific cases of parents attempting to recover abducted children. In the first case, Sandy Kearns is searching for her son Joshua who had been abducted by his father. Sandy's husband had run off with his son in the past. She was told by police that it was a civil matter and received no assistance. The next afternoon she was told by police officers that her husband had shot her son and then himself. The next case is about Cynthia and Julian Smith. Cynthia's son Julian was stolen away when he was two. Five years later, abused both sexually and emotionally, Julian was rescued by his mother. Julian has receive endless hours of psychological help that will have to be continued throughout his life. He is finally adapting to school and his new life and is making friends. The subsequent example involves Jeff and Autumn Young. This story depicts how some children's appearance is changed and they are restricted in all ways from having contact with the outside world. Jeff's ex-wife stole away with their daughter during his custody case in court. Jeff spent his savings on lawyers and detectives who could not find his daughter. Shortly after Jeff and his new wife had a baby, his daughter was found in Florida. Extremely underweight, dirty and pale, Autumn went home with her father. After all of her medical check-ups and some sessions of unconditional love, Autumn is happy to be home with "two people who know what they're doing." The next case concerns Joe, Paula, and Jo-Jo Palancia. Federal law says that custody decisions can not be overridden by courts in different states. This is a fact unfamiliar to many judges. Joe Palancia's wife had abducted their two children after she had consented to allowing them to live with their father. Six years later the children had been found and Joe was back in court. After \$800 worth of phone call inquiries and \$3,000 worth of legal fees, Joe's wife again agreed to let Joe take the children. His wife eventually spent 4 months in jail. Finally a happy family once again, Joe, Paula, and Jo-Jo do the things regular families do and their lives have calmed down somewhat. The last incident involves Steve and Stephen Fenton. Steve agreed to allowed his wife to take Stephen, then six, to Mexico for three weeks. Steve's wife never returned with Stephen. Abductions outside the United States do not fall under American law, but Steve was told that the recovery rate from Mexico was 90%. Seventeen months of attempted recovery had failed and Steve realized he needed to try something else. He hired a man for \$51,000 to re-abduct his child. When a kicking and screaming Stephen was finally retrieved, Steve had to slowly rekindle memories to reassure the child that he was his father. Months later, Steven watches his child play soccer and despite being looked down upon by his caseworker, is content with the method he used to rescue his precious son.

Whereas Geoffrey Greif sees abduction as the 'extreme end of divorce,' Deborah Linnell, a Project ALERT volunteer, calls it 'an extreme form of domestic violence.' I feel that abductions are the combination of the two. Certainly stealing away with your child without telling the other parent can be considered domestic violence. You can hurt someone just as much emotionally as if you had stabbed them with a knife or cut off their arm. Just as applicable is that this is an extreme, and excessive end to a divorce dispute. What I found interesting about the reunification process in these cases is that they are often depicted in both movies and books as a joyful reunion. When in fact, the assimilation of an abducted child to the family that they have not seen in years is not always so smooth. I was appalled by the lack of assistance from the police and the ignorance of the courts. The idea that a parent would kill their own child and take their own life as well, solely to prevent their ex-spouse from being with the child is incomprehensible. Both of the articles were extremely informative. The techniques used to write the articles were equally effective, giving a different perspective on the stories. The possibility of recovering after an event as traumatic as abduction through psychological counseling is a welcomed and exciting idea. The course on "Introduction to Psychology" has opened my eyes to the extent that psychology can go to help make a difference in the lives of people everywhere.

