

HOLIDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

"The holidays are back. Hold your breath!" – Heather

Your family may have always celebrated certain holidays and events: Christmas, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, Halloween, New Year's Eve, and each person's birthday. But if your brother or sister has been abducted, holidays can fill you with different feelings. You may be worried about what to do when your missing sibling's birthday rolls around. You may feel selfish to celebrate a holiday or your birthday when your brother or sister is still missing. You may ask yourself, "Is it wrong to still want to celebrate Thanksgiving?"

The answer is no. Deciding to celebrate a holiday can be a positive step, a way to acknowledge that life goes on, a way to feel more like a "normal" family, even for a day. On the other hand, you or your parents just may not be "up" for a celebration right now. That's fine, too.

Holidays are always emotional times for families. Recognize that they will be even more emotional now. If you simply ignore a holiday or event, remember that the rest of the world will be celebrating, and you'll be very aware of that.

If a holiday is approaching, try to anticipate how you want to handle it. If you can't decide what you want to do, think about what you *don't* want to do, and go from there. Discuss your ideas and thoughts with your family. The Holidays Checklist on the following page can help your family make decisions about an upcoming holiday or celebration. Ask each family member to fill out a separate checklist, and then sit down together and compare notes.

Here are some other ways to cope with holidays:

- Talk with your family ahead of time about what

makes the most sense for the coming holiday. Remember, whatever you feel is okay. If you just can't cope with any kind of celebration, be upfront about it. You may want to talk to your parents about being somewhere else that day, like at a friend's or relative's house.

- You or your parents may not feel like celebrating a holiday, but you may not want to spoil things for the younger kids. See if you can find a compromise between an all-out celebration and no holiday at all.
- Holidays can bring out all kinds of hidden emotions. Be prepared for that. Tell yourself it's okay to take a break from the party or dinner if you become overwhelmed by feelings.
- You and your family may feel that it is too difficult to do the same things you usually do on a certain holiday. Think about starting some new traditions. If you always have turkey on Thanksgiving, this year make a big pot of spaghetti. Talk with your family about this.



COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS CHECKLIST

Place a check mark by what you want to do this year. Share this with your family or have them do one of their own and compare notes.

Holiday Cards

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Include a "Holiday Letter"
- Elect to skip this year

Decorations

- Decorate as usual
- Modify your decorations
- Ask for help
- Let others do it
- Make changes, such as an artificial tree instead of a real one
- Have a special decoration for your loved one
- Choose not to put up decorations

Shopping

- Shop as usual
- Give cash
- Shop through catalogs or the Internet
- Ask for help

- Shop early
- Make your gifts
- Give baked goods
- Shop with a friend
- Ask for help wrapping gifts
- Do not exchange gifts now, but later
- Make a list of gifts to buy before you go out

Holiday Music

- Enjoy as usual
- Avoid turning the radio on
- Shop early before stores play holiday music
- Listen to it, have a good cry, and allow yourself to feel sad

Traditions

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Don't attend holiday parties
- Go to an entirely new place
- Bake the usual holiday foods
- Buy the usual holiday foods
- Bake, but modify what you usually do

- Attend a religious service
- Do not attend a religious service
- Attend a totally different place of worship
- Spend quiet time alone
- Visit the cemetery
- Open gifts on the usual day
- Open gifts at another time

Holiday Dinner

- Prepare as usual
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Eat alone
- Change time of dinner
- Change routine of dinner, such as this year, do a buffet
- Change location of dinner, eat in a different room
- Ask for help

Post-Holiday & New Year's Day

- Spend as usual
- Go out of town
- Avoid New Year's parties
- Attend a New Year's party
- Hold a New Year's party

- Spend time with only a few friends
- Write in a journal your hopes for the new year
- Go to a movie
- Go to bed early

Other Ideas

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Amy

"You go through all those same feelings again—the ones you went through when your sibling first went missing."

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Robin

"Anniversaries of the abduction are still tough. We all experience elevated levels of stress when late July rolls around."

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Trevor

"I feel we have an obligation to recognize that day."

to recognize that day."

ANNIVERSARIES

Hopefully your brother or sister will quickly come home safe and sound. For some families, however, it may take a longer period of time—even years. Like holidays, anniversaries can sneak up on you. On the anniversary of a sibling's abduction, you may find yourself reliving the same feelings you had when your brother or sister was taken. It's natural to experience very strong emotions as the anniversary date approaches. You may dream about your sibling or have trouble sleeping. You may find that you and your parents are struggling to keep your emotions under control.

Because anniversaries can be difficult or emotional occasions, talk with your family about what you want to do on that particular day. You and your family may want to be with just your immediate family or to have more family friends and relatives around. You may want to have some sort of ceremony to honor your missing sibling.

Here are some ways to handle anniversaries:

- Expect that the day is likely to be an emotional one for you and your family. Give yourself permission to feel all of your feelings, and let yourself cry if you need to.
- Anniversaries can be tough, so do what you need to do to take care of yourself. You may need to be on your own or with friends and not talk about your missing sibling.
- You may want to honor your brother or sister by keeping the memory of him or her alive. It can feel affirming to celebrate the memories. Share funny stories about your sibling with family and friends. Bring out old family pictures.
- Invite people to write messages on **biodegradable** helium balloons; then, take the balloons outside and let people share what they have written. You might sing a song or share a poem and then let the balloons go.
- Light a special candle or say a prayer.
- Write your missing brother or sister a letter. Say all the things you wish you could have said before.

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- If you need time alone, pick out a safe place to go in your home. Make sure you let your parents know where you are. Let yourself remember your brother or sister. It may help you to feel close to them.
- Don't be afraid to ask your parents or your siblings for what you need right now—a shoulder to cry on, a hug, someone to hold your hand.
- Spend some time with your family pet. Sometimes animals can be a great source of comfort.



Space for your thoughts.

