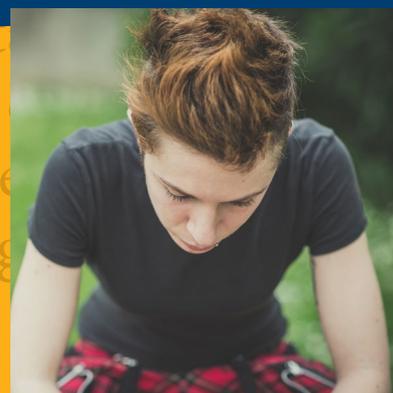
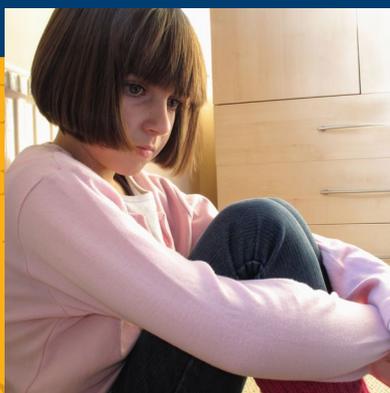




## What About Me?

Finding your path forward when  
your brother or sister is missing

2nd Edition | 2024



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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a program office within the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking.

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# Acknowledgments



In 2007, a group of eight young people who each experienced the abduction of a sibling came together to help create *What About Me: Coping with the Abduction of a Brother or Sister*. At the time, they had never shared their stories about the abduction of their brother or sister with others, yet they came together in the hope that their words and experiences would help others facing similar situations. And in the process, these remarkable young men and women created a strong bond of friendship and support because they knew what each other was going through. They understood their pain and felt the same emotions. They knew what helped and what did not, and they learned that by sharing their experiences, they were able to help others as well as themselves.

In 2024, six young people who each experienced a missing or abducted sibling came together to update the sibling Guide, which now bears a new, more inclusive title, *What About Me? Finding your path forward when your brother or sister is missing*. These siblings spoke about the personal and emotional journey they experienced when their brother or sister was abducted in the United States or abroad, was lured away, trafficked, ran away, or was murdered. By sharing their experiences through adversity, their contributions to the Guide have expanded its value and ability to support an even wider audience.

We extend our sincere thanks to the following contributors to the first and second editions of the Guide:

1st edition | Robin, Erika, and Marcus, siblings of Tamara

2nd edition | Kimber, sister of Mikelle

1st and 2nd editions | Heather, sister of Molly

2nd edition | Rysa, sister of Maayimuna “Muna”

2nd edition | Cory, brother of Dylan

2nd edition | Sayeh, sister of Sara

1st edition | Martha, sister of Jimmy

2nd edition | Zack, brother of Jessika

1st and 2nd editions | Carmen, Amy, and Trevor (1st edition), siblings of Jacob



This Guide has been a labor of love for all involved. Without the vision, compassion, and strength of so many, it would not have been possible. We want to first thank Ron Laney, former Associate Administrator of the Child Protection Division, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice; and Helen Connelly, Associate, National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College (NCJTC-FVTC). Through their vision and compassion, this Guide as well as many other resources have provided support, encouragement, help, and resources needed by so many families.

We also want to thank the dedicated professionals serving the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) for the leadership, direction, and dedication they have given to the development of this Guide and so many other valuable resources. They include:

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**Janell Rasmussen**, Program Administrator, AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program, NCJTC-FVTC

# Introduction



While we're not trained mental health professionals, we are brothers and sisters who have gone through situations much like what you are experiencing, and we have so much compassion and empathy for you. **We want to help.**

This situation is unlike anything else in your life. **It's hard, and it's scary.** You're probably feeling many different emotions and aren't sure what to do.

We've learned how important it is to **take care of yourself, first and foremost.** Please talk with your parents, a trusted adult, or a professional counselor or therapist. Tell them what you are feeling and what you need. **It's okay to ask for help.**

And if you feel like you're stuck and don't know where to turn, **these organizations can help you, 24/7:**

- The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** is a national network of local crisis centers with trained counselors available to provide free and confidential support. **Dial or text 988.**
- The **National Runaway Safeline** offers confidential support to help you and your family if you are in crisis. **Call 800-RUN-AWAY (800-786-2929).**
- The **National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline** is a nationwide peer-supported service that provides information, resource referrals, and support. **Text 62640** or call **800-950-6264.**
- **Findtreatment.gov** is a confidential, anonymous resource for locating treatment facilities for mental health and substance use disorders. Visit **<https://findtreatment.gov/locator>** to find treatment options near you.
- **Team HOPE**, part of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), is a group of peer support volunteers who have personally lived through the experience of a missing and/or abducted child. **Call 800-305-HOPE (4673).**



Most of us rely on the internet for information and resources these days. Use this QR to quickly find this Guide, videos, and many other resources that can help you and your family.

**Family Survival  
Guide Website: [familysurvival.  
amberadvocate.org](http://familysurvival.amberadvocate.org)**

If you are reading this because your brother or sister is missing, this Guide is for you.

If you are reading this because someone you know—a friend, classmate, neighbor—is missing, this Guide is for you.

If you feel that nobody could possibly understand what you're going through, this Guide is for you.

When your brother or sister is missing, it seems like your life will never be the same again. Your thoughts are spinning. You feel like your life is out of control. **You may be thinking:**

"I can't believe this is happening to me."

"Things like this only happen on TV."

"I feel like I'm having a nightmare—only I can't wake up."

"I don't know what to do!"

"Why won't everyone leave us alone?"

"I'm afraid the same thing might happen to me!"

You probably have a million questions but don't know where to find answers. And you're likely wondering if anyone else has felt like you.

**The answer is yes, we have, and we know how difficult this is.**

**Your feelings are okay.  
Talk about them when you can.  
Don't be afraid or ashamed  
to ask for help.**

"I hate that I am scared all the time. I hate feeling crazy. I hate this! I have no answers, but questions and the need for reassurance. I feel so different from everyone else."

—Heather



"Don't blame yourself for what's happening now. Don't blame yourself."

—Martha



"Feeling lonely doesn't mean you are alone. Feeling guilty doesn't mean you are responsible. Feeling angry doesn't mean you don't care."

—Zack

## Who We Are—Meet the Authors

Like you, our brothers and sisters went missing for various reasons. And while our situations are all different, they are connected and similar in many ways. Some of our siblings ran away. Some were abducted. Some were lured away from their home. We all felt frightened and confused. Sometimes, we still do.

We wrote this Guide because when our brother or sister was missing, we didn't feel like we had anyone to talk to. No one could relate to our feelings, really listen, or help us cope. We couldn't find answers to the millions of questions we had—or people who could help us feel better. We felt alone.

**You're not alone.** We're here to offer answers where we can and to help you feel understood. We can relate to what you're going through. In every type of missing child circumstance, families are stunned, scared, sad, angry, and desperate for help. We know those feelings; we have lived through them ourselves.

### The Sibling Guide: Then and Now

This Guide was first written in **2007** by eight young people who each experienced the abduction of a sibling. When they wrote the Guide, it was the first time they met others who had gone through similar situations.

In **2024**, additional young people who experienced a missing or abducted sibling were asked to help update the Guide, offering their thoughts and perspectives on what to expect, how siblings can take care of themselves, how to find support, and what resources, services, and tools can help to navigate through this difficult and unfamiliar journey in life.



Original Sibling Guide Contributors. Back row, left to right: Marcus, Martha, Trevor, Amy, Robin. Front row, left to right: Erika, Heather, Carmen.



Sibling Guide Update Contributors. Back row, left to right: Zack, Cory. Front row, left to right: Rysa, Amy, Kimber, Carmen, Sayeh. Missing from picture: Heather.

We want to share what you might expect to happen in the days, weeks—and even months and years—ahead. We hope to give you some answers to questions like:

- What feelings will I have?
- What might happen from day to day?
- What can I do to make myself feel better?
- How do I handle daily life and routines?
- Who are all the people asking questions, and why?
- How do I get back to a normal life?
- What do I do if I feel like I can't cope?



We have learned some useful lessons—things to say and do. Things that can help you deal with a situation that seems unreal and abnormal. We want you to know you can and will get through this, no matter how hard it seems. And in the process of putting our thoughts on paper, we realized this Guide may also be helpful for friends who are trying to support you, teachers and counselors at your school who want to help, and other family members and even parents who are also struggling with how to cope.

**We wrote this Guide to give you hope and encouragement. We may not have all the answers, but we do know a lot about what you're going through. One thing is for sure: it's not easy.**

As you read this Guide, remember that these are our thoughts and ideas about what might help you through this terrible ordeal. You will see comments from the original authors and from those of us helping to update the Guide. Individually and collectively, we found things that worked and things to think about—as well as things to avoid. And while we can't tell you everything that will happen, we can share what we discovered and how we navigated through it.

**Above all else, remember that:**

- **Every situation is different.** Based on your circumstances, you may feel differently. There is no right or wrong.
- **Your emotions will change.** This is a given. Your emotions will change based on what is happening around you.
- **It's a roller coaster ride.** You may feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster. But you are strong, and you will get through this.

## About Feelings

Perhaps the best advice we can give you is **not to be too hard on yourself**. You are important and are going through something terrible and traumatic. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Your feelings are your own, and whatever they are, they're okay.

We also can't tell you what to feel or do in every situation you'll experience through this journey, as each person's is different and unique. One of the best things you can do is acknowledge your feelings and try your best to work through them in positive ways.

We hope your brother or sister returns home safely—and soon. However, through our experiences, we all learned it's best to prepare yourself for the possibility that this situation may go on for a long time. And regardless of how long your sibling is missing, the outcome may not be what you want or expect.

**We are not sharing this to worry or scare you.** As you read our stories and messages of hope at the end of the Guide, you will find our journeys have all taken different paths, with different outcomes—for those of us whose siblings were found and those of us who are still searching for our missing brother or sister.

**We have learned this is a forever process.** We are all still going through feelings about what happened. A lot has changed in our lives. We have found a new “normal.” We hope our words help you deal with what is happening around you. We offer our thoughts to support and help you begin to put your life back together. And we believe in you—you will find the courage and help you need to get through this. You can find and lean into positive things in your lives, even during times of struggle.

**Here are some of our thoughts about feelings:**

- ✓ It's okay to **ask for help** and to share your thoughts and feelings with someone.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to **let the feelings out**; just be patient with yourself as you learn to work through them in productive ways.
- ✓ **Talk to someone** you trust. You may feel better getting things off your chest.
- ✓ You are not a burden. **You are allowed to have emotions.**
- ✓ You may want to **write down your thoughts**. Maybe keep a journal. Sometimes things that are hard to say are easier to write.



- ✓ You can keep your journal private, or you may want to share it with a trusted adult. They may help you cope. **It's all up to you.**
- ✓ Know that your **feelings may change** from day to day—or even minute to minute.
- ✓ **It's okay to feel the way you feel.** There's nothing wrong with it.
- ✓ Give yourself permission to take a break from feeling bad. **It's okay to do something fun. It's okay to laugh.**
- ✓ Do something to **take your mind off a situation.** You can do things like watch or go to a movie, listen to music, make art, practice an instrument if you play one, or just hang out with friends.
- ✓ It may be hard to feel okay with this, but we want you to understand **it's healthy for you to think about and do other things when you can;** try not to feel like you must think about your missing brother or sister every minute.



## How To Use This Guide

You have a lot on your mind now. **When you pick up this Guide, it's okay if you feel like you can't read it from cover to cover.** We've written it to help you think about and handle different situations and circumstances. You can read it in any order and at any time. You may want to read one chapter at a time or just leaf or scroll through it. A great idea is to ask someone to read it to you, for you, or even with you.

We know that siblings of all ages can find themselves living through the experience of a missing brother or sister. We were all different ages when this happened to us. We wrote the Guide so that, regardless of your age, you can hear our stories, find suggestions that are meaningful and helpful to you, and navigate through this tough time.

Reading parts of the Guide aloud to your younger brothers and sisters can be good for them, and for you—helping them can give you good feelings as well. In the back of the printed version—and available as convenient individual downloads with the online version—you will **find some activities you may like, along with others designed for younger siblings** if you have them. Throughout, you'll see **pages for writing notes** about how you're feeling, things you don't understand or want to find help with, or things you want to do.

**However you decide to use it, this Guide is for you.**

There's one more important thing we want to share with you as you continue in this Guide—and in this journey: **it's going to be a roller coaster at times**. Getting through this is not a linear process; it won't happen in a straight-line, neat, predictable way. You may feel like you're going along, handling things pretty well—and then something happens that sets you back. This journey will bring you progress and even some growth in ways you don't expect. But be prepared for times where those positive or productive feelings fall away. Sometimes you'll be able to see why, and other times you won't. Just keep reminding yourself the journey has ups and downs, and always try to **be kind to yourself**.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

# Taking Care of Yourself



You just found out your brother or sister is missing. **Your life has suddenly turned upside down.** Your emotions are running wild. **Your thoughts are racing.** The “normal” in life is gone. Home, as you have always known it, has changed.

Your parents are acting differently. Your home is likely full of friends, family—and strangers. These **people you don't know** can be from law enforcement, the media, and social services. People may just come through the front door without knocking and walk all over your house, even going into your room.

Most of us feel best when things stay the same and we are surrounded by familiar things and people. **Life and home now feel unfamiliar, and that's uncomfortable and upsetting.**

**There are some things we want you to remember as you begin to face this new reality.**

- You are going through something **traumatic** and terrible. What you are feeling is real. And whatever you are feeling is okay.
- You may be feeling emotions like **anger, fear, guilt, and sadness.**
- Over time, the constant anxiety and worry that comes with this situation can cause our minds and bodies to respond in ways designed to keep us safe or alleviate pain. However, this

**Caring for yourself—your feelings and your physical needs—is one of the most important ways to be there for your missing brother or sister and your family.**

“Hope is being able to see there is light despite all the darkness.”

—Sayeh



“Just remember that trauma responses can manifest themselves later in life.”

—Heather



“I came home from school, and everyone was sitting in the living room being quiet. No one told me what was going on.”

—Trevor



“Sports was a big deal for me. It gave me discipline, teamwork, and confidence. It was a great stress reliever, too. My coach was always there to encourage me.”

—Martha



“Find ways to convert your emotions into positive energy. Find ways to help yourself.”

—Zach

can cause real challenges to our mental and physical well-being.

