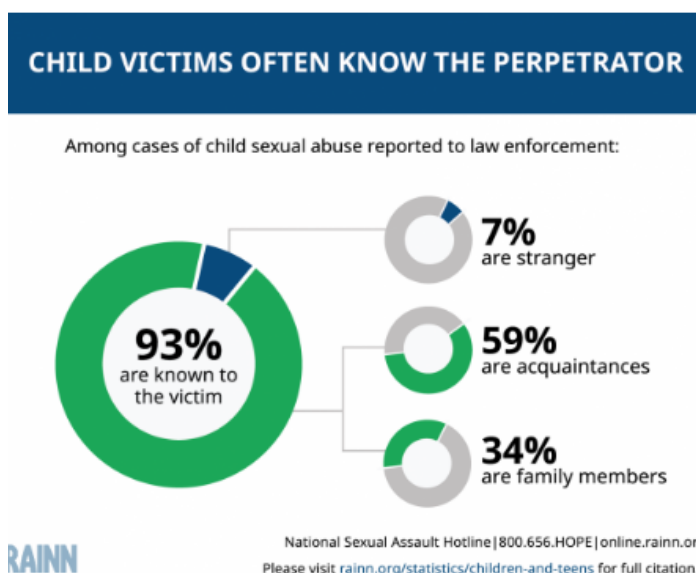




## Trauma During the Holidays

For many, the holiday season is filled with family, fun, traveling, and gifts. However, the holiday season can also be a difficult time for those that have experienced trauma through child sexual abuse. 93% of child sexual abuse happens by someone the child knows, and of those children, 34% of them are abused by a family member. The holiday season can be a very hectic time for families and can bring up a lot of painful memories, anxiety, or even place children in dangerous situations. In this newsletter, we want to highlight how the holidays can impact someone who has been sexually abused and provide some tips on what can be done to help during this season.

### The Impact



Triggers are a sensory reminder of a traumatic event. They can be a visual sensation, a noise, a physical sensation, or even the temperature can remind a person of the trauma. Triggers do not have to be specific and can be generalized to any characteristic that resembles a traumatic event. Triggers are often associated with things such as time of day, the anniversary of the event, or even holidays. A person can experience trauma triggers throughout the holidays because holidays are often a stressful and hectic time for many. Many families are often traveling over the holidays, and usually, children are placed in a new environment to celebrate the holidays or have extended family over to celebrate.

Additionally, the holidays can expose someone who has been sexually abused by a close friend or family member to dangerous situations. Due to the stigma surrounding sexual abuse and many other factors, many often do not report sexual abuse to the authorities or disclose what had happened to their parents. About 3 out of 4 sexual assaults that take place are unreported for several reasons, including a fear of retaliation from the family or perpetrator if they tell someone about what had happened. Other times sexual assaults or abuse have been disclosed to the parents; however, the parents do not believe them or support them. Children who had not reported the abuse or were not believed when it was reported are often placed in dangerous situations during the holidays. There is a chance of repeated abuse by the perpetrator, or they may have to see their perpetrator again.



# Some tips for parents and providers on how to support children who have been sexually abused during the holiday season

- For those traveling and having to go through airport security, having to participate in a pat-down may be triggering for some. It is possible to request a private screening from someone of the same gender. See RAINN's article [Airport Security for Survivors](#) in the resources section for more tips on how to get through airport security.
- Preparing for others to ask about holiday plans. This can be a very stressful and rather personal question for those that have experienced trauma. Having a simple answer prepared can help elevate the stress from people asking about holiday plans.
- The holidays not only disrupt our daily routine, but they often disrupt eating and sleeping habits. Proper nutrition and exercise have many benefits to mental health, and it is essential to be aware of how the holidays can impact one's diet.
- Recognize that it is okay not to be overly excited and happy about the holidays. It's okay to take a break and practice taking time for self-care throughout the holiday season.



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