



Martha

"It would have helped

if people had explained to me why my parents were acting so differently. I would have liked to have known that, under the circumstances, their behavior was normal."

"Your parents are going to act differently. They're dealing with the situation in their own ways, which may be different from the way you think they should act."



Trevor

"People kept asking 'How

are your parents doing?' What about me? Don't they want to know how I'm doing?"

**While it is your brother or sister who was abducted, your whole family is experiencing the abduction—and in different ways. Life as your family has known it will change. Your parents, your other sisters and brothers, your relatives, and even close family friends are all in frightening new territory. It's hard enough handling your own feelings. How do you cope with their feelings, too?**

## YOUR PARENTS

There's no doubt about it: your parents are acting differently. Before the abduction, they may have been there for you and your siblings, supporting you through good and bad times. Now they seem so sad and distracted and angry that you don't recognize them anymore. All their energy is focused on finding your missing brother or sister. There doesn't seem to be much attention left for you. Sometimes you feel like you were pushed to the back burner.

You want your parents to act like your parents again. It's not always the big things that bother you. It's the little things, like getting a good grade on your math test and wanting them to get excited about it. It's things like your Mom forgetting that you have soccer practice and you need a ride or your Dad not making it to your baseball game. Your parents still live in your house like they always have, but, somehow, they are not there for you in the same way.

One minute you may feel angry at your parents for not giving you their full attention and the next minute feel guilty for being angry with them when they have so much to deal with. You may try to be the "perfect" child by getting all A's, cleaning your room, and acting cheerful even when you don't feel that way. Your parents may seem to not even notice, and you may resent them for it. You may find yourself being a parent to your parents—making sure they eat regularly or reminding them of doctors' appointments they've forgotten.

Remember that whatever you're feeling, it's okay. What is happening to you now is very, very hard on you. Your parents are still your parents, they still love you, and they care about your feelings—even if they can't show it right now. Don't be too hard on yourself, and don't be too hard on them.

"I remember harassing Mom until she actually cooked breakfast. To me, what was normal was Mom cooking." - Ericka

## In the meantime, here are some things you can do right now to cope:

- If you can, try to talk to your parents about the abduction and all the feelings it's stirred up in you. While you may be afraid it will make them even sadder, simply ask them if it's okay to talk about it. It may be the best thing for all of you.
- If you cannot talk with your parents for whatever reason, talk to another adult you trust: a close aunt or uncle, your athletic coach, a close friend's parent.
- Sometimes it's easier to talk to an objective person who's trained to listen to and help kids. A counselor from school or a professional therapist might be a good idea.
- Being productive and doing things for others can feel pretty good. If you feel like helping your parents out in some way, go ahead. Take care of your little brother or sister; offer to make dinner. Your parents will appreciate what you do for them, even if they can't express it right now.
- It can be pretty upsetting to see your parents cry—it may even make you cry, too. Go ahead. A good cry can make you all feel better.
- Stick to your regular structure and routine, whether it's school, soccer practice, music lessons, or debate club. It may reassure your parents to know your life hasn't been totally disrupted.
- You may feel like you have to be at home with your parents all the time because something might happen on the case or that they need you to be there. Try not to feel that way. Do something for yourself—it's okay. Make sure you tell your parents where you are going, and make a plan for how you can get in touch with each other.
- People who care about you will be eager to help you and your family. It's okay to rely on the parents of close friends if you need a ride or some other favor. It may help them to feel better, too.
- Try to find some **normalcy** in your daily life. Your parents may be too busy to eat dinner with you every night, but you may want to suggest making one night a week “family night,” a time for you to all sit down at the table together and catch up on each other's lives.
- Recognize that your parents are overcome with worry and may feel the need to be extra protective or cautious with you and your siblings. Try not to resent it. Even though it may not seem like it all the time, they are worried about you, too. It's okay to talk with your parents or people you trust about feeling closed-in.



Carmen

"I had to learn to live with one less person in my family."



Heather

"My brother John and I lost part of ourselves the day our sister disappeared."



Marcus

"I didn't talk to my sisters or anyone about it. The problem was, there wasn't anyone I felt comfortable talking to."



## BROTHERS & SISTERS

Sometimes brothers and sisters are wonderful and are your best friends, and sometimes they're just a pain.

When your brother or sister is missing, though, you may feel guilty about the times you did not get along with them or weren't nice to them. Somehow, everyday life doesn't feel the same anymore. Your family roles have shifted. Suddenly, you may be the oldest child, or the youngest, or even the only child at home.

What if you shared a room with your missing sibling? It can feel scary, sad, or uncomfortable now that they're no longer home. Just going in the room can make you feel their absence even more. However it makes you feel, it's okay. It's even okay if you want to think of them as being "away" for a while and to hope that eventually they'll come back.

You may have new responsibilities now like taking care of your siblings, running errands, or answering the phone. If you're a younger child, you may be asked to stay with someone else for a while—an aunt or a

grandparent. If you're a little older, you may feel a responsibility to take charge. There's a lot of tension at home. You may not know if you should talk to your brothers and sisters about what's happening or keep it to yourself.

### What can you do?

- Ask your brother or sister if they want to talk about anything. Give them the opportunity to share their feelings and to listen to yours, but respect their right to privacy if they don't want to talk.
- Try to remember that you and your entire family are sad. Sometimes, it's comforting just to know you are not alone in your sadness.
- If you're an older sibling, try to pay a little extra attention to the younger ones who may be frightened or confused. Play a game with them or read them a book. Encourage them to tell you how they feel. Sometimes, the closeness of the family is all it takes to make you feel better.

# FAMILY

- Do something helpful—even something as simple as making macaroni and cheese for the little ones. It can make you feel better to help them feel better.
- If you're an older sibling, offer to take the younger kids to a movie or the playground. Give your parents some much-needed time off, but first be sure to let them know where you're going.
- You may find yourself lashing out at your brothers and sisters. Shake it off, and let them know you're sorry. Read the suggestions in the section titled "Normal" to find other ways to let out your emotions. At the same time, try to be understanding if a sibling loses his or her temper.

*"Whoever you consider your family is family."— Ericka*

## EXTENDED FAMILY

There's your immediate family, your parents, siblings, and step-brothers and sisters. There's also your extended family, the people who care about you and gather around, like your grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, friends, and friends of the family. Some of your extended family may come to stay for a while. Close friends and neighbors may come by, dropping off food and asking if there's anything they can do. Your friends' parents may visit often to make sure you and your folks are doing okay. It can seem like every day after school when you walk into the house and throw down your backpack, someone new has come to visit or stay. And while sometimes this may be exciting, at other times, it can be a real hassle.

### **People may want very much to help you but just don't know how.**

Even if you have friends and family to offer support, you may still feel left out and alone. You may feel that your life and routine have been disrupted. You may feel that others are focusing mostly on your parents' well-being but are ignoring what you need right now.

### **What can you do?**

- Your immediate and extended family are concerned and worried for you and your family. But they may not have the emotional energy to deal with your feelings. They may not know what to do for you or how to ask. Try not to take their lack of attention personally.
- Don't be afraid to ask your extended family for help. Often, they don't know how best to help you. Ask them for a ride to school, to take you out for ice cream, to talk with you. Sometimes you just need to ask. Just be sure to tell your parents where you are going.
- You aren't imposing on your extended family by asking them to help out; in fact, you're doing them a favor by telling them how they can help you.
- Sometimes you need a hug. Your parents might not be around all the time now to give you one, but it's likely that a favorite grandparent will. It's okay to ask someone you trust for a hug.