- Depression, disassociation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can come into our lives, no matter how hard we try to do our best with everything.
  - **Ask for help, even when you're not exactly sure what help means.** It's so important to reach out; and there's no shame in it.
  - Try to **share your feelings with those you feel you can trust.** Your parents, friends, a teacher, coach, school counselor, therapist, or another trusted adult in your life. It's okay to ask for help.
- 
- If you are feeling a sense of darkness, despair, or hopelessness and can't find someone trusted to talk with, **call or text the Crisis Lifeline at 988.** Someone is there 24/7 to talk to you. You can also reach out to the other resources listed on page 5.
  - **Connect with others.** As much as you can, **surround yourself with those who love you, care for you, and have your best interests at heart.** Steer away from people who only think of themselves or who don't respect your needs and boundaries.
  - **You matter. Value your needs and take care of YOU.** Try to choose and use healthy outlets for your emotions rather than isolating yourself or doing things that will hurt you, bring negativity, and set you back. This will help you put your energies and emotions into a positive place.
  - **Look for activities that will help** take your mind off troublesome things and give you a sense of normalcy and structure. Taking this step and finding things that can help you feel more centered and grounded is key to taking care of yourself and protecting your physical and mental health. **You don't have to be good at these; they may be completely new activities—and that's okay.** Here are some suggestions:
    - Go for a walk, run, or do other exercises you like.
    - Play a sport you like or try out a new one.
    - Join a group or club.
    - Listen to music, do artwork, or get back to another hobby you've enjoyed in the past.
    - Read or journal.

- Try mindfulness exercises, reiki, or meditation.
  - Connect with a therapist or counselor.
  - Pray, attend a religious or spiritual service, or talk with a pastor, priest, rabbi, imam, or other spiritual counsel.
- **Sometimes home feels too intense.** It's okay to take a break. Visit a friend, family member, or trusted adult. Spend the night at a friend's house. Go for a walk or a bike ride. Go somewhere or do an activity with supportive friends. Just remember that whatever you do, tell your parents where you are going so they can feel safe that you're okay and won't worry about you.
  - **Don't be too hard on yourself or your family.** This journey is full of tough, messy situations. Even as you and your family members work through these times, try to be patient and keep an open mind. Help your family to feel seen and heard—and ask them to do the same for you. And **remember, in almost every challenge through this journey, you all are better and stronger together.**

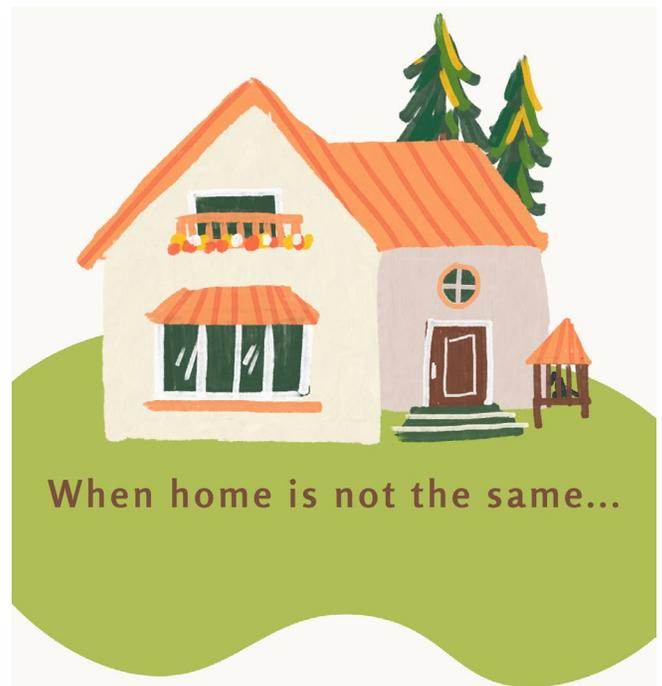
## When Home Is Not the Same

It can be very upsetting when your house is taken over by people you don't know. **You may feel like you don't have any privacy.** When you feel this way, it's important to find your own space.

**Talk with your parents about needing space of your own.** Find a place in your house—a safe place just for you—that everyone else knows is off limits. No one can come in unless you say so.

Hang a sign on your bedroom door that says, "This is my personal space. Keep out." Know that while you're in your own space, you can think anything you want and feel anything you want. **But try not to hide your feelings from others.**

**Think about times or places that have made you happy**—a vacation spot, a holiday, a favorite meal, an activity, or a group of friends that brings you joy. Recall sights, sounds, smells, and tastes; remember things you laughed about or that made you feel safe and content. Traveling to these memories in your mind can bring you comfort.



## Questions You Might Have About Home

Your **thoughts and feelings about your missing brother or sister can bring up a lot of questions.**

As you notice these things coming up for you, remember the importance of talking with your family, counselor, or therapist about them. **You may wonder:**

- Is home still home without my sibling there?
- Will we sit in the same places at the table?
- Can I still borrow my sibling's clothes or toys?
- What do we do on my missing sibling's birthday? Do we just ignore it?
- How do I answer the phone if it's for my missing brother or sister?
- What should we do with their mail?
- What about their personal accounts on the internet?
- What about their room? Can I still go in there to find something? What if the police blocked it off? Will it upset my parents if I go in like I usually would?
- The police took some of the things that we shared—the computer, clothes, even a hairbrush. Will we ever get them back?
- What does it mean now that I am the only child at home?

Your parents and even other trusted adults may not have good answers to these questions. This is new and unfamiliar to them too. And these likely won't be the only questions you and your family struggle with; many more may surface. **This is part of the process, and it's natural to have these thoughts.** Remember, sometimes it helps just to ask the questions aloud rather than keeping them bottled up inside—even if the answers don't follow.

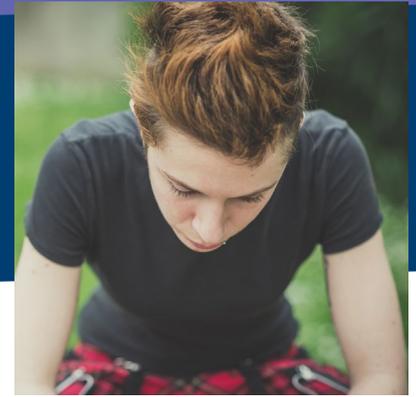


# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# Mental Health— A New Normal



From the moment your brother or sister is missing, your life—and your family’s life—changes. Nothing will ever be the same again. **Many of the things that felt like a part of “normal” everyday life may feel different now.**

Just sitting at the dinner table may feel uncomfortable because you’re so aware of an empty chair. Going to school may feel awkward and isolating because suddenly your friends aren’t sure what to say to you—and you’re not sure how to talk to them either. With law enforcement and the media coming in and out of your home at times, it can feel like you can’t even relax on your own furniture, in your own spaces, because your parents may be answering officers’ questions or doing a news interview.

Your world has been turned upside down, and you may feel like you’re in limbo. You may feel “on edge,” and seem to stay that way, because you’re constantly waiting for the next piece of news about your brother or sister or for them to come home. **When a sibling is missing, how can life ever feel normal again?**

It may not ever feel “normal” in the way it did before; at least not completely. But over time, your life will take on new rhythms and routines. You may grow more accustomed to the changes that at first seemed so strange, frightening, or upsetting. **A “new normal,” although different than before, can begin to feel more familiar.**

**While nothing will ever be the same, opportunities for “a new normal” are possible.**

**Taking care of your mental health will help you and your family move forward in this journey.**

“There will always be a ‘before’ what happened and an ‘after.’”

—Carmen



“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.”

—Amy



“I would try to put it behind me. I just wanted to be a kid again.”

—Trevor



“In this situation, it’s normal not to feel ‘normal!’”

—Martha



“The truth is I am not different. I am just going through something very difficult.”

—Cory



## Helpful

- Asking for help
- Finding activities that help you feel connected and better physically
- Spending time with people who bring wellness and support
- Talking and sharing with trusted people
- Working to better understand and process what you're feeling
- Being kind to yourself and others
- Being patient with yourself and others
- Being open to therapy and counseling



## Hurtful

- Drugs, tobacco, and alcohol
- Controlling or unsupportive relationships
- Withdrawing from family, friends, and support systems
- Obsessively following missing child/person news
- Holding feelings and emotions inside
- Looking to others to fix everything
- Blaming yourself
- Taking care of everyone but yourself

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

Here are some things to try. You may notice a lot of similarity with the suggestions earlier in this Guide, and that's good! It's always helpful to see and think about these important strategies again.

- Try some **physical activity**. Run, swim, join or reconnect with a sports team, lift weights, or dance. Do something to take care of yourself physically.
- **Center, calm, and focus** yourself with mental activity. Concentrate on schoolwork, read, do a crossword puzzle or sudoku, or try a relaxation or meditation app.
- **Express yourself through art**. Draw, paint, work with clay, knit, do beadwork, design clothes, make jewelry, listen to music, play a musical instrument, create video/film projects, or try cooking and 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 that you trust, whether it's an adult or a friend your age. Connect with someone who you're comfortable with and who is not judgmental; a friend, relative, teacher, coach, therapist, godparent, or someone who can offer you religious or spiritual counsel if you desire that.



- **Volunteer.** Volunteer for a cause that has personal meaning for you, such as a missing children’s organization, an animal rights group, or a tutoring program.
- **Care for animals.** Pets can love you unconditionally, make wonderful companions, and are always there to hold and hug. If your parents say this isn’t the time to bring home an animal, you may be able to walk or help walk dogs in your neighborhood or volunteer at an animal shelter.

Even if life doesn’t feel the same again, it’s important to **live your life in a way that’s good and healthy for young people of 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 safe, sound, and better. Remember, your feelings are real and okay to experience, so let yourself laugh, cry, and be angry when you need to.

**Routines can give your life some much-needed structure,** so use school, work, sports, clubs, and other activities to give your day routine, familiarity, and meaning. Try to stay positive, even when life feels unfair.

**It’s easy to slip into negative routines and activities,** and sometimes we can miss noticing that it’s happening. Look at the lists on page 20

### **A Note on Counseling and Therapy**

It is okay not to be ready for therapy. And it’s also important to figure out why you are not ready—and be open to noticing when you are. It takes strength and courage to begin counseling or therapy. Remember, there should never be any embarrassment, shame, or stigma attached to talking with a trained professional about what you are going through. This is a safe place to share your feelings and cope. As a matter of fact, all of us who have worked on this Guide agree: we all found therapy to be one of our most important and healing places. So be open to it, be patient with the process, and if you feel that the therapist or counselor you work with is not a good fit for you or is not helping, it’s okay to look for a new helping professional.



again, which offer a side-by-side view of things that can be helpful and those which are hurtful—and can actually worsen and prolong many of the difficulties you’re facing. And as you read these, understand that each of us, in some way and at some point during our journeys, experienced the hurt of decisions or actions that didn’t serve us. **We are human beings going through an unthinkable situation; and thankfully, we’ve learned to give ourselves forgiveness and grace as we’ve navigated back to better decisions. We want that for you, too.**

## Life Goes On

When your brother or sister is missing, **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 the outcome will be. Will your brother or sister come home safe? Will they ever be found? How will the story end?

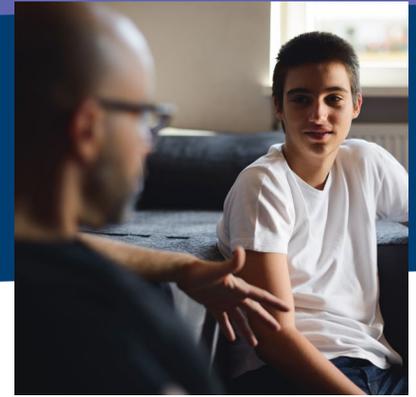
As the brothers and sisters who authored this book, we will tell you that our stories haven’t ended. The fact is, **we continue to be affected by what happened to our siblings years ago.** To this day we continue to cope with thoughts and feelings that were awakened during that time.

**Hard as it may be to believe, we will also tell you that the experience has had some positive effects 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 how to hold on to what is most dear and important** to us. 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 things will get better still.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# Your Family Dynamics



While it is your brother or sister who is missing, everyone in your family is experiencing this difficult time in different and yet connected ways; **each family member's feelings and responses affect the others'**. When a child is missing, the entire dynamic of the family changes. Your parents, other siblings, and extended family—and even trusted friends—are all navigating frightening and unfamiliar territory. It's hard enough handling your own feelings. How do you cope with their feelings too?

**There's no doubt about it: your parents are acting differently.** They may have been there for you and your siblings in good and bad times before. But now they may seem so sad, distracted, and angry that you don't recognize them. **You can feel forgotten at times.** One minute you're angry at your parents for not giving you their full attention, and the next minute feeling guilty for being angry with them.

**You may think you need to be "perfect" and not make a mistake** because your family couldn't handle anything more. And ironically, as you're trying to be "good," you may feel like your parents aren't even noticing. It's like there doesn't seem to be much time or attention left for you; you've been pushed to the "back burner."

**Other times, you may feel like you are acting as the parent to your parents,** which can be confusing and make you resentful. 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 practice, you need a ride somewhere, or your dad not being there for your game. You're still there, living as a family in your

**Everyone in your family, young and old, is experiencing feelings like fear, anger, sadness, guilt, and confusion.**

**Family may look and feel differently now—and that's okay.**

"It would have helped if people explained to me why my parents were acting so differently. I wish I knew 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."

—Martha



"People kept asking, 'How are your parents doing?' What about me? Don't they want to know how I'm doing?"

—Trevor

house, and yet somehow, they're not there for you in the same way.

"My family is a mess," you may say to yourself at times. What is happening to you is very, very hard. 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.** You're all on this journey as a family, and **things will get better.**

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

—Erika



"In this situation, it's normal not to feel 'normal!'"

—Martha

## Your "Chosen" Family

As you navigate through this journey, you may find it helpful to turn to others beyond your parents and immediate family. Trusted adults, friends, counselors, teachers, and relatives may become part of **your "chosen" family—the one you rely on to help you uniquely and productively cope with all that's happening.** Know that this is okay. **You need trusted people to talk to—**people with whom you can have open communication and safe conversations. Those you can ask questions of, even if the questions are hard and don't have easy answers (or answers at all). **Your "chosen" family may change over time,** depending upon your circumstances and needs. Just make sure that your chosen family members are trustworthy, patient, and have your best interests at heart.

**As you work through these family dynamics, remember these helpful actions you can try:**

- **If you can, try to talk to your parents** about the feelings that have been 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.
- **You can also talk with a counselor from school or an outside therapist.** Sometimes it's easier to talk to an objective person who's trained to listen and help.
- **Let people help; it can help them too.** 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 favor.
- **Sometimes you just need a hug.** Your parents might not be around all the time to give you one, but it's likely that a favorite grandparent, aunt, uncle, or relative will. So, ask someone you trust for a hug; it will be good for them too.
- **Try to be productive and do things for others.** This can include friends, neighbors—and definitely your family—in any ways that you can. You can help with younger siblings, with chores or errands, and with preparing meals (cooking and having meals together with your family can often be a great way to just be together). Your parents will appreciate what you do for them, even if they can't express it right now.

