

# A LIFE AFTER CAPTIVITY

**Reintegration guide**



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## CONTACT WITH OFFICIALS

## THERE IS USUALLY A DE-BRIEF OR PERIOD OF ‘DECOMPRESSING’ AFTER YOU’VE BEEN RELEASED.

The de-briefing will be held without any family members present, which will be conducted by experts and supported by trauma specialists. The aim of this is to give you a period of readjustment and, depending on the circumstances of your kidnap, you may also be expected to relive what you’ve been through in order to gather information for the government or police.

During this time of ‘de-brief’, do what feels right for you. If you wish to have some contact with your family, do not be afraid to ask for it. You don’t have to feel isolated from your family.

You may also feel as if you are still in a form of captivity – you will probably be in a safe house rather than at home, and you might have limited access to your loved ones. You could find yourself having a number of different de-briefs depending upon how many teams were involved in your release. It can be a difficult time because you will be recalling what you have been through – former hostages

have also found the process to have a therapeutic effect and recognised that this is the start of their reintegration.

**Take it at your own pace-** don’t be rushed and don’t be afraid to ask to take a break.

It is important that you gel with the person who is carrying out the de-brief – if you don’t, do not be afraid to ask for them to be changed.

Other former hostages have described this period as being ‘surreal’ and have experienced many emotions, such as wondering if they have actually been released; being overwhelmed by the attention they receive; and guilt if they have had to leave other hostages behind.

## CONTACT WITH OFFICIALS (CONTINUED)

You may also experience some or all of the following:– sleep disturbance, flashbacks, nightmares or intrusive thoughts about what happened, you may be hyper-vigilant, feel angry, have a heightened sense of emotionality, and you may cry more than normal and try to avoid doing things related to what has happened.

### **These emotions are all normal**

reactions to what you and your family have been through. It will take time for your mind and body to recover.

As a family member, you may want your loved one to return to you immediately but we know from experience that it is beneficial for them to have a period of de-brief after they are released.

The de-brief is an opportunity for the police to gather information relating to the kidnap that might help in a prosecution. It is important for this to happen as soon as your loved one returns so the information is fresh in their minds.

If done sensitively, this can also be helpful for the returning hostage because it gives them an opportunity to start talking about their experience.

Personally, I found the process both mentally and physically tiring. I was relieved to have some time on my own at the end of each day to process what the day had brought up for me. Having my family there all the time would have been too much of a distraction. It was enough for me to know that my family knew I was safe – and I knew they no longer had to worry about me.

As a family member, it's really important you give your loved one the space they need. This is the best support you can give in the first few days after they are released. In fact, you will all need time to come to terms with what has happened and accept that you are entering a new phase of your lives.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

## **FOR THE FORMER HOSTAGE, THIS IS THE POINT WHEN YOU WILL BEGIN TO REBUILD A NEW LIFE WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

Sometimes your family won't know the best way to support you – what to say, what to do. This is a new experience for all of you. You won't always know what to do. And what might be helpful for you might be unhelpful for your family – and the other way around. This is normal. It is very likely that your relationships will change, because you have changed.

You may find that you need help re-negotiating your relationship with your partner/children. You have all been forced apart under difficult and stressful circumstances and you will all have changed. It is good if you can talk about what has happened and how you are all feeling when you feel comfortable to do so. However, you may not want to and your family may be afraid to ask for fear of upsetting you. Some hostages have never spoken in depth to their family or friends about their experience, as it can be a very painful and emotive subject for them. You will need to be patient and understanding with each other.

If you feel you need someone to talk to outside the family, Hostage US can help you. You don't need to go through this on your own.

Your family may experience some resentment from young children because you have not been around, you may have missed birthdays or Christmas and they are now expected to share mommy/daddy. These are all natural feelings, which need to be recognised and can be worked through.

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS (CONTINUED)**

As a family member, try to accept that your loved one may need lots of rest because they might not have slept soundly for weeks, months or years. This could mean that they will want to sleep more than is usual and at different times of the day and night. Family members might feel this way, too. It will take time for everyone to reestablish a normal sleep pattern.

Family members can support former hostages by acting as gatekeepers to manage what could become an overwhelming experience. You can also help by encouraging simple activities that are not too physically or emotionally taxing, such as going for a walk or pottering around the garden. It is advisable to create some kind of routine and structure for the returning hostage without being too regimented.

