

# KIDNAP & HOSTAGE PHASES AND SURVIVAL

adapted from UN Security Awareness, 1995 & World Vision Security Manual, 1995 by Erik Spruyt, PhD

## Introduction

In this day and age, it is no longer a question of “if”, but far more likely “when” will an agency be faced with an abduction or hostage situation with one of their workers. Targets that seem most attractive are those with visible assets or with a clear affiliation to a certain political or religious group. It has equally become clear that most hostage takers or kidnappers choose their targets deliberately after careful surveillance. Thus, increased awareness of appropriate safety/prevention measures are becoming good practice.

More than ever before in the history of Christian cross-cultural workers, it is imperative to have guidelines and policies in place that help to minimize the risk of fatalities through hostage taking. No longer are traffic accidents the main cause of fatalities among overseas workers. Familiarise yourself with your organisation’s policies on safety and hostage management, including its policy on ransom payments.

For most of us, if we are taken, it will be the first time we have ever been held captive. With no personal experience to draw from and not knowing what will happen next, the situation can be even more unsettling. Below are the general principles you should remember, as well as an explanation of the generally-recognized phases of a hostage situation to help you prepare yourself in case you find yourself taken captive.

## **Behaviour Guidelines**

The following guidelines for general behaviour are recommended as wise and appropriate:

- ✓ Stay calm, composed, and cooperative.
- ✓ Be cautious of heroics! This may lead to death at the hands of a nervous or inexperienced member of the kidnapping group.
- ✓ Gird up your mind for action: Remember favourite scripture passages like Psalms, blessings or prayers. Mental and spiritual activity is very important. Recall pleasant memories, books or movies.
- ✓ Based on your organisation’s policies, be assured every possible care will be provided to your family, team. Information, as it comes available will be given to your loved ones. Explanations of how the hostage situation will be managed by your organisation will be provided to your loved ones, including information about you as it comes available.
- ✓ Since you are a normal human, build rapport with your captors regarding human needs: indicate you are hungry, thirsty in need of a toilet.
- ✓ Try not to give up your personal clothes, your identification, etc. The reason for this is (a) that loss of these things is demoralising and (b) that hostage takers can use these items for bargaining. Try not to accept a change of clothing with hostage takers. Keep in mind that in case of an attempted rescue this could endanger you.
- ✓ You communicate through word and body language. Try not to upset or arouse the suspicion or hostility of your captors.

- ✓ Ask your captors to inform the authorities about where you are and about your condition.
- ✓ Should you be kidnapped with several other people together, try to appoint a point person to negotiate on your behalf or on behalf of the group with your captors
- ✓ Be aware of the “Stockholm Syndrome” in which the captured develops a positive emotional attachment to the capturer and/or their cause.

### **Four Phases of hostage taking:**

#### **Phase 1: Abduction**

The actual abduction is the most dangerous phase as the hostage takers are very nervous and perhaps a bit unpredictable:

- ✓ Stay calm, composed and cooperative
- ✓ Do not speak unless spoken to
- ✓ Do not whisper with a colleague or friend
- ✓ Do not offer suggestions
- ✓ Do not argue
- ✓ Do not make sudden movements
- ✓ Do not be humorous
- ✓ Try not to give up clothes or identification

#### **Phase 2: Transport and/or consolidation**

- ✓ Be patient and try to rest
- ✓ Be courteous
- ✓ Make needs known like need for medication or other kind of aid you may need
- ✓ Listen well, do not argue
- ✓ If you are blindfolded, forced into a car boot/trunk, or other compartment during transport, engage your mind and try to visualise the route taken. Note turns, street noises, smells, and time elapsed between certain points.

#### **Phase 3: Confinement**

- ✓ Exercise! Keep fit! Stay physically active.
- ✓ Exercise your mind: read, write if you can, draw, try to remember
- ✓ Exercise your spirit: pray, intercede for your captors, your loved ones, your colleagues. Bless your captors. Forgive your captives. Worship. Meditate on scripture. Practice the presence of God. Confess known sin and keep a clean conscience. Practice spiritual hygiene over your thoughts, attitudes and actions. Remember your identity in God, remember your purpose and calling in God. Trust the Holy Spirit to comfort you, sustain you and give you wisdom.
- ✓ Try to establish a daily structure or routine. Structure gives you back some form of control over your life, some form of dignity. Daily scripture readings.
- ✓ Maintain standards for cleanliness and tidiness
- ✓ Try to make home where ever you are: make home symbolically. However often you have to move: make home, bring structure, cleanliness, tidiness.
- ✓ Mentally, emotionally and spiritually prepare yourself for a long captivity without becoming passive.

- ✓ Face and personalise your captors. Ask by what name you can address them. Tell them about your family.
- ✓ Never threaten your captors
- ✓ Do not believe everything you are told
- ✓ Accept and eat whatever food is given you, even if it is unpalatable
- ✓ Find a method of telling time, dates.
- ✓ Do not give in to despair. Survival chances improve with time.

#### **Phase 4: Release**

This phase may present a higher level of risk. When the time for your release comes you will have to adjust your behaviour:

- ✓ Pay close attention to orders you are given
- ✓ Obey orders promptly
- ✓ Do not make sudden or unexpected movements
- ✓ Stay alert. If things go wrong you may have to make run for it. Look for a protected place where you could run, dive or roll into if force must be used to rescue you
- ✓ Be prepared for delays and disappointments
- ✓ Trust God

## Proof Life Questions:

Proof of Life questions are used in the event you are kidnapped or detained to confirm that you are alive during negotiations. Please select questions that are

- Easy to remember, even when under severe stress (as they may be asked by hostage takers or negotiators while you are under considerable physical and mental stress)
- Only known to you yourself or close family/friends (ie., would not be available on the news, via Google, or in any documentation from your person, vehicle or compound)
- Positive/uplifting/linked to happy memories (to give a psychological boost if you have to answer these questions during captivity)

Sample questions include:

- The name of your first pet
- Your favorite holiday place (must be local to your home, not globally famous)
- Nicknames of relatives (e.g., grandparents)
- Model and color of your first car

Please write the questions and answers on the form below in your own handwriting to ensure there is a sample of your handwriting (as an additional proof of identity/life).

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 5: \_\_\_\_\_