- **Cry it out—both you and your parents.** It can be pretty upsetting to see your parents cry—it may even make you cry too. Cry whenever you need to; a good cry can make you all feel better.
- **When your parents argue,** it can be pretty upsetting. Just know that their emotions are not directed at you. Try to remember they too are navigating uncharted, difficult territory and feel fear, sadness, and uncertainty too, even though they're older.
- **Do what you can to stick with your regular structures and routines,** whether it's school, work, sports, lessons, or clubs. Finding some normalcy in your daily life is important. While your parents may be too busy to eat dinner with you every night, you can 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.
- **It's okay to not be at home sometimes.** You may feel like you must be home with your parents all the time because something might happen on the case or they need you there. Try not to carry that burden; it's important to your own health and wellness to have safe and positive activities outside the house. Just remember to always tell your parents where you are going and plan for how you can contact each other.
- **Be patient with your parents' protectiveness.** Recognize that your parents are overcome with worry and may be over-protective or cautious with you and your siblings. Try not to resent it. Even though it may not seem like it, they are worried about you too. It's okay to talk with them or the people you trust about feeling closed in.



Through this tough situation, you'll likely come to realize **there are many people who care about you.** Some of your extended family may come to stay for a while. Close friends and neighbors may drop off food and ask if there's anything they can do. Your friends' parents may visit often to make sure you and your parents are doing okay. It can seem like every day after school when you walk into the house, someone new has come to visit or stay. And while sometimes this may feel good, at other times, it can be a real hassle.

And despite having all these people and offers to help all around you, **you can still feel alone or even forgotten.** It can seem wrong. You might even feel guilty about it. But remember: your life and routine have been disrupted. Others may be focusing mostly on your parents' well-being, and that can feel like they're ignoring what you need right now. So, with kindness and courage, try to share with others what you need to feel safe and supported.

## Brothers and Sisters

Sometimes siblings are wonderful and are your best friends, and sometimes they're just a pain. But when your brother or sister is missing, **you may feel guilty about the times you did not get along or weren't nice to each other.** Somehow, everyday life doesn't feel the same. Your family roles have shifted. Suddenly, you may be the oldest, youngest, or even the only child.

What if you shared a room with your missing sibling? **Your room and other places you spent time together can feel scary, sad, or uncomfortable now that they're no longer there.**

Just going into the room can make you feel their absence even more. You may choose not to sleep in that room, or you may find ways to learn to be okay with spending time there, such as telling yourself your sibling is just "away for a while." Whatever you feel, remember it's okay.

**You may also have new responsibilities now,** like helping with the care of other siblings, running errands, or doing extra chores. Depending on your age, your parents may need you to stay with another trusted adult for a while to protect your well-being. If you're older, you may even feel some responsibility to take charge. As you work through changing family roles, needs, and environment, there's nothing more important than talking with your parents and other trusted adults and feeling safe to communicate your needs.

### Things you can do for your family (and they for you, too!):

- **Try to remember that you and your entire family are full of emotions.** It's good to talk about them or just acknowledge them in kind and patient ways. Sometimes it's comforting to know you are not alone in your feelings.

Your relationships with other brothers and sisters can feel different throughout this journey.

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

—Carmen



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

—Heather



"You might be surprised how relieved your parents will be if you come to them with a 'normal' problem—bad grades, breakups, whatever it might be. It will remind you all that life goes on, you are there for each other, and that you need each other."

—Zack



"You cannot know how much your sibling is missed until they are back."

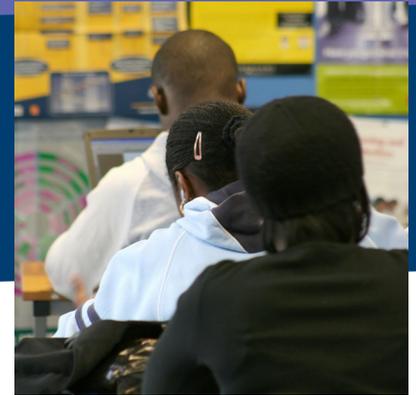
—Rysa

- **If you're older, try to pay a little extra attention to younger siblings who may be frightened or confused.** Play a game or play outside with them. Read a book together. Make a snack with them. Encourage them to talk about how they're feeling, or help them to share feelings in other, creative ways—such as through drawing pictures, dance, or song. Sometimes family closeness is all it takes to make you feel better.
- **If you have arguments or disagreements with your siblings,** try to shake it off, say you're sorry, and talk about it if you can. If not, just saying you're sorry and allowing space to calm down can be enough.



# NOTES & SKETCHES

# Routines, School, and Work



When your brother or sister is missing, going back to school or work will be different—in how it feels and what you will need to be supported and productive. It may be hard to even think about going back. There’s constant activity (that feels like chaos) at home, and you may want to be there to help and know what’s happening. Returning to school or work may feel like you’re neglecting your family or being selfish.

Even with these feelings, remember that school and work are important parts of our “normal,” everyday lives; they keep us moving forward in our learning and personal growth—and in the case of work, provide needed income and resources. But with life no longer feeling at all “normal,” how can you feel safe and solid about getting back into those “out there” routines? We understand that struggle and hope our ideas make the transition a bit easier.

## School

Your classmates will probably know about your missing brother or sister. You may dread facing them or feel anxious about what questions they’ll ask. Their questions can hurt—even if they aren’t meant to. There may be times you think kids are looking at you or whispering behind your back. They may even say negative things to or about you. 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 be a big mess.

**Getting back to routines, such as school and work, can be hard, scary, and frustrating.**

**Be patient with yourself, ask for what you need, and work with those who can help you make these transitions back into the “outside” world.**

“After [Jacob’s] 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.”

—Trevor



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

—Carmen



“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.”

—Robin

Still, it's important to get back into school as soon as you can. The good news is that schools have built-in support systems—your teachers, counselors, and coaches. Not only that, but school can also give you structure and routine; reassuring things that may otherwise be missing from your life right now.

**Here are some things that can help you with school:**

- Talk with your parents about how to **ease back into school routines**. Your teachers may be willing to let you do half-days at first. A whole school day may seem overwhelming, but 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 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 at some point; and when I do, I need you to respect that."

This next piece of advice is very important: **Make a choice—a commitment to yourself—to only hang out with positive people**. Even though some people may be friends to you, if they tend to be sarcastic or critical of others and things in the world around you, now is the time to give them—and yourself—some space. The last thing you need right now is negativity.

As we shared earlier, one of the best things you can do for yourself is to **get involved or reconnect with a group activity**—sports, music, art, academic clubs, volunteer organizations, and other community groups. 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 gives you a clearly defined role, and it can feel good to be part of a shared effort working toward a common goal. It's one area of your life where you can take control again. A group activity or club can also give you a broader

**When going back to school, your energy and focus may be different than before. This is okay. Talk with your teachers about expectations and how they can support you and help you best learn during this tough time.**

"When I went back to school, I didn't speak up enough about my needs. I was in third grade at the time, but school got really hard for me in sixth grade. By then, I felt like everyone wanted me to 'be over it.' I had horrible anxiety and started failing tests. I wish I understood what I needed and spoke up for myself. I wish I knew it was ok to ask for help."

—Kimber



"For me, it was good to go back to school because it gave me structure and routine. And it felt normal. My teachers pretty much said, 'Do what you can do.' I didn't have to make up all the work that I missed."

—Amy



"I would get a lot of questions asked in school. I had to set boundaries and say I don't want to talk about it."

—Rysa

support network and something positive and constructive to do for yourself.

**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. Here are some things to remember.



- **Pace yourself. Your teacher can help.** Meet with your teacher or school counselor. Come up with a plan for how to handle things week by week. Try to take it one day at a time. If your plan doesn't seem to be working, ask to change your approach.
- **Friends can bring work home for you** so you don't get too far behind.
- **A tutor can bridge the gap.** A tutor can help go over missed work or subjects that are a struggle for you. Your teachers or counselor may be able to arrange one for you.
- **Be patient as you improve your ability to concentrate.** 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. Ask your teacher, tutor, or a friend who does well with studies for ideas on how to help you stay focused.
- **Celebrate your "wins" and give yourself credit.** You may not do well on every test, but give yourself credit for what you do accomplish. Whether it's answering a question correctly in class or spiking a volleyball in gym class, pat yourself on the back for your small victories.
- **It may feel like you are just going through the motions** of school at first, and that's okay. With time, the "motions" may start to feel natural again.
- **Be prepared for ups and downs.** You may be readjusting to school smoothly. But then, when you least expect it, you're 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. It may just be too much for you and you feel like you're falling apart. This is natural and to be expected.

**Give this a try:** 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 break." You may just need to go outside and breathe fresh air for a minute or visit the school counselor. Use the signal you and your teacher agree upon; this way, you won't need to draw a lot of attention to yourself, and you can take that important break while respecting the needs and work of the rest of the class.

Lastly, remember that this is a vulnerable time for you. There may be other kids who try to take advantage of this and don't have your best interests at heart. **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 and reach out to your trusted adults at school whenever you need to. Taking care of yourself at school takes strength and courage—and you have both inside you, even on the hard days.

## Work

**If you're an older sibling, you eventually will have to return to work.** You may find it's hard to leave home for an extended amount of time because you feel like you need to be there to help. If the media has covered the story, it's likely your co-workers will have heard about it and may ask uncomfortable questions.

**Here are some things that can help:**

- Give thought to what you do and don't feel comfortable saying. **Set conversational boundaries** accordingly with both supervisors and coworkers.
- **Go back to work gradually**, maybe 3 days a week, then 4, and then 5. Talk to your supervisor. Ask if you can accomplish some of your work through telecommuting.
- You may want to isolate yourself while at work but **try to connect with coworkers once in a while.** Grab a coffee or meal with them and talk about things other than your sibling's case and things at home.
- Try to **surround yourself with people who are positive** and can foster positive feelings and outlooks in you.
- **Be patient with your ability to concentrate.** 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 regular breaks to clear your mind.** Go outside for a walk. Stand up and stretch. If you're having trouble accomplishing your work, see if it's okay to leave early that day.

**A lot of what works for returning to school can "work" for returning to work.**

**It's about support, boundaries, and pacing yourself.**

"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."

—Heather



"The job aspect was the most challenging. I would be offended if others wanted to give me special treatment."

—Cory



- Your employer may have an **Employee Assistance Program** that can arrange free counseling for you. You may want to check into it.
- And **when you just need a mental health day**, talk to your supervisor. Kindly and confidently ask for what you need.

**And remember self-care outside of work.**

- Do what you can to **care for yourself physically**—eat well, get some daily exercise, and strive for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. If that is out of the question, just focus on a consistent sleep schedule. Even when you don't feel like it, these things are important.
- **Use healthy outlets to deal with stress.** Remember that some things you might turn to for comfort now may eventually hurt you. Look for ways to get more time outdoors, more daytime light (from outside activities and having windows near your desk). Use music, audiobooks, reading, or mindfulness and meditation practices. Find the combination of outlets and times of day for them that works for you. There is no “right approach” or “perfect schedule.” Just try to do what you can when you can.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

# Holidays and Traditions



Your family may have always celebrated certain holidays, traditions, and birthdays. But if your brother or sister is gone, holidays that you used to look forward to can now fill you with uneasiness, confusion, and even dread. **You may feel selfish for celebrating.** “How can we be happy and festive when they aren’t here? They’re out there, somewhere, and can’t get home.”

You may be worried about what to do when your missing sibling’s birthday approaches. Wondering if it’s wrong to celebrate their birthday is normal. And yet, we want you to know, it’s okay to honor them, to celebrate them. It can be positive and reaffirming of how much you, your parents, and your trusted friends love and miss them.

Similarly, deciding to celebrate other holidays can be a positive step, a way to acknowledge that life goes on, and a way to feel more like a “normal” family, even if just for that 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—and the situation you’re all living through will make them even more emotional now. It may seem unimportant, but **try to decide as a family whether or not you want to celebrate a given holiday when it’s approaching on the calendar.** Maybe talk about it at family dinner night or another time when you’re all together. If you can’t decide what you want to do, think about what you don’t want to do and go from there. If you simply ignore a holiday or event, seeing others celebrate it all around you can make things worse, but deciding as a family and planning for other positive things to do together can help you get through the holiday in a healthier way.

**Holidays and traditions can go from being days and events you cherish to things that bring uneasiness, sadness... even dread. But there’s a way forward—and it starts with communication.**

**“You are not alone. There are people you can trust, talk to, and have had similar bad things happen to them. Find light through the darkness. Find your purpose. Don’t stop believing good can come out of bad. Against all odds, there is hope. You can survive. More importantly, you can thrive!”**

**—Sayeh**



**“The holidays are back. Hold your breath!”**

**—Heather**



**“Every day is different, but each one is a blessing. Find your own happiness.”**

**—Cory**

## Here are some resources that can help with holidays:

The **American Hospice Foundation** has some great suggestions on how to handle the holidays when you or your family are feeling grief, including **Coping With Holidays and Family Celebrations**.

The National Alliance for Children’s Grief has a super-helpful toolkit, **Supporting Children Who Are Grieving During the Season of Family**. This publication has thoughts and ideas for how to celebrate holidays when your brother or sister is missing.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) produced a resource for families titled **Supporting Children and Teens During This Holiday Season**. This resource offers caregiver strategies for supporting children and teens who have experienced trauma or loss during the holiday season as well as suggestions for acknowledging difficult emotions while creating moments of joy, hope, and connection.

## However you and your family decide to handle holidays, here are actions that can help:

- **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 a 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 want to celebrate 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 celebration** 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 given holiday. **Think about starting some new traditions and talk with your family about it**. For instance, if you always have a certain meal, this year prepare something completely different—something new, delicious, and fun.

## Anniversaries

Hopefully, your brother or sister will quickly return home safe. For some families, however, it takes a longer period of time—even years. And some families are still waiting. **Like holidays, anniversaries can sneak up on you**. On the anniversary of the date your brother or sister went missing, you may find yourself reliving the same feelings you had when it first happened. It’s natural to experience strong emotions as the

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

—Amy



“I feel we have an obligation to recognize that day.”

—Trevor



anniversary date approaches. You might dream about your sibling or have trouble sleeping. You can 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 ahead of time about what you collectively want to do on that day.** You may want to be with just your immediate family or to have more family, friends, and relatives around. Some sort of ceremony to honor your missing sibling can be a positive way to both remember and foster hope for the future. **And remember—it's okay if you cannot participate.** Trust your feelings.

**Here are some suggestions we can offer you and your family for handling anniversaries:**

- Expect that the day will be an emotional one for you and your family. Give yourself permission to feel all your feelings. 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, with friends, or not talk about your missing sibling.
- You may want to honor your brother or sister by keeping their memory alive. It can feel affirming to celebrate memories. Share funny stories about your sibling with family and friends. Bring out old family pictures.
- Invite people to write and share messages or poems, light candles, offer prayers, or sing songs together.
- Write your missing brother or sister a letter just for them. Say all the things you wish you could have said before.

- If you need time alone, pick a safe place to go to 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. Animals can be a wonderful source of comfort.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# Working With Law Enforcement, the Media, and Others



## Law Enforcement

After your brother or sister is missing, **the first thing your parents will probably do is call the police.** In most cases, law enforcement (police, sheriffs, detectives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation/FBI) will be the first people your family talks to.

