



**Child Kidnapping
& Recovery**

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Protective Service & Training

Creating a Safe World

Risks Incorporated is a progressive, European - owned and managed specialist security and training company that has proven itself many times on international operations. We have compiled this document to help people identify potential problems they may encounter and to take preventive action to protect themselves, their families, and their assets.

Risks Incorporated's clients can be assured they are getting the best training and services available from experienced professionals! I personally have over 27 years experience working in the international security industry, what we teach is based on reality, not what someone with no real operational experience thinks would work in a hostile situation. I am a published author and have been interviewed by numerous international TV and media outlets ranging from the New York Times to Soldier of Fortune Magazine on topics ranging from kidnapping, organized crime to maritime piracy. My books "International Security" & "Life or Death" are available on Amazon.

Contact us for more information on our training courses in US, Europe & The Middles or about our international security services.

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Child Kidnapping & Child Recovery

Domestic child kidnapping & child recovery is an area of the security and investigation industry that is much talked about and glamorized but in reality can be classed as criminal activity.

There are many cases where an estranged parent will take a child they do not have legal custody for and flee to a foreign country. These days' international travel is not complicated as long as you have a valid passport and required visas, if required. If the estranged parent has a passport or papers for the child to travel all they have to do is cross a border and any legal custody judgments for the child are usually void as the local country laws usually take precedence. The Hague Child Abduction Convention is the international law that tends to be used for child custody disputes but how this is interpreted at local levels is another thing.

A single parent may have custody of their child in U.S. etc. but if their ex-partner is a citizen of say a European country and manages to kidnap and take the child to their own country and then applies for custody of the child there, the local courts will most probably rule in their favor, after lengthy court proceedings. I have been asked quite a few times if I could go to various countries to recover children who have been taken by estranged parents. I am happy to provide advice and highlight the fact that if the parent I am talking too has legal custody in U.S. this might not apply in the country the child is in.

I know of one gentleman who had full legal custody of his child in the U.S. but his ex-wife during a supervised visitation with the child managed to get them on a plane and back the Western European country where she was from and lived. This gentleman who had 100% custody of the child in the US went to Europe, located the child and snatched the child in the street from one of his ex-wife's family members. The local police arrested him before he made it to the airport and luckily for him they were very understanding. They explained that his ex-wife had started legal proceedings for the child in that country and what he had done could be classed as attempted kidnapping, but they understood his situation. They released him with the advice that if he tried it again he would be charged with attempted kidnapping and to go and retain a decent lawyer. From a legal point of view I expect the ex-wife's lawyers would be making the most out of her ex-husband's kidnapping attempt to the courts as proof of why he should not have custody of the child.

I have also had clients whose children have been taken to countries in Eastern Europe and have been told by their ex-partners that if they ever entered the respective countries they would be arrested or killed. I told them to consider such threats very seriously as in many places the rights of locals take precedence over the rights of foreigners and law enforcement is for hire or can be paid to ignore things. A thousand dollars or so can influence a judge, put someone in jail, hospital or an unmarked grave.

Now, as for those companies claiming to be in the business of recovering children, well firstly apart from advertising they intend to break the law there are a few other things that can go wrong with their operations. A very well publicized recent child recovery attempt that went extremely wrong happened in the Lebanon and was being filmed and documented by a news crew for the Australian "60 Minutes" program. It would have been a very good publicity stunt if it worked but it didn't!

I have heard stories and seen promotional videos etc. from people claim to go armed in to places like Mexico to rescue children. Well, from a business point of view these clients must have a lot of money to organize the logistics and execute such an operation as they would not be cheap. Also, in most countries, even Mexico, carrying firearms is illegal to start with and where would any weapons come from? Taken illegally from the U.S. or like the movies bought in some shady hotel room above a whore bar? Reality check, if you are caught in Mexico with illegal firearms by the police you will go to jail, if you are caught by Cartel members you will be killed.

Now even if the child was snatched back successfully, those doing the operation would have committed the crime of kidnapping to start with, which in most places has a lengthy prison term attached. The child might be safely returned to the parent with custody in their respective country who hired you to perform the operation but, any arrest warrants and extradition requests will be in your name. When you combine the risk of being arrest, ending up in a 3rd world jail and the child being physically or psychologically harmed during the snatch, things are better left to embassy staff and trusted local attorneys.

As I always say and tell my clients, they need do everything they can to avoid any problematic situations. If a parent is involved in a child custody dispute, especially with a foreign national they need to always consider the worst case scenarios and put procedures in place so an abduction cannot happen and if it does law enforcement and the legal authorities are alerted ASAP.

Child Kidnapping Prevention

Over the past couple of decades kidnapping and hostage taking have become a booming multimillion-dollar business. Unlike the movies you do not need to be high profile or a high roller to be kidnapped, it can happen to virtually anyone for a multitude of reasons. In the emerging markets of the Middle East, Latin America and Africa business owners within the middle classes are often the targets for criminal gangs. Children are especially vulnerable to kidnapping as their natural inquisitiveness can be exploited, most nannies or drivers are not security trained, also many kindergartens and schools have very low standards of security.

I have been asked quite a few times if I could go to various countries to recover children who have been taken by estranged parents. I am happy to provide advice and highlight the fact that if the parent I am talking too has legal custody in U.S. this might not apply in the country the child is in. Also, if the child was snatched back, those doing so would have committed the crime of kidnapping, which in most places has a lengthy prison term attached. Combine the risk of being arrested and the child being harmed during the snatch, things are better left to embassy staff and trusted local attorneys.

