

SCHOOL & WORK

After your brother or sister has been abducted, “back to school” has a whole different meaning. Home is a chaotic place, but you may feel you need to be there to help out. School is a part of your normal, everyday life, but your life doesn’t feel “everyday” or normal any more.

SCHOOL Chances are your classmates will know about the abduction. You may dread facing them or feel anxious about what questions they’ll ask. Their questions can hurt—even if your friends don’t mean for them to. There may be times when you feel kids looking at you or think they’re whispering behind your back. Other kids may not know what to say to you or whether you’ll want to talk about what happened. They may feel awkward; you may feel self-conscious. It can all be a big mess.

Still, it’s important to get back as soon as you can. The good news is, there are a number of built-in support systems at school, including your teachers, counselors, and coaches. Not only that, but school can provide structure and routine—reassuring things that may otherwise be missing from your life right now.

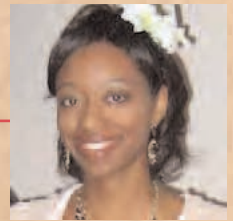
Here are some things to help you cope with school:

- Talk with your parents about how to ease back into the school routines. Your teachers may be willing to let you do half-days at first. A whole school

day may seem overwhelming, but you can tell yourself, “I can handle this for a couple of hours.”

- Let your friends know what you can and can’t cope with right now. Sometimes it takes just a few words to break the ice.
- You can set the boundaries. If kids ask about your brother or sister, you can say “I really don’t want to talk about that right now. But tell me about what’s going on with you.” This is a good way to take the focus off of yourself.
- Another good thing to say might be “It’s okay to talk about my brother or sister, just not behind my back. And I might want to change the subject in about 30 seconds!”

Robin



“Going back to college was extremely difficult. I did poorly in my classes that semester, and I failed English for the first time in my whole life.”

Trevor

“After the abduction, I didn’t go back to school for a long time. I didn’t want to be away from my family and I wanted to be there if my brother was found.”

Amy



“For me, it was good to go back to school because it gave me structure and routine. And it felt normal.”



- Try to hang out with positive people. The last thing you need right now is negativity.
- Get yourself involved in productive activities. Join a group or club. Find a good cause and volunteer. It's a way to feel like you're doing something to help, which you may not feel at home.

"I would work out literally for 5 or 6 hours every day. It was my getaway. It was my focus." – Marcus

"Sports was a really big deal for me. It gave me discipline, teamwork, and confidence, and it was a great stress reliever, too. My coach was always there to encourage me." – Martha

"When you're playing sports, nothing else matters." – Marcus



One of the best things you can do for yourself is get involved in a team sport, a school club, or other activity. They can be a welcome relief from thinking about the situation at home. Sports are a way to turn your mind off and focus all your attention on physical activity instead. A team sport gives you a clearly defined role, and it can feel good to be part of a team, working toward a common goal. It's one area of your life where you can take control again. A group activity or school club can also give you a broader support network and something positive and constructive to do for yourself.

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It's natural to fear that you won't be able to concentrate in class and to worry about falling behind. Remember that your teachers want to help you succeed. They are probably aware of your circumstances at home and willing to work with you any way they can.

- Part of your teachers' job will be to help you pace yourself. Meet with each of them and come up with a plan for how to handle things your first week back. Try to take it one day at a time. If your plan doesn't seem to be working out, it's okay to change your approach.
 - Your friends may be willing to bring work home for you so you don't get too far behind.
 - Your teachers or your counselor may be able to arrange for you to have a tutor to help you go over missed work or subjects that are a struggle.
 - It's understandable if the situation at home makes it hard to concentrate. But at the same time, try not to use it as an excuse.
- It may feel like you are just going through the motions of school, and that's okay. With time, all the "motions" may start to feel natural again.
 - You may not ace every test, but give yourself credit for what you do accomplish. Whether it's answering a question correctly in class or spiking the volleyball in gym class, pat yourself on the back for your small victories.



Amy

"My teachers pretty much said, 'Do what you can do.' I didn't have to make up all the work I missed."



Carmen

"I remember the first day back pretty clearly. I liked my teacher, and she held a small meeting with my friends and the school counselor. It was a good chance to talk about things."

Trevor

"One of the things I remember is that the longer you stay out, the harder it is to go back."



You may be readjusting to school pretty smoothly. But then, when you least expect it, you may be walking down the hall or eating lunch in the cafeteria, and you become overwhelmed by emotions. For no apparent reason, you want to cry, snap at a friend, or run away. All of a sudden, it may be too much for you. You may feel like you're falling apart.

This is natural and to be expected. There are a couple of things you can do. If you think you're going to "lose it" in class, talk to your teacher ahead of time and arrange a signal that says "I need a time out." You may just need to go outside and breathe some fresh air for a minute or to go see the school counselor. With a simple signal, like pulling your earlobe or dropping a note on the teacher's desk, you won't need to draw a lot of attention to yourself, and you can take a much needed break.

"In high school, especially it's easy to hook up with the wrong people. Be careful who wants to hang out with you and why." – Martha

Finally, this will be a **vulnerable** time for you. There may be other kids who try to take advantage of your vulnerability and who don't necessarily have your best interests at heart. This is a time to trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy or find yourself thinking "This is not a positive or productive thing to do," don't do it. Stick with the friends who make you feel good about yourself and life in general.

WORK

If you're an older sibling, you eventually have to return to work, rather than to school. But many of the same principles that apply to school-age kids apply to you, too, so take a look at some of the suggestions under the "School" section.

You may find it's hard to leave home because you feel like you need to be there to help. If the media has covered the abduction, it's likely your co-workers will have heard about it and may ask uncomfortable questions.

What can you do?

- *Decide what you do and don't feel comfortable saying, and set conversational boundaries accordingly.*
- *Go back to work gradually, maybe 3 days a week, then 4, then 5. Or see if your boss will let you telecommute some of the time.*
- *Your tendency may be to hide in your office and not talk to people. If you can, try to force yourself to go out to lunch or dinner with co-workers and talk about anything else but your sibling's abduction.*

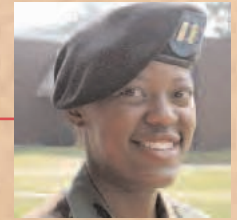
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- Try to surround yourself with people who are positive and who help you to feel that way.
- Immerse yourself in exercise, or music, or books. Reading is a good way to take your mind off things.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. You may find it difficult to concentrate on work at first. Recognize that it's natural to be distracted and that you will become more focused in time.
- Take frequent breaks from work to clear your mind. Go outside for a walk. Stand up and stretch. If you're having trouble accomplishing the work, see if it's okay to leave early that day.
- Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Program that can arrange for you to have free counseling. You may want to check into it.



- Take good care of yourself physically —eat well, exercise, get some rest. Even when you don't feel like it, these things are important.
- Use healthy outlets for dealing with stress. Remember that some things you might turn to for comfort now may hurt you in the long run.

Ericka



"I had to go back overseas to my Army job in South Korea. It was right back to work—no down time. My support system was back home. I worked myself to exhaustion."

Heather



"When I went back to work substitute teaching, all the kids wanted my "autograph" because, in their eyes, I was a celebrity. They did not really understand. I used that opportunity to ask them each to write down one rule of safety, and then I signed that."