Law enforcement has a large network of officers with distinct roles, responsibilities, and areas of expertise. Expect that you will see a wide variety of people at and around your home.

## Understanding Police Interviews

**Law enforcement has a job to do. They are there to find your brother or sister, eliminate possible suspects, and track down the actual perpetrator of the crime.** Many people don't realize this, but the police and the FBI start by questioning the people closest to the missing sibling: you, your parents, your other siblings, close relatives, friends, and neighbors.

They will also talk to many people, including those who know your brother or sister and who may have witnessed something important. They want to gather as much information as possible to bring your brother or sister home safely.

**Better understanding of law enforcement's work, and their understanding of your and your family's needs, can make a world of difference in working together in the search for your missing brother or sister.**

**"I liked having the police at our house. I was very scared and having them there made me feel safe."**

**—Trevor**



**"I did not care that I was being asked the same questions over and over. I just wanted them to find the monster who took my sister."**

**—Sayeh**



**"Just because you don't hear about progress doesn't mean they're not making any."**

**—Marcus**



**"Having a family advocate can be a great resource to law enforcement and to help you through the process."**

**—Sayeh**

**The more people law enforcement can eliminate as suspects, the more they can focus on what happened and work toward finding your brother or sister.** You, your parents, and others close to the family may be asked to take a polygraph test to see if you are telling the truth. Though **this can be a frightening process**, it is a necessary one. Be honest. Ask questions. And remember that law enforcement is there to help.

The local police and the FBI are trained to gather as much information as possible, largely through interviews. **You can expect that they will ask a lot of questions and will ask you the same questions repeatedly.** You'll probably be interviewed many times, sometimes in an uncomfortable or unfamiliar place. You may have different people or the same people asking questions. And sometimes they ask the same questions over and over again.

Some of their questions may make you feel uncomfortable or intimidated and you might not understand why they are asking you certain questions. They will ask you questions about relatives, teachers, coaches, neighbors, and family friends, and you may be afraid your answers will get someone in trouble. You may think that they are insensitive or are asking strange questions. **Sometimes, it may seem like they do not know how to talk to you or don't believe you. It's not their intention to make you feel distrusted. The processes they are following are designed to gather the best and most accurate information possible to help find your missing brother or sister.**

Through all of this, you may be so tired and confused that you start to question your own answers. Be honest with law enforcement and your family and tell them what you need. If you feel you are not being heard, you can request a family advocate, if you have not been connected with one already. Ask the law enforcement officer working with you or contact the **Family Advocacy Outreach Network** at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at **800-843-5678** for assistance.

And as you take each day as it comes in the search for your sibling, try to remember one thing: law enforcement's job is to ask questions to help them find your brother or sister. Your job is to answer the questions as best you can. Your only job is to tell the truth.

"As a retired law enforcement officer, I want you to know that some officers may not be excited to work on cases involving children. Some may have never been involved in a missing persons case. These are some of the most devastating, emotional, and difficult cases to work on.

For me, cases involving children were the ones I wanted to work on. I knew the vulnerability of children, I understood first hand the circumstances surrounding a missing persons case, and I knew how to work with innocent children who were hurting.

Missing children need us to fight for them to get answers and get bad guys off the street. We take an oath to serve and protect our community. You may have a law enforcement officer who has no experience with a missing children case, is uncomfortable and may seem distant, or someone who jumps in with both feet. If you want to talk with a different officer, speak up. Law enforcement is there to do their best. Don't give up HOPE. We won't!"

—Sayeh

## Here are some things you can do to help handle the interview process:

- Bring something with you to the interview that makes you feel comfortable. Young children may want to bring their favorite toy.
- Try not to overanalyze every question you were asked or give what you think is the “right” answer. Answer questions truthfully.
- Let the officer know if you are tired, thirsty, or need to go to the bathroom. Ask if you can take a break.
- Remind yourself that even though you don't know why they are asking certain questions, they are the experts in solving cases.
- If you cannot remember something, don't make up an answer. It's okay to just say, “I don't remember.”
- If any part of the interview makes you uncomfortable, let your parents and your family advocate know about it.



## What Else Is Law Enforcement Doing?

Law enforcement may also do other things which feel invasive. Try not to be alarmed. This is all part of their search for your sibling. **Here are some actions they may take to help your family—even if it doesn't feel like help.**

- Temporarily take personal possessions from your home or cars.
- Listen to or record your family's phones or connect additional phones to use in the investigation.
- Monitor your family's email and other online accounts to watch for suspicious activity toward your family that can lead them to a suspect.
- Monitor postal mail and packages, again to help catch suspicious activity toward your family.
- Interview your friends and neighbors.
- Ask you not to touch anything that belonged to your brother or sister.

- Help collect things that belonged to your brother or sister, such as computers, phones, tooth- or hairbrushes, gaming consoles, clothing, and even trash cans.
- Take photographs and pictures that were on the walls in your house, such as family portraits or pictures of you and your brother or sister.

## **Working With Law Enforcement: Offering Honesty and Building Trust**

Your family's relationships and communication may not have been perfect before your sibling went missing, but you should still tell the truth to law enforcement about your family life. **It's very important to be honest—you're helping law enforcement put all the pieces of the puzzle together and work with the family collaboratively.**

We know that sometimes, it may feel difficult to work with law enforcement. There may be a language barrier that prevents ongoing, open communication between law enforcement and the family. In some cases, responding officers may not have worked on a missing persons case. All of this can make the relationship challenging. You may even feel antagonistic toward law enforcement and not trust them. But we want to reassure you that their job is to help you and your family. So do your best to remain respectful, truthful, and honest with them. As an older sibling or young adult, you can break down any barriers to **open communication with the officers helping with your sibling's case. You are all working toward the same goal—finding your missing sibling.**

Finally, if you feel that you need some support or assistance working with law enforcement, ask to speak to another law enforcement officer, a **family advocate**, or a **designated law enforcement liaison**.

### **TO LOCATE A FAMILY ADVOCATE:**

Ask the law enforcement officer working with you for assistance, or contact the Family Advocacy Network at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at **800-843-5678**.

**Sometimes it may seem like there is a lot of law enforcement activity, and sometimes it may seem like there is none.** You may not know and understand everything law enforcement is doing. They have good reasons for keeping activities confidential and not telling your family about every new development in the case. **Just because you haven't heard about any progress doesn't mean that nothing is happening.** Try not to let it get you down or lessen your hope.

One thing we found helpful was to have a law enforcement officer serve as our family's designated liaison to give us information and to coordinate law enforcement activities. Your parents may already

know and trust someone in law enforcement and can ask that person, or someone they know, to take on that role. The designated liaison can give the family an update every day. That way everyone can feel like they know what's happening.

## The Media

Every family needs to decide the best way to work with the media. We will share our experiences, the lessons we learned, and what we think you should be aware of. **But remember, we all have different opinions about the media, and one is not better than the other. You need to do what is best for you.**

Often the media plays a role in the search for a missing child. For most of us, being around the media is a whole new experience. **Your parents may be the best judges when it comes to deciding who in your family should talk to the media and when.**

You may have mixed feelings about whether you do or don't want to be a part of media interviews or other types of coverage. On one hand, the media can get the word out quickly about your missing brother or sister—and can work to keep the story of interest for the public. **They often seem sympathetic and friendly when approaching you and your family, and it's natural to find this helpful and be excited to give them information and let them know how you feel.**

On the other hand, you may feel very differently about the media. They may be constantly invading your home, privacy, and space. Film crews may park around your house and even on your front lawn. **Their questions may embarrass or hurt you. The story may not be presented the way they said it would or you thought it would.** Sometimes, it may seem like they aren't concerned about you or your family—only about getting your story on the news to boost their viewers and ratings.

**Traditional media (TV and radio) and social media are essential tools in getting the word out and keeping people updated about your sibling's case. The goal is to use these tools in ways that protect your family and help the investigation.**

**"Media can be your best friend or your worst enemy. With social media, be prepared for both positive and negative responses."**

**—Rysa**



**"I was mad at my mom because the media took pictures of me at my soccer game."**

**—Carmen**



**"Find the reporter or journalist who provides compassion and truth. Give them the exclusive interview."**

**—Sayeh**



**"There's no such thing as 'off the record'.... I didn't go anywhere because I knew they would follow me with questions, and I was afraid I'd lose my temper."**

**—Erika**



**"When you do an interview, they can distort what you're saying."**

**—Marcus**

**Your opinion about working with the media may change as the days, weeks, and months go by.**

One minute you may want to tell them everything and the next be afraid to talk to them at all. You may be leery about exposing your personal feelings to the public, and you may not want complete strangers to recognize you and know your personal business.

**Tell your parents how you feel about talking with the media.**

If you are uncomfortable, let them know. If you feel like your space is being invaded or you are being hounded for information, speak up. If you want to speak to the media but are afraid, ask a trusted adult to be present with you—a family member, family advocate, or law enforcement officer working closely with your case. And ultimately, know that **you do not have to answer their questions**. You can say “no” or “I changed my mind.” **You can set boundaries with the media.**



We all had different experiences working with the media, and to this day we have different opinions and feelings about it. Some of us choose to avoid the media, while others embrace it. What we can tell you is that it is important that **you** decide what’s best for you by talking with your family every time the media becomes an issue of concern. We hope what we’ve offered here will help you make good decisions for yourself by understanding both the benefits and the potential downsides of media coverage.

## Traditional Media

Sometimes a missing child story gets a lot of traditional media coverage, and sometimes it does not. What is broadcast or released online from day to day has a lot to do with what is occurring right now in your community, in the country, and even in the world. The media wants to get “breaking news” out on their various platforms. And when they release their stories and posts, you and your family may be thrust into the limelight, whether you want to be or not.

Sometimes, in the media’s rush to get a story out, facts do not come out accurately or aren’t presented in the ways you and your family would want them to be. If you or your parent(s) give an interview, what you say may be misconstrued or sensationalized. Be prepared for this—it has happened to all of us. And if it does, you may feel used and exploited. **Here are ways to protect yourself and minimize any negative impact:**

- **Remember, you do not have to speak to the media.** Tell your parents and law enforcement how you feel. Sometimes law enforcement has reasons for keeping the story quiet and not putting

information on the news. That doesn't mean it's unimportant or that nobody cares. In some ways, it can be a relief if the media decides not to focus on your family during a given time.

- **Your family will decide what to do.** You and your family may have different thoughts about working with the media. That is okay. There is no right or wrong way to engage with the media. You and your family may or may not be comfortable working with the media. But it is important that you talk as a family about your feelings.
- **If the media tries to talk to you without your parent's permission** and/or asks inappropriate questions, tell your parents or another trusted adult about it. And you can walk away from any media that approaches you.
- **The media can cause extra stress on your family and cause misunderstandings.** If friends or relatives hear information on the news before they hear it from your family, they may say, "I can't believe I had to find out about this on the news." Don't take this personally—people just don't realize unless they become a focus of media attention how aggressively and quickly the media can work to put out stories and posts.
- **The media may show up when you least expect or want it.** Sometimes an event may trigger a burst of media attention. A similar story may come up in the news. It may be the anniversary of when your sibling went missing. There may be people who want to capitalize on your family's misfortune, hounding you for a story or wanting to make a movie or write a book about it. Be prepared for these things and talk with your family about how to best handle them if they do happen.
- **Have a trusted person with you if you agree to do an interview.** They can look out for you and object if they think the reporter is asking questions that are out of line.
- **Trust your gut.** If a reporter or journalist makes you feel uncomfortable, or any other person approaches you with questions in a way that makes you feel unsafe, immediately tell your parents, law enforcement, or another trusted adult.
- **When you're done, you can stop.** It's okay to tell a reporter you don't want to talk anymore if an interview goes too long, is too intrusive, or is uncomfortable for any other reason.
- **Tell the story you want to tell.** Interviewers or writers may try to persuade or even pressure you to tell your story and give information in a certain way. Remember, you are in control of what you say.
- **Your family can choose your interviewer or journalist.** Ask for a reporter whom you trust to do an interview with, and remember you can say no to an interview with a person or media outlet you don't trust.
- **If you don't know, say so.** If you are talking with the media and you don't know an answer, it's okay to say, "I don't know."
- **You can change your mind** if you agree to an interview and decide you don't want to do it. Don't feel forced into doing something you are uncomfortable with. You are in control.

## Social Media

**Social media also has its positives and negatives.** Before you engage in any social media, talk to your parents or a trusted adult. Let them know what you are thinking and ask for their opinion. Speak to them specifically about what you are going to post and how you will post it.

### The Positives

On the positive side, if your missing brother or sister sees your post, they may be able to reach you through social media. One example of this is when children are taken at a very young age and don't remember certain things about what happened. Seeing a post from your family or organizations like the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) might trigger a memory or help them connect the dots to realize they can get help. Another example of a missing child using social media to connect with their family is when they have left home due to being lured away or deceived by someone who promised them something they very much felt they needed, but who actually wanted to exploit them. Sometimes a child who leaves home under these circumstances realizes they need help and wants to get back home. Seeing a social media post may offer them a way to start reaching out to be rescued.

Some families and siblings, and even some of us who helped to put together this Guide, have embraced and used social media to keep our stories alive, help find our missing brother or sister, and even help others. But we have done this strategically, understanding both the positives and negatives, risks, and our ability to manage and deal with them and our emotions.

**Friends, community members, and people all over the world can see a post or recognize a photo that may help them connect the dots and share things they have seen, heard, or read with law enforcement or your family.** And even if people don't have information about your missing brother or sister, many are ready and willing to reshare posts from your family, law enforcement pages, and organizations like NCMEC. And most people want to share comments of support, empathy, prayers, well-wishes, and ideas to help. Just remember that, like negative comments, which we'll talk about next, **even positive comments can be overwhelming**—just the sheer volume of them can be stressful if you feel as though you need to read and respond to even a portion of them. So **have a plan for when, how long, and how often you'll look at comments**—if at all. Trusted adults, family, and close friends can help you keep up on important posts meant to try and gather information.



## The Negatives

On the negative side, **individuals reading your post may criticize you, your family, or your sibling; may reply with negative comments; or may even post false or misleading information.** Once a post is out on social media, you have very little, if any, control of how the content gets used. And there is no foolproof way to remove it because people can take screen shots, scrape video or audio content, and keep making new posts about something you removed from your page.

**Use the platform's tools and security settings to unfollow or block users who say or post hurtful or inaccurate things.** Depending on the content of a post, decide what audience you want to share it with and whether or not they can share it with others. If you're not familiar with these tools and settings, take some time before you start sharing posts on social media to learn about them—or ask a trusted adult or friend for help with this.

## The Bottom Line on Social Media

We want you to be very careful about what you decide to post; take some time to think about it before you share any content or information online. Talk with your family and others you trust to **make sure you're sharing and preparing the right way for using social media to help** find your brother or sister.

