

A NEW NORMAL

Heather

"I was lucky though. I was blessed with a beautiful daughter who reminded me daily that there was something bigger, that I had to go on. I had to eat, sleep, get up, get dressed, and participate in life."

Robin

"I just wanted life to go back to normal again."

Amy

"After some time had passed, we all needed to begin to return to our 'normal' lives. By the time I was 16, I was driving my brother and sister to basketball and dance. Our lives were as far from normal as I could imagine."

"In this situation, it's normal not to feel 'normal.'" —Martha

From the moment your brother or sister is abducted, your life—and your family's life—will change. Nothing will ever be exactly the same again. All the things that feel like a part of "normal" everyday life may feel different now.

"I would try to put it behind me. I just wanted to be a kid again."
— Trevor

Just sitting at the dinner table may feel different because you're so aware of the empty chair. Going to school may feel different because suddenly your friends aren't sure what to say to you—and you're not sure how to talk to them, either. Your home may be filled with strangers from law enforcement or the media, and you can't even flop down on the sofa because your parents may be doing an interview for the evening news.

Your world has been turned upside down, and you may feel like you're in limbo—unable to relax and just "be" because you're constantly waiting for the next piece of news about your brother or sister or just plain waiting for them to come home. When a sibling has vanished, how can life ever feel **normal** again?

It can't. Not completely. But over time, whether it's from day to day, or from month to month, your life will take on new rhythms and routines. You may grow more accustomed to the changes that at first seemed so strange, or frightening, or upsetting. What feels

normal now may be different from what seemed normal before. And it can begin to feel more familiar. Things can begin to feel more okay.

"I didn't go back to school right away, but I never missed a dance class. Dance was fun." — Carmen

There are things you can do to help yourself find a comfort zone amidst all the chaos. Doing positive things can help you to restore some balance in your life and regain a sense of normalcy from day to day.

Here are some things to try:

- Take on some kind of physical activity, whether it's running, swimming, joining a sports team, lifting weights, or dancing.
- Lose yourself in mental activity. You can concentrate on school work, but you can also read, do crossword puzzles or sudoku, or take up meditation.

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- Express yourself through art. Draw, paint, work with clay, knit, do beadwork, design clothes or jewelry, listen to music, play a musical instrument, experiment with cooking or baking.
- Write. You can keep a journal, write short stories, a novel, or poetry.
- Talk. What matters is that you find someone to talk to who you trust, whether it's an adult or a friend your age. Find someone who is not judgmental, someone you're comfortable with: a friend, relative, counselor, godparent, or member of the clergy.
- Volunteer. Volunteer for a cause that has personal meaning for you, whether it's a missing children's organization, an animal rights group, or a tutoring program.
- Take care of an animal. Pets can love you unconditionally, make wonderful companions, and give you someone to hug. If your parents say this isn't the

time to bring home an animal, see if you can walk the neighbor's dog or volunteer at an animal shelter.

Even if life doesn't feel the same again, it's important to live your life the way you should at your age. Try not to retreat from life or to put everything "on hold" until your sibling returns. Hold tight to friends and the things that make you feel good. Remember that whatever feelings you have are okay, so let yourself laugh, cry, or be angry.

Routines can give your life some much needed structure, so use school, sports, clubs, and other activities to give your days routine and a sense of familiarity and meaning. Try to stay positive, even if life feels very unfair.

It's all too easy to get caught up in negative routines and activities. There are a number of things you should avoid, things that will only prolong many of the difficulties you're facing right now or make them worse.

At all costs, avoid:

- Drugs. Stay away from tobacco, alcohol, legal and illegal drugs. They're addictive and physically harmful. And they make your "lows" even lower.



Robin

"Despite the horrors and negativity associated with her kid-napping our family has become closer than ever before. Even though it didn't seem like it at the time, life did go on, and so far, we have made the most out of it."

Amy

"As time went on, we gradually attempted to redefine ourselves both as individuals and as a family. Each of us has done this at different times and in different ways. It is a continuous process that has continued to be a daily struggle."

Heather

"Still trying to live like everything's okay. I'm okay. Everything is going to be okay."

- Inappropriate relationships, ones that are controlling and unsupportive, ones that make you dependent and unable to help yourself heal.
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and support systems. It's okay to need some time alone, but don't isolate yourself for long periods of time.
- Obsessively following other cases of child abduction.
- Closing up inside and not feeling your feelings.
- Expecting someone else to make everything alright. Things will eventually feel better, but it may take time.
- Blaming yourself. Stay away from statements that begin with "I should've or I could've." You are in no way responsible for your sibling's abduction.
- Taking care of everyone but yourself.

"There will always be a 'before' what happened and an 'after.'" – Carmen

LIFE GOES ON

Once the abduction of a brother or sister has happened, there's no going back to things exactly the way they were before. So much of your day-to-day life may be difficult, painful, and frightening. You wonder what will be the outcome. Will your brother or sister come home safe and sound? Will your brother or sister ever be found? Will you know how the story ends?

As the brothers and sisters who authored this book, we will tell you that the story hasn't ended yet. The fact is, we continue to be affected by whatever happened to our siblings years ago. We continue to cope with thoughts and feelings that were awakened during that time.

Hard as it may be to believe, we will also tell you that the experience has actually had some positive affects on our lives. We may have been forced to grow up faster, but we have also grown up stronger. We have become more sensitive and empathetic to other peoples' problems. We have learned that life does go on, that it still holds much that is good and satisfying, and that we can and should dare to hope that things will get better, still.