

Border Crossing with Children—Part I -A minor traveling with one adult

A recurring question we receive at our counters and from passport acceptance facilities is concerning the issue of traveling with a minor across the border and what type of documentation should the adult be carrying to identify such minor and establish that there is no legal impediment to transit the international border. Although we have not generated a particular handout on this issue we found the article below useful and informative. The author who routinely writes about traveling identifies the specific issues surrounding the traveling when only one parent or adult is accompanying a minor. Although the article refers to travel to Canada, same conclusions can be derived on trips to any other country.

Crossing Borders- -

Documents Needed When Only One Parent Is Traveling (Grandparent or Friend)

By Teresa Plowright, About.com Guide

In recent years, concern about parental abductions -- where one divorced parent steals the child away from the other one-- has prompted border officials to be more cautious when they encounter a child traveling with just one birth parent.



If you're traveling as a solo parent with your child -- or if the child is traveling with a grandparent or guardian-- at a minimum, the traveling parent should carry a letter of authorization from the absent parent, giving permission for the travel. It's quite likely that, for most countries, you won't be asked to show any travel consent letter -- but better safe than sorry, right?

Which Countries Require Travel Consent Documents?

A good resource is the US Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs (<http://travel.state.gov/>) site section that lists the travel documents required by numerous countries around the world.

But What About Travel Between Canada and the US...

...where cross-border travel is so common that people sometimes change countries for a shopping trip? At time of writing, the Canada Border Services Agency (<http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/publications/pub/bsf5082-eng.html#s2x3>) site says:

"Divorced or separated parents should carry copies of the legal custody agreements for the children."

Also "If you are travelling with minors, you must carry proper identification for each child such as a birth certificate, passport, citizenship card, permanent resident card or Certificate of Indian Status. If you are not the parent or guardian of the children, you should also have written permission from the parent/guardian authorizing the trip. The letter should include addresses and telephone numbers of where the parents or guardian can be reached."

It's always a good idea to check the *latest* info about document requirements, in case the security climate changes. For Canada, the US State Department site is a good source; or try the Canada Border Services Agency.

Preparing a Letter That Authorizes the Child's Travel

A "permission to travel" letter doesn't need to be a complicated document: basically, the purpose is just to state that the parent gives permission for the child to travel out of the country (with the other parent, or with another accompanying adult) on certain dates.

Family Travel Forum (privately own travel advisory publication) (<http://www.familytravelforum.com/how/advice/10545-Required-Documents-For-Travel-With-Minors.html?p=4>) has a handy online form you can print out for a sample Permission to Travel letter; it includes a place for a Witness to sign and for a Notary Public's signature or seal.

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Crossing Borders- - Documents Needed When Only One Parent Is Traveling

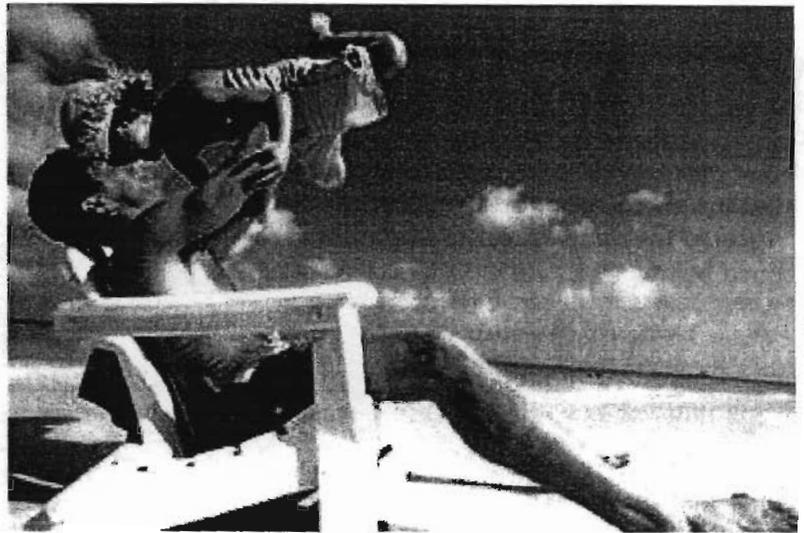
Especially if your situation is a complicated one, you may wish to take that extra step and have your documents **notarized**. A "notary public" is a person authorized to legally witness another person signing a document. In the US, this service can commonly be found in banks, real estate offices, and elsewhere; fee is minimal (\$2, at time of writing.) In Canada, the fee is much higher (\$25 or more), and you'll need to locate a notary public, typically at an individual office.

Keep in Mind, When Crossing Borders:

Requirements for documents can change over time. So do check the entrance policies for the particular country you're visiting: the U.S. State Dept.'s Bureau of Consular Affairs lists Entry Requirements (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html) for many countries. If you're still uncertain, contact the Embassy or Consulate of the country you're visiting, and ask what documentation you'll need.

Also: the level of **caution in the airport may increase even without a formal change in policy.** For example, if a high-profile case of cross-border child abduction has been in the news, expect that border officials will be extra-vigilant.

And finally, **if your situation is anything but straight-forward** --for example, a child has a different last name than the parent he/she is traveling with-- be extra-careful about documents and paperwork. In a case of differing last names, for instance, you'd be well advised to have a notarized letter of consent from the absent parent, and a copy of the child's birth certificate which *specifically lists you as a birth parent*. (In Canada, this is called the "long-form" birth certificate.) For a mother who's remarried and taken a new name, another layer is added: you should be prepared to prove you're the person named on the child's birth certificate.



COPYING OF ID

By now you should be aware that you must **CLEARLY** notate the identification of the applicant in the pertinent block of the DS-11 and a **CLEAR** photocopy of the ID needs to accompany the package. These photocopies need to be in a 8" by 11" piece of paper, not a "scrap" of paper.

Also, please keep an eye for recently issued ID. If your applicant was recently issued the primary ID, please make copies of whatever he/she may have in their wallet with their names on it. These documents will support the claim to the identity and answer several questions for us.



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