**Use social media platforms, website blogs, videos, and audio podcasts as a tool, not a solution.** If you decide to post content to websites or social media accounts or pages, be prepared that your story will generate both supportive and negative or hurtful responses. Set and keep your boundaries and control your own story and narrative.

For those of us who are older now, we better understand how to control the messages that we want to convey. For those of us who still have a brother or sister who is missing, social media has allowed us to keep our story alive and the public looking for them. And while some of us continue to have some negative responses, we have learned how to better handle them.

## Questions From Others

People other than media—**extended family members, friends, people you know from your community, and even complete strangers—may approach you and your family with questions.** Many will have good intentions and genuinely want to know how they can help; others are just plain nosy and thrive on

### For Younger Children: A Place To Go for Internet Safety Awareness and Education

**Netsmartz** is NCMEC's online safety education program. It provides age-appropriate videos and activities to teach children to be safer online with the goal of helping children become more aware of potential online risks and empowering them to help prevent victimization by making safer choices on- and offline.

getting information that is none of their business. They may even spread hurtful rumors about your brother or sister, you, or your family.

## Questions You Hate To Be Asked

It takes only moments from the time your brother or sister is missing to realize **there are questions you will dread**. When you're in the public eye, many people feel entitled and think they have a right to ask you questions. Some people don't want to bother your parents, so they may ask you questions instead.

But even a seemingly harmless question from a stranger, like "How many brothers and sisters do you have?", can throw you and leave you uncertain how to answer. **It's hard to answer questions from people you know, and even harder to answer questions from people you don't know**. It helps a little to be prepared for common questions so you're not totally surprised.

**Talk to your parents about any questions that make you uncomfortable**. If your parents are not around, find an adult you trust, like a relative, teacher, or family friend, and let them know the questions that make you feel bad or uncomfortable. Or find a good friend to talk to. Sometimes it helps to simply admit that you're really bummed out. Your friend may not have the answers, but having a caring person listen is helpful. And remember, **you can always walk away from people asking you questions who don't honor your request to stop or leave you alone**.

## Common Questions You Might Not Want To Answer and Responses You Can Give

**Here are some common questions you may be asked and answers you might want to give**. If you think you'll want to answer these questions sometimes, think about what you want to offer so you don't feel "put on the spot."

- "How many brothers and sisters do you have?"  
*I have four brothers and sisters, but one is not home right now.*
- "Do you think your brother or sister is still alive?"  
*I hope so.*
- "What happened?"  
*I don't know what happened. And I don't want to talk about it.*
- "Was your brother or sister sexually abused?"  
*I don't know if my brother or sister was sexually abused, but this is not something I am comfortable talking about.*
- "How does this make you feel?"  
*I don't want to talk about my feelings right now.*



**It's always okay to say:**

- *I don't know.*
- *I don't feel like answering that question right now.*
- *That question makes me feel uncomfortable.*
- *That's enough questions for now.*

## **Watch Out for the “Cling-Ons” or “Tragedy Seekers”**

With all the media attention, **your family may be viewed as “celebrities” in the eyes of many people.** We think of these people as **“cling-ons”** or **“tragedy seekers.”** They are complete strangers who feel they know you because they recognize you from the media. Or people who want to get close to you because they may have suffered a similar tragedy and are seeking attention. They may stake out your house or try to talk to you when your parents are not around. They may follow you when you leave the house or approach you when you're going to and from school, work, or errands. They can seem weird, scary, and even aggressive, and you don't want anything to do with them. **Call or message your parents or law enforcement any time you feel uneasy or unsafe. Trust your instincts.** Tell people who approach you oddly, aggressively, or otherwise act out of line with you that you have nothing to say to them—clearly and bluntly if needed. If they don't get the message, ask your parents or law enforcement for help.

## A Note About Court and the Judicial Process

Depending upon the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of your brother or sister, you may be faced with going to court and navigating the judicial process. Know that this can be a very long, drawn-out process that again puts you in the media spotlight and brings up emotions and feelings that you have been grappling with for months or even years. It can be devastating, as it was for some of us. Expect the court or judicial process to be unfamiliar to you. You will again be asked repeated questions by people you do not know. Try to be patient. Answer questions truthfully. And try to revisit earlier sections in this Guide that talk about taking care of yourself, mental health, and handling the media.

The following resources can answer many of your questions about the judicial process:

- The Office for Victims of Crime has put together **Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials** that you may find helpful as you prepare for court.
- The **Center for Justice Innovation** created interactive and educational materials to help you navigate the justice system.

**We thought it might be helpful to tell you, in our own words, about our own experiences with the courts and legal process. Without a doubt, it was very difficult.**

**From Amy:** *“My family went nearly 27 years without answers to what happened to my brother. Then the man confessed and soon we found ourselves in the courtroom facing him. For me, this was incredibly difficult, as we had to hear the details of what happened, and everything shifted from the hope we carried for so many years to the reality of the worst-case scenario. During the years my brother was missing, I occasionally found myself thinking the worst and imagining horrible things that could have happened, but I never let myself stay there for very long. It wasn’t helpful. To live my life, I needed to focus on the hope that he could be found and returned to us.*”

*But then we were there in that room with lawyers and the sheriff describing the horrific details of what happened the night Jacob was taken. It was so much worse than what I had imagined the worst-case scenario to be. We were given the opportunity to write a victim impact statement. It wasn’t required, but I chose to because I wanted this man to hear how his actions impacted so many people. This was truly one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do—to go back and recount how my 13-year-old self changed that night, how my childhood came to a screeching halt. As an adult today, my life is still impacted by the decisions he made that night.”*

**From Carmen:** *“Going to court was a scary, unknown experience for me. Our immediate family had a private meeting where we heard the horrific details about what happened to Jacob. This took place nearly 27 years after Jacob was taken. The next day at court, our extended family and friends heard these graphic details for the first time. Nothing prepared me for that pain. I couldn’t look at the man’s face. All I wanted was for it to be over. Prior to sentencing, I prepared a victim impact statement. I wrote it planning to submit it for the court record and not read it aloud. I didn’t want to be in the spotlight yet again. But I woke up on the day of sentencing with a different mindset. I had to read it. I knew it was my chance to share how unbelievably hard this had all been. It was awful, yet it began the healing process from a very dark time in my life.”*

# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# When Your Brother or Sister Is Home—A New Normal



**Our greatest hope is that your brother or sister comes home quickly and safely.** That was what we all hoped for. But when you read our stories, you will see this was not the outcome for all of us.

Sometimes a sibling is gone for a long time, sometimes they don't come home, and sometimes they don't come home alive. The hardest part in writing this Guide was facing the reality that the outcome may not be what you expected or dreamed of. We aren't saying this to frighten you. We are saying this to be realistic and to let you know that we went through every possible scenario you can imagine. We know how hard it is and how painful it can be. **Take one day at a time, one step at a time, and take care of yourself.**

**Use this Guide to help you any time you need it—**daily, even hourly if it helps. Keep it with you and use the notes page at the end of every chapter to write or draw things you feel and things you want to remember to ask or do. **You will get through this no matter how hard it may seem right now.**

**If you are happily reunited with your brother or sister, it will be a time of joy and celebration** for you and your family. And while everyone will share in the joy, **here are some things that are important to think about:**

- Chances are you'll have a lot of questions about what happened to your brother or sister. **They may not be ready or able to talk about it—or they may want to talk all the time. Let them set the pace of the conversations.** And remember that they have been through a terrible ordeal.

A “new normal” may sound like a false promise right now. We want to encourage you to have hope that you and your family will find it someday.

“Finding my brother, even though he was deceased, was bringing him home for me and my family.”

—Cory



“Why did I survive and my sister did not?”

—Sayeh



“Healing takes time and is important, no matter the outcome. Healing and home look differently for everyone.”

—Rysa



“Hold space for their return—in your home, in your heart.”

—Zach

- Your brother or sister may seem different than before. They may seem distant and want to be left alone. Or they may pick someone to confide in—maybe another family member or a close friend. Don't take it personally. Try not to feel left out or insulted. **Give them the time and space they need to sort out their feelings.**

- Try to pay attention to what your brother or sister needs from you. It's okay to ask if there's any way you can help. But don't try to force information out of your sibling. **Just as you needed others to respect your feelings, your brother or sister needs you to respect their feelings now.**

- Even though you don't mean to, **your sibling may feel smothered by your affection or feel like you're being overly protective.** This may not be what helps your sibling right now or even in the future. Ask what they need and try to be patient. Let your sibling know you're there to help in any way you can. And remember, the healing process may take some time.

- **You may find that your sibling's return stirs up a lot of feelings in you again.** Ask your parents, a trusted adult, or a law enforcement officer who has grown close to your family for help if you need it or if you think your sibling needs help through the process.

- **The media may gather around your family all over again.** Talk to your parents and your sibling about what is best for the family. Remember, you don't have to do interviews if you don't want to. Take care of yourself and each other. This can be a very vulnerable time for all of you.

Unfortunately, and sadly, sometimes a missing brother or sister does not come home alive. This was the case for some of us. We sincerely hope that this is not the case for you and your family. But if this happens, we have some thoughts to share with you. Know that your family will probably be thrust into the spotlight once again. Know that law enforcement may again be present in your home and life. If you can, look back again at the media and law enforcement sections to help you through this time. Look at the family section to help you understand what you are going through, how this impacts your family, and how to get through it.

**And most importantly, look at the taking care of yourself section and remember that:**

- This is going to be an emotional roller coaster once again.
- It is important to be kind to yourself.
- Talk to someone you trust.

"Use this experience—no matter the outcome—to inspire yourself and others."

—Kimber



"I sometimes run into someone I haven't seen since the early years of Jacob's disappearance. It's a weird feeling but I go right back to feeling like an 8-year-old kid."

—Amy



- Stay away from things that could hurt you and your family physically and emotionally.
- Tell people what you need.
- Don't isolate yourself.
- You are not alone.

If you feel despondent and don't know where to turn, call or text the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**, call the **National Runaway Safeline** at **800-RUN-AWAY (800-786-2929)**, or contact the **National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline** via text at **62640** or call **800-950-6264**.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

# Some Final Thoughts— Our Stories and Messages of Hope



When we were writing this Guide, we thought it might help you to know that no matter what happens, your life will go on. Things do get better. One way or another, you'll be able to move forward.

Some of us are much older than when our brother or sister went missing. We have been through a lot of emotions over the years and are still in many ways on that same roller coaster that started when our sibling went missing. Things are different now, and so are we. This is not to say it is bad—we have grown, become stronger, and have been able to help others like you understand and cope with what is happening around you. The trauma we have gone through is not linear. We have been living forward over the years—feeling all the feelings yet going on one day at a time. Your journey and your goals, for yourself and your family, will change over time. And as they do, and as you progress, you will discover new goals and work toward them.

Don't give up. Don't lose hope. Keep striving to make a good life for yourself. You will have setbacks, flashbacks, and even what some of us have experienced as PTSD. Life does not always give us what we want, what we hope for, or what we feel we need. But we are here to affirm: You are not alone, and you will get through this. Ask for help and stay connected. There are so many people out there who want to support you throughout this journey.

Here are our stories.

## From Heather, Sister of Molly

I have survived almost 24 years without my little sister. I miss her every day, but especially on the days I know we would have shared together, like my birthday or hers, or when my brother is driving me crazy. The silence of her is deafening. For a long time, I saw myself as a broken person, and today, I still relate and empathize with those who have experienced tragedy and trauma. But my pieces are glued and tied together—sometimes it feels like a light string, and other times by a hard sailor knot.



My journey has been unique and nothing like I expected my life to become when I became an adult. I thought I would travel the world, join the Peace

Corps, and live for myself. Instead, I had a baby at 22 years old and lost my sister at 23. Because of that beautiful baby though, I held on—sometimes by my fingertips—to create a “normal” life for her. These efforts were challenged in 2007 when my father had a stroke and needed full-time assistance from my mother. Suddenly, the investigation of my sister’s abduction and murder fell into my lap. We were no closer to its resolution then than we are now, but I continue to fight for justice in her case.

At my core, I am a teacher. I love children and their authenticity and honesty. It was easy to get behind my parents in creating and developing the Molly Bish Foundation as protecting children was our premise. I carry that legacy on today in my own efforts. I have filed Familial DNA legislation for unresolved cases and continue to advocate for DNA analyses in these types of crimes. I served on the Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance Board and was a part of the Massachusetts Missing Persons Task Force.

I still spearhead the investigation into my sister’s abduction and murder and utilize social media as a platform to share her story, our story.

My daughter is 24 years old now and has a master’s degree in environmental science. She is chasing her dreams in Colorado, riding down mountains on her snowboard, much like my sister loved to do. I am still a teacher because I believe in the power of children shaping our future, and my hope is that they will never have to experience a tragedy like this.

### **Heather’s Message of Hope**

*Welcome to the “club that no one wants to belong to” and I am sorry that you have been put into this position. But I want to assure you that you have people here, near and far, who understand this journey and are there for you. We created this Guide, videos, and connections so that you never have to feel alone, as we did when we first experienced our loss. I remember begging my mom when she visited the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to bring me, and asking her, “What happened to the other kids?” I was terrified about my own fate.*

*I hope you never have to experience that part, because of this, because of us. It is true that you are facing a new “normal” and your life will never be the same. You will carry this with you for the remainder of your life. My hope is that through your own journey, and carrying your own weight, you can see the love that people share and the hope that holds you. Few people can see the world the way that we do, and it is both a curse and a blessing. Focus on the blessings. Hold on to yourself, and who you are, and don’t compromise what is most important to you. My father used to say, “Hope requires perseverance, even against overwhelming odds,” and there were times I would write that down and read it every day to survive this. There is no right or wrong way to survive, it is just our own, and sharing that experience will empower you to continue and possibly empower someone else to continue too. I am still learning on this journey, and it is those who have experienced this same kind of loss who both inspire and reassure me that I will be okay, and you will too.*

## From Kimber, Sister of Mikelle

I was 9 years old when my older sister Mikelle, 11, was kidnapped in 1999. She is still missing. We were typical sisters—best friends and worst enemies. She was perfect, and while I hated it, I secretly looked up to her. I am now a 34-year-old mother to an amazing 11-year-old boy who is my inspiration in so many ways. I work for the National Criminal Justice Training Center, teaching law enforcement about my experience growing up with a missing sibling. I have anxiety and C-PTSD, and it has taken a lot of work in therapy and throughout my life to get to the place I am at today. I am passionate about advocacy and helping other victims of trauma.