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## BEING KIDNAPPED IS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYONE

Some former hostages may experience stress-related anxiety. A minority will go on to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – but this is rare. With the right support early on, most hostages are able to overcome this.

It is important for you to give yourself and your brain time to heal. You may find that your concentration levels are not as good as they were, you might find it difficult to process conversations and to retain information. You might not notice this as you will be trying to get back to normal as quickly as possible. Family and friends may see this first – listen to them and trust their judgment.

This is normal-be kind to yourself, give yourself time and look out for yourself.

As a family member, you may be shocked by the changes you see in your loved one. If they have been away for a long time, they will probably have lost a lot of weight and their appearance will be different. This can be upsetting and distressing to see. You might feel helpless. But just by being there to support, care and listen is all you need to do.

## HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

## **YOU COULD BE MALNOURISHED; HAVE MUSCLE WASTAGE, IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO EXERCISE; OR HAVE PICKED UP A VIRUS OR INFECTION- POSSIBLY REMAINING UNDETECTED**

You may have been sexually abused or physically tortured and you may have experienced long periods of isolation.

If you haven't been offered a medical examination when you are released, make an appointment with your GP and ask for a thorough health check. You might also want to discuss a healthy eating plan and a sensible fitness regime to bring you back to full health. Do not ignore any persisting symptoms whatever they are –

get help.

There are all sorts of things we do to help us cope with everyday stress and help us to relax, such as going for a run or having a glass of wine. In moderation, these are healthy responses for anyone, but done to excess they can become detrimental. Keep an eye on yourself and each other – you will know if things don't feel right. Seek help.

## WORK RELATED ISSUES

## MANY RETURNING HOSTAGES STRUGGLE TO KNOW WHEN AND HOW BEST TO RETURN TO WORK

Some may want a long period of rehabilitation, while others might want to go back to work straight away. This is a personal choice and everyone is different. Try to pace yourself and take notice of how you feel mentally and physically.

When you do return to work, it is advisable to request a 'return to work interview', where you can talk through issues, such as the number of hours you will work, the types of tasks you will do and any challenges you might face, such as levels of concentration, dealing with stress, or having to travel overseas (possibly to the same country where you were kidnapped).

When you have returned to work, try not to put too much pressure on yourself in order to appear that you are coping well. If you are having problems, talk them through with your manager as soon as possible so you can find a way through them.

You might also find it difficult or awkward to rebuild relationships with your colleagues. They won't understand what you have been through and might find it difficult to know what to say or how to help you. Even those that are genuinely supportive might end up saying or doing the wrong thing.

If you need help in your return to work, Hostage US can provide support to both you and your employer.

If you feel you need a longer break before returning to work or may have been advised to take extended leave, you might want to consider doing something else that can keep you occupied, give you some structure and build up your confidence. This might include voluntary work, a part-time course, or a new hobby. This can give you a sense of purpose and a routine.

**REBUILDING YOUR LIFE**

## REBUILDING YOUR LIFE DOES TAKE TIME

There is no quick fix and you will do it at your own pace and in your own way. Be patient and kind to yourself.

Try to establish some kind of routine, order or pattern to your everyday life.

Seek support when you need it. You don't have to travel this journey on your own.

Don't do anything for the first six weeks and don't make any major decisions in the first six months. Be prepared for the long haul.

All the hostages I have spoken to, myself included, experienced an emotional rollercoaster for the first year at least but we all learned to ride it and not be frightened by it.

You will build a new life for yourself and your family and most definitely in time your life will become easier.

Your experience will become a memory and you have the capacity to control that

memory. There may be times when these memories are triggered. This is natural and to be expected. You can allow them to come out of their box – and you can also put them back in there.

## CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Hostage US keeps an up-dated reading list of books, reports and guides on its website:  
<http://www.hostageus.org/resources/>

Hostage US has a wealth of experience, but we are always learning. We would appreciate your feedback so we can continue to improve the support and advice we provide.

Please send your comments and experiences to [info@hostageus.org](mailto:info@hostageus.org)

Hostage US has also produced a guide 'Handling the media and social media' and 'A Life After Captivity: reintegration guide', both are available on our website.

Hostage US has a strict privacy policy; any information you provide will not be shared with anyone without your permission.

For more information about Hostage US or to find out how we can help, please visit our website: [www.hostageus.org](http://www.hostageus.org)

This information is provided for guidance only.

Hostage US 24/7 toll-free helpline 888-284-1010

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