



MEDIA RELEASE

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Fears eased border restrictions could see rise in international parental child abductions

International Social Service (ISS) Australia are urging families at risk of falling victim to international parental child abductions to seek professional assistance.

International parental child abduction occurs when one parent takes the child or children of a relationship to an overseas country without the consent of the other parent. Sometimes this could be in the form of not returning from a holiday, or not informing the other parent of international travel plans.

According to a survey conducted by Relationships Australia in May, 42 percent of respondents felt COVID-19 lockdowns had negatively impacted their relationship. Relationships Australia's mediation service also reported that the number of people thinking about separating had increased by more than 300 percent. Australian Google search results for 'divorce' also saw a spike in the final week of June, up by 22.5 percent from the previous year.

ISS Australia are concerned that social isolation, recent relationship breakdowns, separation from family and the mental health impacts of COVID-19 could fuel a rise in international parental child abductions as borders reopen.

International Social Service Australia has seen a 19 percent drop in new cases and enquiries since the start of COVID-19. Whilst international travel restrictions are limiting movements, there is fear these numbers will surge as restrictions ease. Of the legal cases handled by ISS Australia in 2019, 20 percent involved New Zealand which is expected to be Australia's first permitted overseas destination following the announcement of the trans-Tasman travel bubble.

"The easing of travel restrictions could result in a spike in international parental child abductions. However, there are preventative measures that can be taken. Those who fear their children may taken overseas without their permission should know that ISS Australia is here to help and they are not alone," **CEO of ISS Australia, Peter van Vliet, said.**

At risk parents should seek advice about putting measures in place to prevent this from happening before further easing of restrictions. These measures may include ensuring the child's passport is secure or having the child's names placed on the Family Law Watchlist.

For families separated by international borders, legal, social work and international family mediation services are available from ISS Australia to assist a parent in their efforts to bring children home. More information can be found at www.iss.org.au .
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MEDIA: For more information or to arrange interviews please contact Peter van Vliet on 0488 769 097.