Use this QR code to view Kimber's video

I struggle with dissociating and work on it constantly. I strive to be present, to accept and process all my emotions. Because of this, I choose to live passionately, finding joy and beauty in little everyday things. I enjoy amateur photography, taking food and sky pictures the most. I find peace in hiking, painting, meditating, grounding, writing, and yoga. I also love live music and enjoy concerts, and love blasting music in the car or while cleaning at home. I try to surround myself with people who have beautiful souls. I have a small group of friends who are amazing and important to me. I am close with my family and talk to each of them almost daily, even though we are all in different states. I spend a lot of time with my son and love experiencing life together and watching him grow. We love to play board games and find “fun activities” like mini golf and trampoline parks. He is the most important person in my life, and he challenges me to do better daily. All these things help me feel and live fully.

When I had the unique opportunity to meet and work with the other siblings of missing persons, I was shocked at the outcome everyone else had. In some way, every other person had answers. It was comforting in a sense to know that getting answers is very possible. There was also a bit of sadness and almost jealousy that I have gone 25 years now without answers. I would love to say it gets easier, but in reality, it is just a form of acceptance. It is not easy not knowing what happened. I strive to one day get the answers my family and I desire, and I wholeheartedly believe we will. Waiting is difficult. I strongly suggest acceptance and finding where you want to be in life. They say good things come to those who wait, but that to me does not mean “doing nothing.” Thrive while you wait.

### **Kimber's Message of Hope:**

*It is important to know that there is hope. Not just hope to get your sibling back, or to have answers, but hope for life. Living with a missing sibling, no matter the situation or outcome, is difficult. Acceptance is key for having hope. Your experience is yours only. You are different from most others. You are even different from those who also have a missing sibling. That is okay. You are allowed to accept, love, and value yourself, and you are allowed to expect that from others. Trauma experiences do not make you less. Different is not bad. After my sister was kidnapped, I decided the only thing that mattered was finding her. That translated in my young brain to “your needs don't matter” and led me to a lifelong*

*pattern of people pleasing, dissociating, and not feeling deserving or like I mattered. I've done a lot of work in therapy to overcome some of these issues, and it is something I must be mindful of daily. Life is still worth living after trauma. There can still be beauty, happiness, thriving, and growing. It is okay to have hope for these things. Your sibling wants that for you. I want that for you because I know this type of trauma leaves a mark. I have learned that I want to take that and make it something beautiful, and to me there is nothing more beautiful than helping others in a unique way that not everyone can. Remember that hope can mean many things, and that you are capable and allowed to have it.*

## From Carmen and Amy, Sisters of Jacob

We are Carmen and Amy, the sisters of Jacob. Carmen is the youngest sibling of Jacob, who was abducted at age 11 on October 22, 1989, by a masked gunman near our home in St. Joseph, Minnesota. Carmen was 8 years old at the time. Amy is the older sister of Jacob, who was age 13 when Jacob was taken. We also have a brother, Trevor, who was 10 at the time.



Use these QR codes  
to view Carmen and Amy's videos



Jacob's abduction had an enormous impact—not only on our family but on the Midwest as people lost their sense of safety. Our journey searching for Jacob lasted decades. On September 1, 2016, **almost 27 years after his abduction**, Jacob's remains were found, and his abductor was charged with murder. While our family's hearts were shattered by the news, we have continued focusing on being beacons of hope for others.

Becoming parents made us look at things differently. We now know how hard this must have been for our parents. We have struggled between feeling the need to protect our children and not wanting to project our fears onto them. We wanted them to have the childhood that we had before our brother was kidnapped—where we did not have to worry about terrible things happening to kids. There were countless times we felt life was unfair. Why don't our kids get to know their uncle who is not here? Where is he? We wanted our children to know their uncle even though they did not have the opportunity to meet him. Explaining a missing family member to children is incredibly hard and is not something any family should have to do. Jacob is still very much a part of each of our families.

Today, Carmen supervises a case management program supporting people with disabilities to maintain health and live well in their communities. She and her husband Kristian have twin daughters, Maizie and Belle. Amy is a special education teacher and works with high school students with developmental cognitive disabilities to increase their independence. She and her husband Chris have two daughters, Lili and Izzi. Jacob has 6 nieces and nephews who never got to meet him but who carry on his 11 traits.

## Amy and Carmen's Message of Hope:

*Jacob is still very much a part of our families. Our investigation lasted nearly 27 years. Ultimately, we were able to bring him home, give him a proper burial, and honor him with a celebration of his short life. We guess we are grateful that we have our answers, and we were able to close the investigation. However, we wouldn't say we have "closure." Jacob's abduction and murder still impact us every day.*

*Jacob also inspires us every day. He believed in a fair and just world, a world where all children know they are special and deserve to be safe. He believed that people were good. And that family was important. He was full of energy and life. And he lived his life centered around 11 simple traits. To this day, our entire family centers our lives around the 11 simple traits that he valued:*

1. *Be fair*
2. *Be kind*
3. *Be understanding*
4. *Be honest*
5. *Be thankful*
6. *Be a good sport*
7. *Be a good friend*
8. *Be joyful*
9. *Be generous*
10. *Be gentle with others*
11. *Be positive*

*Try to remember these simple traits. Know that there is life after this and you will get through it. Life will be different, but you will find peace, love, and fairness in the world again.*

## From Rysa, Sister of Maayimuna "Muna"

My name is Rysa Lee and my younger sister, Maayimuna N'Diaye, is a survivor of International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA). Maayi was abducted to Mali, West Africa on December 27, 2011, by her father when she was 4 years old. My mother and I were fortunate to be able to go to Mali and return with her in July of 2014. IPCA is unique—most people assume that because the child is still with a parent, they must be okay. It would hurt me so much when people would assume that. It felt as though all the emotions and turmoil my family was going through were erased. Although she was with her father, there were still so many unknowns, and so many unanswered questions. While Maayi's abduction was relatively short, that year and a half was by far the most difficult and longest time of my life. I was 14 when she was taken, and I am 26 when writing this to



Use this QR code to view Rysa's video

you. To this day, I have never felt as empty and distraught as I felt during that time. The fact that my youngest sister was across an ocean and not in the room next to me sleeping every night was incredibly painful. All the giggles, the dance parties, the make-up nights. Gone. I felt alone, angry, and broken. I would distract myself any way possible to forget what was happening around me. I would focus on band and color guard, drown out the world with music, and heavily lean on my friends to cope. However, facing those feelings was unavoidable.

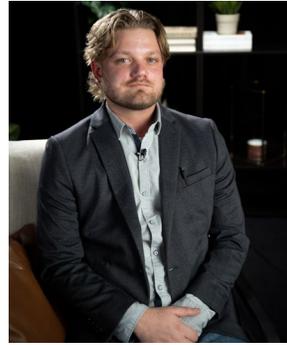
When Maayi came home, life still didn't feel "normal." You would think that everything would return to how it was before, but that wasn't the case. People were still asking questions and the media was still involved. Eventually that went away, but the pain and darkness was still there. What I didn't know then was that healing takes time, and learning how to navigate through my own traumas, as well as my sister's, proved to be the biggest adjustment for me. There would be times where I would lash out at her when she would upset me because I would take it as a personal attack. I didn't realize that her actions stemmed from trauma. As we've both gotten older, I can now see that we had our own ways of processing our pain. Today, Maayi is in high school, and I am working toward starting a new organization to help youth abduction survivors find and build a network of peers who have shared similar experiences. I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to watch my sister grow into a wonderful person, student, and activist. I understand how lucky I am to have her back home with me, and I can attest personally that siblings do come home. Advocacy on IPCA has become extremely near to my heart. I have witnessed first-hand the reunification of siblings and families, and I know healing is possible no matter the outcome.

### **Rysa's Message of Hope:**

*Finding strength in these times may be hard, but you must realize that you are more powerful than you feel right now. You may feel like you have no control over your life, and you are just going through the motions. While feeling that way is okay, I cannot stress enough how important it is to not stay in that head space. Pain can be all-consuming, and you must have a healthy outlet that can, at the very least, distract you from those dark times. One piece of advice I have is to take those emotions and create. Create art, create music, create things for yourself and others, and do what you must do to survive. You have a unique perspective on life after you have gone through something like this, and you can use it to your advantage. Your experiences are special, and you have tools to help others. Have hope and carry it with you through this. Think of hope as a fire that you must feed to prevent the light from going out. It's not easy and you will struggle. The world is going to tell you to give up and move on, but no one can take hope away from you. Siblings do come home, and my family is living proof. I believe in you and want you to believe in yourself too.*

## From Cory, Brother of Dylan

My name is Cory Redwine. I live in Colorado with my wonderful family. I have two beautiful children and an amazing wife. Every day, we learn to love each other a little bit more and live the life that we have made together. Unfortunately, my life has not always been like it is today. In 2012, my younger brother Dylan went to visit his father on a scheduled court-ordered visit for Thanksgiving. Dylan was 12 at the time, and I was 20. That was the last time I saw my brother.



Use this QR code to view Cory's video

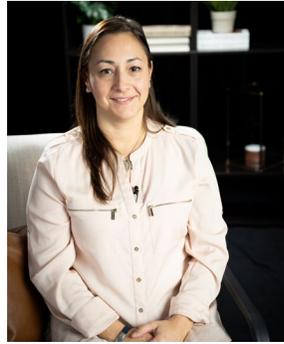
Nine years after Dylan's disappearance, our father, Mark Redwine, was convicted of second-degree murder and child abuse in the death of my brother. Life has been a roller coaster for me and my mother. We spent many years searching for Dylan, and many years pursuing justice for him. The court process was long and arduous and brought up so many emotions for me. But it also made me realize that I am stronger than I thought I was, that my voice and words are powerful, and that my words and actions can not only help me but help others. It was amazing to see so many people of diverse backgrounds and in different fields come together for the sole purpose of helping Dylan. It puts your faith back in people at a time when you question people's motives. And it helps you find a path forward in life. There is no doubt that this has been extremely hard and trying on me and my mother. The truth is that I am no different than other people—I am just going through hugely different things. You never get over this, but you will find that every day is a blessing and that you can find and make your own happiness.

### **Cory's Message of Hope:**

*You are going through something that you never bargained for. There is no doubt that this is probably one of the worst things you can ever imagine happening to you. And as difficult and tiring as it is, you will get through and you will be stronger on the other side. Use your voice—it is your greatest tool. Tell others what you are feeling. You will feel empowered when you do. Ask for help. Say what is on your mind. And be hopeful, because if you lose hope, others will as well. Today, I work with adults who are facing difficult situations in their lives. I feel honored to work with them and know that my experience, as different as it may be to theirs, has given me the wisdom, strength, and insights to help them through challenging times and come out better on the other side as well. As difficult as it may seem right now, there are good things ahead for you. I learned that you must get up and keep moving forward because the world does not stop for you. I found happiness in the simple things in life and joy in knowing that the way we get better is together. And through all of this, I found my voice, a way to heal, become empowered, and see the goodness in the world. Find your happiness.*

## From Sayeh, Sister of Sara

I was born and grew up in Pensacola, Florida. My parents divorced when I was 5 years old. My little sister, Sara, was 3 at the time, and my little brother, Arash, was 1. My mother won custody of us, so we continued to live in Pensacola. Sadly, Child Protective Services was in and out of our home due to physical and mental abuse at the hands of our mother and other family members. She had abused drugs and alcohol to get through the tough times of trying to raise three kids on her own. Unfortunately, she thought having men in our lives would help us. But her boyfriends weren't all good. In fact, one changed our lives forever in the worst way imaginable. As the oldest, I tried to protect my siblings from the hurt as much as I could. Sara was not only my sister, but she was also my best friend. Ray Wike, one of my mother's boyfriends, had been sexually abusing me for a year since I first met him in 1987. On September 22, 1988, in the middle of the night, Ray kidnapped both me (age 8) and Sara (age 6) from our mother's home while we were sleeping. He drove us to a wooded area about 20 minutes away from our apartment. There he sexually assaulted me for hours. Ray then left us both for dead in the woods after cutting both our throats. I pretended to be dead while Ray ran out of the woods and took off. I checked on my sister and knew by the look of her, she wasn't going to answer. I had to get help, so I started walking out of the woods and waved down a couple on the road. They rushed me to a nearby store and called 911. I survived; my sister did not. From that day forward, I felt guilty for surviving and had dreams of saving my sister from this nightmare. I knew who did this to us and was determined to bring her killer to justice. I can't imagine having to wonder where my sister is and who did this to her. However, it doesn't take the pain and heartache away. You learn to live with it and fight to keep their memory alive.



Use this QR code  
to view Sayeh's video

Today, I am the parent of a wonderful son. Being a parent is both amazing and terrifying at the same time. To think you are now responsible for life other than yours. I became extra vigilant about people and surroundings. I talk to my child about possible situations he could be faced with and won't allow him to do certain things like sleepovers. And I have learned through all of this that I am stronger than I thought—and you are as well. When I was older, I became a State Trooper in New York, working with and helping children who, like me, faced the most horrible situation you can imagine. I am proud of the work I have done, and even prouder of all the children I have worked with and supported. The story never ends, but it can have a better ending than you think.

### **Sayeh's Message of Hope:**

*I am proof there is hope and you can survive. If your brother or sister is out there, keep hope alive, believe one day they will come home and you will have answers. Some, like me, may get answers that your sibling will not be brought home. You will not understand why this happened. For myself, I finally found peace when I stopped asking why and learned to forgive myself for surviving. Please find*

*your support, whether it's your family or your chosen family. Get counseling. Life feels broken and it will be difficult to try and put the pieces back together. Self-care is a "must" and you need to take care of yourself because you are important. Remember to be kind to yourself. And remember that it's okay not to be okay. You will have good days and bad days. I found strength knowing my sister would want me to fight back and help prevent others from having to go through what our family experienced.*

## From Zack, Brother of Jessika

I was in my second semester of college, 3,000 miles away from my home, when I first learned that my youngest sister, Jessika, had run away.

She was only 15, the baby of the family, and they told me she had left a note. She was sorry for getting a bad grade, and that she wanted to "find herself" in Seattle. It seemed like such a small thing at first, a childish thing. Kids run away sometimes—heck, I had run away before—but they come back, right? That's when my parents told me she had already been missing for 3 days, and that was when I really felt that first explosion of mixed emotions—emotions that it would take years for me to really understand. Some feelings were familiar, like fear and anger. Some were subtle and toxic, like guilt and jealousy. All of them were strong—strong enough to steal away every good thought and force me into hiding away.

It was 108 days until my sister was recovered through a police sting operation and my family learned the awful truth that she had been trafficked for sex. Her recovery in many ways was just the beginning, because in so many ways the broken person who came home was not the little girl who had left.

In the years since, my family and I have fought, both for my sister and for the children across this country and the world who are at risk of having their innocence stolen as she had hers. We have joined organizations such as Team Hope and NCMEC, championed new laws to protect children from online predators alongside other amazing families, and, very importantly, we have all in our own time committed to therapy and self-care. For all the hardship and the pain that followed for the many years since, I could not be prouder of my family for everything they have done and the resilience they have shown. And I am happy to say that after a long time, I'm proud of myself, too.

