



Writer and Editor [Tiffany Fontana](#)

# Shining Hope

The "Shining Hope" newsletter offers valuable resources and support to families facing child abduction and parental alienation. Our publication provides uplifting and informative messages to parents dealing with the abduction of their children, fostering a strong and supportive community throughout their difficult journey. Stay informed and up-to-date with the latest news, events, and pressing issues through our comprehensive and timely newsletter.



Visit our [website](#) for programs, resources, and support!

Sunday night Zoom call for parents: email [contact@stlforabductedchildren.org](mailto:contact@stlforabductedchildren.org) for more information. JOIN..... for yourself and your children!

Follow us on [TikTok](#)

*"My son will know one day that his mother never stopped fighting for him."*

*— Sara, left-behind parent*

## Crisis to Confidence: A Mother's Fight and the Community That Stood Beside Her

When Sara's son [Valid](#) was abducted by his father and separated from her, the world they knew fell apart. In the middle of the shock and confusion, Sara didn't know what to do next. Where could she turn? Who would help? And how was she supposed to get through something like this?

*Sara is not alone.*

Across the globe, parents like Sara are facing the unimaginable pain of parental child abduction and parental alienation. For many, the first wave of crisis feels isolating and paralyzing. But through Shine The Light for Abducted Children (STL), parents are finding support, compassion, and a path forward.

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# Crisis to Confidence

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In her own words, Sara shared:

"Most people see my calm face, but they don't see the weight I carry. They don't see the pain of being separated from my son, the constant fight against injustice, or the strength it takes just to keep going. They tried to silence and break me, but God is bigger than any oppressor. I may be standing alone in this world, but I am never alone in spirit. God sees, and I believe He's making a way, even when I can't see it yet. My son will know one day that his mother never stopped fighting for him."

*Her story shifted the moment she reached out for help.*

Sara first connected with STL during a time of deep despair. The trauma of losing her son had left her exhausted and overwhelmed. But within STL's private parent network, she discovered something she hadn't felt in a long time: strength, clarity, and hope. Through weekly check-ins, shared resources, and honest encouragement from other parents, Sara found her footing again. "I finally felt seen," she said. "I wasn't the only one anymore."

Equipped with the tools she needed, Sara began to understand her rights, explore legal options, and find safe ways to share her story. She found ongoing guidance, community connection, and access to up-to-date information on parental child abduction, along with the steady assurance that she was no longer facing this alone.

STL's mission is to support parents navigating some of the most devastating circumstances imaginable, including international custody battles, domestic abductions, and the emotional toll of parental alienation. Many find it to be a safe landing place, where their voice matters and their story is honored. STL provides guidance and practical resources that can be nearly impossible to uncover alone.

*Parents often come to STL feeling shattered, but they leave equipped and empowered.*

[Sara's fight](#) continues, but she now faces it with the support of a community that empowers her. Her story reflects STL's commitment to restoring parents' voices and helping them reclaim their futures.

## If You're in Crisis, STL is Here

Shine the Light for Abducted Children is committed to walking with parents from crisis to clarity. Whether you're just beginning your fight or have been in it for years, you are not alone. Visit [stlforabductedchildren.org](http://stlforabductedchildren.org) to learn more about parent groups, advocacy support, and the resources available to you right now.



# Growing Up as a Ghost: The Lingering Shadows of Parental Child Abduction

At seventeen, Olivia couldn't explain why she felt like she was living someone else's life. Reunited with her mother after eight years of separation, she entered a daily rhythm that should have offered comfort, but instead felt foreign, like stepping into a life that had continued without her. She described feeling "like a ghost watching my own life happen."

Psychologists are finding that this unsettling sense of disconnection is more than just a struggle to adjust. It may reflect deeper disruptions in identity, attachment, emotional regulation, and a person's sense of self, often rooted in prolonged family separation.

## The Architecture of Interrupted Lives

[Parental child abduction](#) (PCA) leaves wounds that extend far beyond the immediate crisis of separation. [The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) estimates that approximately 200,000 children are affected by PCA annually in the United States. This trauma creates a unique form of psychological injury that mental health professionals are only beginning to understand.