Kidnapping situations are nasty situations to be involved in and best avoided at all costs, period! If the kidnapers are professionals there is a good chance that a hostage would be released when the ransom demands are met, on the other side of the coin if the ransom demands are not met, it would be a good business practice to execute the hostage, to encourage future payments. The professionalism of kidnapers varies greatly from those that are highly skilled to Neanderthals; all, however, are capable of extreme violence. The express kidnapers for example are generally not what could be classed as high end criminals. This means they tend to be more violent and unpredictable than groups that target higher profile victims for large ransoms. As always, if ransoms are paid in express kidnappings there is no guarantee the victim will be released, especially if the victims can identify the criminals or have been sexually assaulted, which can be expected in most cases.

We can't overemphasize why kidnapping situations should be avoided and where a threat is identified precautions need to be taken, especially when children are involved. In most cases children are a lot more vulnerable, easier to take than an adult yet the threat to them is taken lightly or ignored! Here I am going to list some basic considerations to help prevent child kidnappings.

- **Compile a threat assessment:** This is the most basic and often overlooked element to any security program. You need to consider all the potential threats to the child and get the opinions of others; forget the "it will never happen" attitude. Arrogance is the greatest weakness in all security and military operations. Ask the opinions from a wide variety of people, advice from security professionals can be helpful but in a lot of instances their opinions are text book and one dimensional. Criminals don't have text books, so also ask those who you think can give you some unique perspectives.
- **How would you kidnap the child?** Think like the kidnapers, think with a criminal's mindset where the rule of law means as little as the life of someone who got in your way! Once you have answered this question and have the threat assessment compiled, then you can start to consider what security measures to put in place to counter the potential threats.
- **Residential security:** It's a sad fact that a lot of kidnappings take place at the victim's residence or when they are entering or exiting. The security of the residence, the grounds and the surrounding area need to be assessed. Contingency plans need to be put into place for potential threat situations and active kidnapping attempts.
- **Pretext tests:** Consider testing the security of the residence and alertness of the staff by sending someone to try and gain entry to the house, grounds or to deliver an unsolicited gift of a toy or sweets for the child. Remember, when selecting someone for the pretext, that people are usually suspicious of young men, not so of young girls and women with children.
- **Could the child be drugged?** This can be from unsolicited gifts delivered to the house or given while the child is in the garden for an outing. If the child has taken ill the parents' and staff's main concern will be the child's wellbeing and security precautions can be disregarded. The ploy of poisoning the child can be used to get them out of a secure residence for a street kidnapping or to a hospital where a low level of security may exist as a visual deterrent but nothing more.
- **House staff:** Have all house staff be vetted and at least been briefed on security awareness and procedures? Criminals will look to recruit or blackmail employees to give them itineraries and sensitive information, that's why you must insure that all your employees are vetted out, supervised and all sensitive information is kept on a need to know basis.
- **Nannies:** The child's nanny will need to be trusted at a far greater level than the other house staff and understand any potential threats the other staff may not have been made aware of. The nanny will need to know how to spot any potential threats and how to respond to any emergency situations.
- **Drivers:** Full time drivers should be trained to identify and react to potential threats and hostile situations. Contract drivers should not be trusted and not be given the details of any trips until the last minute.
- **Security personnel:** Will they fight, run or are they working with the kidnapers. Just because someone has a gun it does not mean it works, they can use it or would use it if they had to. Yes, I

am very cynical about those in the security industry and with good reason! Make sure you're not wasting your money!

- **Visitors to the residence:** Ensure visitors are known, contractors have appointments and not left unattended.
- **School security:** Most schools have minimal security in place, they may have cameras and employ a few guards but nothing that could prevent a kidnapping attempt from a determined semi-professional criminal gang. The issue with armed school security is how they would react to a hostile incident and are they properly trained? You don't want them shooting a child "by accident" as they try to prevent a kidnapping.
- **School staff:** Are they security aware and trained to deal with emergency situations?
- **Penetration tests:** Consider sending someone to test the school's security; can they get in, walk around unchallenged, talk to children etc.
- **Being picked up from school:** What are the procedures for the children when being picked from school? What chances are there for the child to be picked up by an unauthorized person? Test it!
- **The child's friends:** What threats could the child's friends be under that could lead to your child being threatened? If your child is visiting friends what are the other families' security precautions like, consider pretexting or a penetration test! We are talking about a child's security, so don't worry about hurting the other parents' feelings, better that than dealing with a kidnapping, right?
- **The child:** When old enough basic security procedures should be taught to the child but be mindful to do so in a way not to scare them, but to educate them. This needs to be an ongoing process and as they grow they need to be made aware of the potential threats they could encounter both criminal and social!

Hopefully you can see from this article there is a lot more to a security program than hiring a big guy with a gun, and we have not touched on such things as local laws, budget, environment, and cultural issues etc. Where a potential kidnapping threat is identified everything must be done to minimize it, if in the process you hurt some people's feelings then so be it. That's a far better state of affairs than to have to pick up the pieces from the aftermath of a kidnapping situation!

If you have any questions let me know. At Risks Incorporated we provide a full range of kidnap prevention, close protection, bodyguard training, international bodyguard and security services.

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We hope the information in this document has been of use to you. Please remember this is basic information, if you have any questions then please feel free to contact us.

We supply corporate investigations, maritime security services, executive protection, tactical firearms training, kidnap and ransom services, tactical training, travel security, kidnapping prevention, community security group, SWAT, and bodyguard training. Our clients range from entrepreneurs to corporate law firms and from trainee bodyguards to specialist tactical police units and government agencies actively engaged in counter narco terrorism and counter insurgency operations. We have training location in US, Europe and The Middle East, our instructors are also available to travel to your locations.

Stay Safe,

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