### **Zack's Message of Hope:**

*Don't forget to love yourself. So often as a sibling of a tragedy, we will try so hard to compensate for the pain that the rest of our family is feeling. Maybe your parents, usually so strong, need you as a shoulder to cry on now. Maybe you have other siblings who are scared, and you have become their comfort. Maybe it feels like if somehow you can do it all perfectly enough, things will be okay. Life has made you grow up too fast, and the world is a heavy thing when we try and balance it all on ourselves. So don't*



Use this QR code to view Zack's video

*forget to love yourself, too. Be as kind to yourself as you are to your family, be as understanding with yourself as you would a friend. Through this you will become a healthier, stronger person, and the world will be a much lighter place on those shoulders. You might even find it beautiful again, in its own way.*

## From the 2010 Authors

While Amy, Carmen, and Heather joined us in 2024 to create this updated version of the Guide, we want to make sure you also have the messages of hope that were written from other siblings who wrote the 2010 first edition. **You can read their stories and see more pictures of them here:** <https://familysurvival.amberadvocate.org>.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# Words You May Not Know



You may hear some strange or unfamiliar words when your brother or sister is missing. Don't be afraid to ask a trusted adult or older sibling what these words mean. You can also look them up online—just be careful to use trusted dictionary sites rather than random articles that come up when you search on a word or term. Talk to your family advocate, a law enforcement officer, or school counselor if you're still not clear.

**Here are some of the words you may want help with.**

**Abduction.** To carry a person off by force; to kidnap; to lure away.

**Abnormal.** Unusual or unexpected, something that is not normal.

**Accustomed.** Something that is familiar, something that you are used to.

**Advocate.** Someone who supports or stands up for another person or cause.

**Affirming.** Providing emotional support or encouragement.

**Antagonistic.** Showing or feeling opposition or hostility toward someone or something.

**Anxiety.** A feeling of worry or uneasiness.

**Arduous.** Something that is difficult and tiring.

**Capitalize.** To benefit from or to get the most out of.

**Confidential.** Something that is secret or private.

**Depression.** The state of being sad; people suffering from depression may feel sad, have no energy, and feel as if they have no value.

**Designated Liaison.** Someone your family chooses to be the spokesperson when talking to a specific person in the media, law enforcement, or other agency/group.

**Disassociation.** Being disconnected or separated from something or someone.

**Eliminate.** To get rid of, to remove.

**Empathetic.** To be concerned, compassionate, or understanding,

**Exploit/exploited.** Used unfairly; taken advantage of.

**Inappropriate.** Not suitable or fitting; an incorrect action.

**Intimidated/intimidating.** Frightening or threatening.

**Invasive.** Tending to intrude, as in invading privacy.

**Journal.** A diary you keep to write down your thoughts, feelings, and what happened that day.

**Judicial Process.** The procedures and actions undertaken by and in the court.

**Law Enforcement.** The people who make sure the law is followed. For example, the police, detectives, sheriffs, and the FBI.

**Leery.** To be cautious of something or someone.

**Linear Process.** Going from one stage to another in an orderly series of steps.

**Lured.** To tempt someone to do something or go somewhere.

**Media.** A form of communication, information, or entertainment. For example, television, radio, newspapers, news websites, and social media.

**Normal/normalcy.** Regular or usual.

**Obsessively.** To be overly preoccupied, something you can't stop thinking about or doing.

**Perpetrator.** The person who commits the abduction, the person who is guilty.

**Polygraph.** A lie detection instrument used by law enforcement to see if someone is telling the truth.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/PTSD.** A mental and behavioral disorder that occurs from experiencing a traumatic event.

**Sensationalized.** To present in a way that is shocking or exciting.

**Sibling.** A brother or sister.

**Suspect.** A person the police think may have committed the crime.

**Thrive.** To flourish, succeed, blossom.

**Traumatic.** Emotionally disturbing or distressing.

**Vulnerable.** Exposed or open to being easily hurt; you can be physically vulnerable or emotionally vulnerable.

# NOTES & SKETCHES

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# Where To Find More Help



Who do you go to when you need someone to listen to you? In the past, you may have turned to your parents or brothers and sisters for support. But they may not be able to help you right now because—like you—they are trying to cope with the loss of your sibling.

If that's the case, there are others you can turn to for help and support: your trusted friends, family members, and relatives. And if you need to speak to someone else, there are professionals ready to listen, who genuinely want to hear what you're going through, and have resources to help.

- The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** has trained crisis workers who will listen empathetically to ensure that you feel safe and help identify options and information about mental health services in your area. Your call is confidential and free. Call or text 988. The line is open 24/7. You can access their fact sheet [here](#).
- The **National Runaway Safeline** operates 24/7 and is available for a child who has run away or for the family of that child. Staff are available to listen and offer confidential, non-directive, and non-judgmental support that can guide the caller through solutions to improve their situation. Call 800-RUN-AWAY (800-786- 2929). You can access their fact sheet [here](#).

Additional resources are also available to give you and your family information and support. Some of these resources target parents as their initial audience, so you may want to share the following list with your parents or other trusted adults.

- The U.S. Department of Justice manages the **AMBER Alert** program, an early warning system to help find abducted children. AMBER Alerts are one of the tools that law enforcement can use to find an abducted child.
- The **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children** (NCMEC) was established in 1984 to help prevent child abduction and sexual exploitation; find missing children; and assist victims of child abduction and sexual exploitation, their families, and professionals. To access their resources, call NCMEC at 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678) or visit their website at [www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org).

- **Team HOPE** (Help Offering Parents Empowerment) is a mentoring and support program for families of missing children. Made up of parent volunteers, Team HOPE provides mentoring services, counseling, and emotional support for parents and other family members. Volunteers can be reached at 866-305-HOPE (4673).
- **Missing Child Clearinghouses** provide resources for missing children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, and the Netherlands have a missing child clearinghouse. These clearinghouses are state agencies often housed within, or operationally connected to, the state police, highway patrol, or a top-level law enforcement agency.
- **Black and Missing Foundation** (BAMFI) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to bring awareness to missing persons of color, provide vital resources and tools to missing persons' families and friends, and educate the minority community on personal safety. BAMFI was founded in 2008 by experts in the fields of law enforcement and public relations to help bring awareness to and find those missing from our communities. BAMFI creates public awareness campaigns for public safety and provides parents and loved ones of missing persons with a forum for spreading the word of their disappearance, with pictures and profiles of missing individuals. BAMFI also utilizes a variety of media platforms, including print, television, radio, and social media, to help locate those who are missing.

Other materials you may find helpful include:

- **Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials** available from the Office for Victims of Crime in the event you must navigate the court process.
- Interactive and educational child witness materials available through the **Center for Justice Innovation**.
- **Finding Sierra**, a book by Derrica Wilson, is about a girl named Sierra Knight who has not been seen for 15 days. Her disappearance has rocked the city, bringing the public together as they strive to bring Sierra home. With the help of Officer Carlise's fellow detectives, and the support of the community, they gather evidence and pursue leads in hopes that their efforts will solve the case. Finding Sierra brings to light the importance of community, comradery, and internet safety. Readers will get a glimpse into the very real dangers of entertaining strangers online and what we can do to prevent involvement in harmful situations.

You are also encouraged to look at the following publications, produced by the National Alliance for Children's Grief, to help through this challenging time:

- **Responding to Change and Loss**
- **Holiday Toolkit: Supporting Children Who Are Grieving During the Season of Family**

# Links Mentioned in This Document



The following links are embedded in the electronic version of this document:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

AMBER Alert Program: [amberalert.ojp.gov](https://amberalert.ojp.gov)

American Hospice Foundation: [americanhospice.org](https://americanhospice.org)

- Coping With Holidays and Family Celebrations: [americanhospice.org/working-through-grief/coping-with-holidays-and-family-celebrations](https://americanhospice.org/working-through-grief/coping-with-holidays-and-family-celebrations)

Black and Missing Foundation (BAMFI): [blackandmissinginc.com](https://blackandmissinginc.com)

Center for Justice Innovation: [innovatingjustice.org/child-witness-support](https://innovatingjustice.org/child-witness-support)

Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials: [ovc.ojp.gov/child-victims-and-witnesses-support](https://ovc.ojp.gov/child-victims-and-witnesses-support)

Family Advocacy Outreach Network: [missingkids.org/gethelpnow/support/faon](https://missingkids.org/gethelpnow/support/faon)

Family Survival Guide website: [familysurvival.amberadvocate.org](https://familysurvival.amberadvocate.org)

Finding Sierra: [findingsierra.com](https://findingsierra.com)

Findtreatment.gov: [findtreatment.gov/locator](https://findtreatment.gov/locator)

Missing Child Clearinghouses: [missingkids.org/gethelpnow/clearinghouses](https://missingkids.org/gethelpnow/clearinghouses)

National Alliance for Children's Grief

- Holiday Toolkit: Supporting Children Who Are Grieving During the Season of Family: [indd.adobe.com/view/c3379af8-b35d-4ea3-aa85-92d43073ecf6](https://indd.adobe.com/view/c3379af8-b35d-4ea3-aa85-92d43073ecf6)
- Responding to Change and Loss: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/c213f5cc-0e37-4c6d-b1b9-1aacd7a10aa7>

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC): [missingkids.org/home](https://missingkids.org/home)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): [nctsn.org](https://nctsn.org)

- Supporting Children and Teens During This Holiday Season: [nctsn.org/resources/supporting-children-and-teens-during-this-holiday-season](https://nctsn.org/resources/supporting-children-and-teens-during-this-holiday-season)

National Runaway Safeline: [1800runaway.org](https://1800runaway.org)

- National Runaway Safeline fact sheet: [nationalrunawaysafeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NRS-Fact-Sheet-2021.pdf](https://nationalrunawaysafeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NRS-Fact-Sheet-2021.pdf)

NetSmartzKids: [netsmartzkids.org](https://netsmartzkids.org)

Team HOPE (Help Offering Parents Empowerment): [missingkids.org/gethelpnow/support/teamhope](https://missingkids.org/gethelpnow/support/teamhope)

# A Message to Parents and Older Siblings



As the brothers and sisters who helped update this Guide, we know how important it is for all children, regardless of their age, to receive the support they need at this difficult time. When a brother or sister is missing, younger children face many of the same confusing feelings and worries that older children do, even if they can't put them into words. Having some activities relating to the experience can help younger kids process their feelings.

This section of the Guide was designed to help kids of all ages actively express themselves. The activities can be used by children who are too young to read or understand our words, children who choose not to read the Guide right now, or children who want to engage in some other type of activity. To ensure the activities are appropriate for children dealing with grief and loss, we relied on two organizations to help with this section. The American Hospice Foundation and the National Alliance for Children's Grief allowed us to use many of their materials and activities. The activity sheets can be torn out of the guide and stapled together so younger kids have ownership and a "book" of their own. Children and parents can choose activities that are age appropriate.

Please remember that we have selected activities that would have been helpful to us and our younger siblings at the time our brother or sister went missing. Ultimately, parents need to decide what is best for their children. These suggestions and activities cannot take the place of professional help children may need at a time like this.

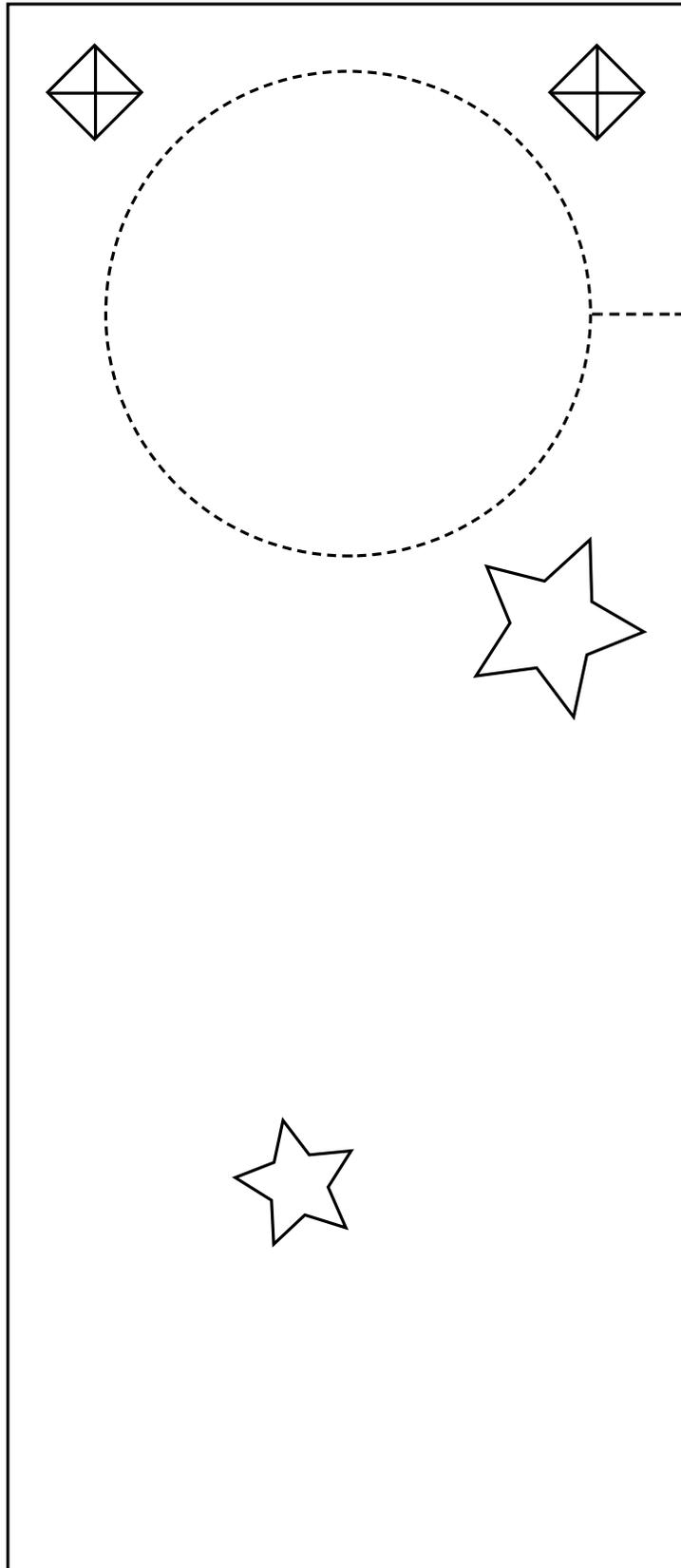
*The activities on the following pages include materials adapted from numerous publications and are used with permission from the American Hospice Foundation ([americanhospice.org](http://americanhospice.org)) and the National Alliance for Children's Grief ([nacg.org](http://nacg.org)). All rights reserved.*

# How am I feeling today?



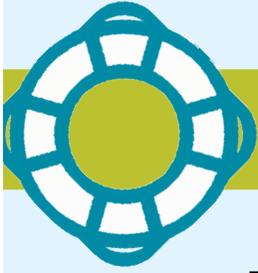
Adapted with permission from materials developed by the National Alliance for Children's Grief.