These children don't simply feel distant from their families; they experience what can best be described as an internal mourning for a life interrupted, stolen, and fundamentally altered.

[Dr. Marilyn Freeman](#), whose groundbreaking

research on parental child abduction has shaped modern understanding of the phenomenon, describes the experience as a "dislocation of self." This clinical term captures the profound disruption these children endure. They exist in a state of suspended animation, caught between the life they were living and the life they were meant to have.

*"Children affected by parental abduction often internalize feelings of guilt and confusion, not fully understanding why their world has been upended," Freeman explains in her research on long-term effects. "This leads to chronic emotional distress that can persist well into adulthood."*

Freeman's research, published in 2014, found that children who had been abducted spoke repeatedly about their confusion, feelings of shame, self-hate, loneliness and insecurity.

When children are recovered and reunited with their left-behind parent, both parties often expect relief and joy. Instead, they frequently encounter what can best be described as phantom limb syndrome of the soul. Just as amputees continue to feel sensation in missing limbs, these families feel the persistent presence of lost time and missed experiences.

The returning child may look familiar, but they carry within them experiences, memories, and adaptations that are foreign to their recovering parent. Meanwhile, the child returns to a parent who has also been changed by years of grief, legal battles, and forced separation. Neither party is who they were when the abduction occurred.

## Sources and References

- Freeman, M. (2014). Parental child abduction: The long-term effects. International Centre for Family Law, Policy and Practice.
- Johnston, J. R. (2001). Early identification of risk factors for parental abduction. Family Court Review..
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# Growing Up as a Ghost

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Many of these children survive by emotionally shutting down or forming complex, sometimes unhealthy bonds with the parent who took them. Reunification does not automatically undo those coping mechanisms.

This situation is further complicated by the fact that the returning child must navigate two timelines: processing their current reality while grieving the life they have lost over the years. They mourn not only the parent they were separated from, but also the version of themselves that might have grown from a stable, connected life. This may also be true for the left-behind parent, who must cope with profound loss, the pain of separation, and the challenge of adjusting to a completely changed parenting role and family dynamic.

Even after successful reunification, many children describe a persistent "stuck" feeling that colors their daily existence. They feel caught between worlds, unable to fully embrace their current life while unable to let go of their past. This psychological suspension creates a unique form of suffering that traditional trauma therapy often fails to address.

This stuck feeling manifests in various ways, such as difficulty making decisions, chronic indecisiveness about relationships, and a persistent sense of waiting for something to happen or change. These children often describe feeling like they're living in a waiting room, never quite able to fully commit to their present circumstances.

## Pathways to Healing

Despite the profound challenges, healing is possible. However, it requires approaches that

acknowledge the unique nature of parental abduction trauma rather than treating it as [general childhood trauma](#).

Trauma-informed therapy focusing on attachment injuries has shown promising outcomes. The goal is to give children a safe space to explore their full range of emotions: anger, grief, confusion, and mixed feelings toward the parent who abducted them. These emotions need to be processed in an environment free of judgment. While some individuals may eventually choose to forgive the people who hurt them, that decision comes only when they're ready.

True healing begins with validating and processing their lived experience. Families who engage in ongoing healing work can move beyond loss and lingering shadows to build trust and understanding.

Formerly abducted children often find relief and understanding when they connect with others who share similar experiences, making support groups valuable for both children and parents. Family therapy that emphasizes rebuilding trust and communication can help work through the complex emotions surrounding reunification. The goal is to build a new relationship that honors the reality of what everybody has been through.

The experience of parental child abduction can leave families feeling like ghosts in their own lives, burdened by unresolved pain and loss. Yet recovery is an uneven process with no clear beginning or end. The return of energy and a renewed engagement with everyday life are often the first signs that hope is finally emerging. When healing is seen as an ongoing journey, pain can lead to growth and brokenness can give way to new connection.



## TIME FOR JOY!

### *Thank You*

STL celebrates Rolla with heartfelt thanks for her generous spirit and dedicated service on our Board. As she begins this new chapter in marriage, we are deeply grateful for the lasting impact she has made. Wishing Rolla and Harry love, joy, and every happiness in the journey ahead.

## Contact Us

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