**Color this door knob sign, cut it out, and hang it on  
Your Personal Space.**



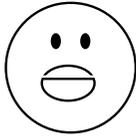
**Create a collage that reminds you of your brother or sister.  
Try using pictures and words from magazines.**

Adapted with permission from "Remembering You: A Book of Memories for the Teenager Who Has Had a Loved One Die." American Hospice Foundation. 2003.



# Hard Days Safety Plan

**My plan for hard days.** When I need to take a break...



**2 ways to tell:**

1

2



**3 places to go:**

1

2

3



**4 things to do:**

1

2

3

4

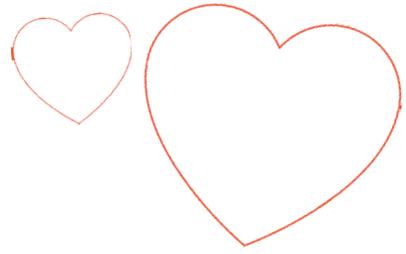
My name \_\_\_\_\_

My grown-up \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted with permission from materials developed by the National Alliance for Children's Grief.

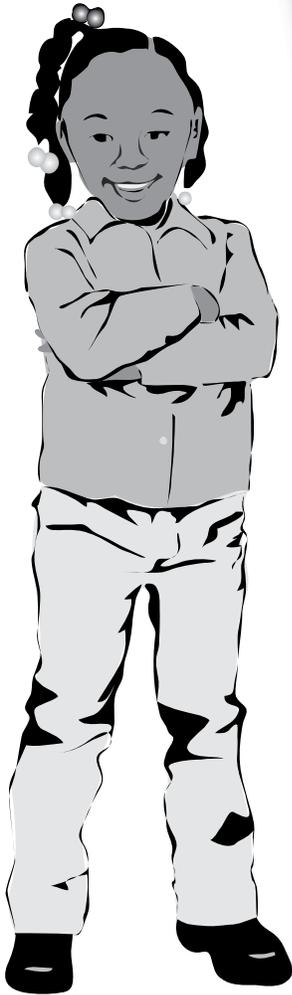
# WHO DO YOU MISS?

It's common to miss people throughout the day, even people we see all of the time. Who are you missing today?



Adapted with permission from materials developed by the National Alliance for Children's Grief.

**There are a few things I want to tell you.  
Here is a letter to my brother or sister.**

A large, tilted sheet of paper with horizontal lines, intended for writing a letter.

Adapted with permission from "Remembering You: A Book of Memories for the Teenager Who Has Had a Loved One Die." American Hospice Foundation. 2003.

## Here are some questions I would like to ask.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

I worry most about:

---

---



What helps me the most is:

---

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Adapted with permission from "All About Me." American Hospice Foundation. 2000.

# Things to do instead of hurting.

Rip up old newspapers or magazines and throw them around.

**Kick pillows piled up against the wall.**

Stomp around or walk briskly until you feel better.

**Yell a karate yell and beat on a Nerf ball.**

*Make a list of everything that makes you mad, and rank them according to how mad they make you, starting with those that make you the maddest.*

**Work a wad of clay until it is softened and you feel better.**

Make balls of the torn paper and throw them into a trash can and see how many "baskets" you can make.

**Draw a picture of what or who is making you mad and stomp on it.**

Count to 10 loudly .....and slowly.

**Shout your anger into a tape recorder, play it back, and hear your angry voice.**



**Make a "MAD" face in the mirror.**



Pop plastic packing material "bubbles."

**Take a shower.**  
(It can be a paper shower.)

**Pull weeds vigorously.**



Throw a Nerf ball against the wall.

*Write an angry letter and tear it up into little pieces.*

Find someone to talk to.

Punch a beanbag chair, mattress, or a pillowcase filled with old clothes or paper.

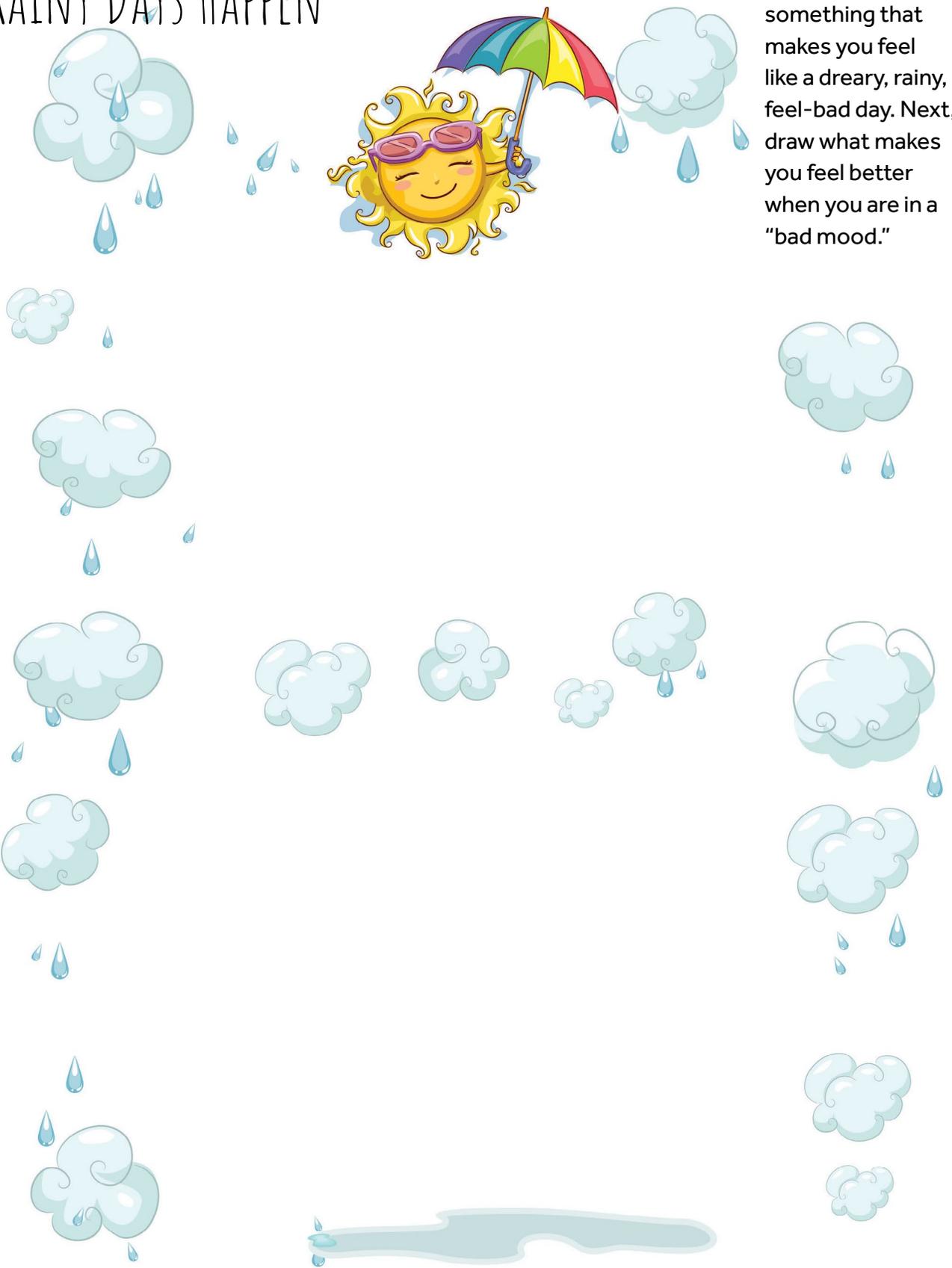
**Blow into a paper bag and pop it.**

Do an angry dance.

Adapted with permission from "Grief at School, Resource Manual." American Hospice Foundation. 2000.

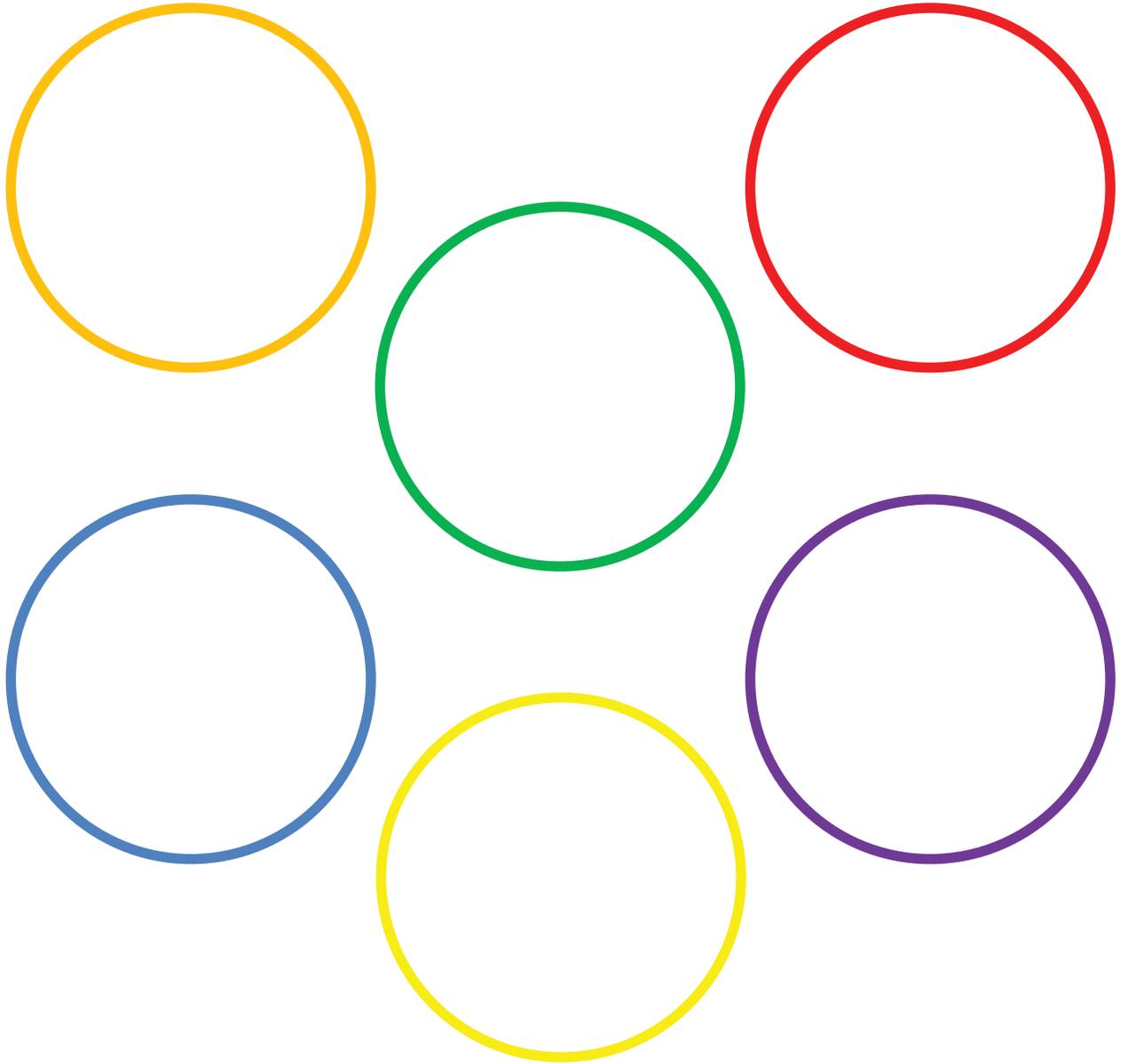
# RAINY DAYS HAPPEN

Draw a picture of something that makes you feel like a dreary, rainy, feel-bad day. Next, draw what makes you feel better when you are in a "bad mood."



Adapted with permission from "When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book." National Alliance for Children's Grief. 2020.

# WHAT ARE YOUR MOODS?



## **Some emotions to choose from:**

amused - angry - annoyed - ashamed - awkward - bittersweet - blah - bored - calm - cheerful -  
confused - cranky - depressed - disappointed - energetic - enraged - excited - exhausted - flirty  
- frustrated - giddy - gloomy - grateful - grumpy - happy - hopeful - indifferent - irritated - jealous  
- lazy - lonely - loved - mad - moody - nervous - numb - optimistic - peaceful - pessimistic -  
relaxed - restless - rushed - sad - satisfied - shocked - silly - sleepy - smart - sneaky - stressed -  
surprised - thankful - touched - uncomfortable - weird

Adapted with permission from "When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book." National Alliance for Children's Grief. 2020.

# WHAT COMFORTS YOU?

Everyone likes to feel comfortable. But sometimes we have to work to feel comfort. When you are having a hard day, what are the things you like to do to comfort yourself? Maybe wrap up in a blanket and watch your favorite movie or spend time with your best friend? Have you ever thought of what comfort feels like, tastes like, or sounds like?

*Some people may think comfort feels like a warm hug, the first day of spring, or having lots of energy.*

**What does comfort feel like to you?**

*Some people may think comfort tastes like marshmallows, ice cream, chocolate, or a snow cone.*

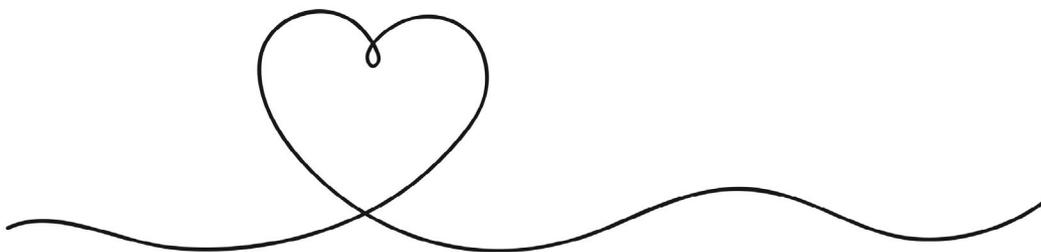
**What does comfort taste like to you?**

*Some people may think comfort sounds like a stream, walks on the sand, music, or the quiet.*

**What does comfort sound like to you?**

*Some people think if comfort could speak, it would say everything will be OK. You can do it, I'm here for you.*

**If comfort could talk, what would it say to you?**



Adapted with permission from "When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book." National Alliance for Children's Grief. 2020.

# CALMING EXERCISE

Color in the flowers and the candles. Keep breathing in and out a few times and see how your body feels. Next time you get upset, remember this exercise to help calm your body down.

**Step 1:**  
Close your eyes  
and take a deep  
breath in - just like  
you are smelling  
beautiful  
flowers.

**Step 2:**  
Now blow all the  
air out - just like  
you are blowing out  
birthday  
candles.



Additional Coloring:



Adapted with permission from "When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book." National Alliance for Children's Grief. 2020.

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