



## **Surviving The High Holidays: Jewish Survivors of Incest and Childhood Sexual Abuse**

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For many the high holidays are a time of year filled with wonderful memories of families getting together. Unfortunately, for survivors of childhood abuse (emotional, physical and sexual abuse), this can be a time for painful memories to reemerge. When this happens a survivor may find it safer to retreat, then to participate in holiday functions. It is important for each individual survivors to find what works best for them to stay emotionally healthy. It is vitally important each person to be kind to themselves with what ever decisions you make regarding holiday services. We all need to respect their decisions, especially if they decide not to participate.

If you know someone who is a survivor of childhood abuse, it might be a good idea to check up on them a few times over the holidays. Make sure survivors have invitations to meals. If they say no, it is important to let them know they can always change their mind and come at the last minute.

The holidays often mean that families get together, routines are changed, there is also the added stress of cleaning and preparing meals. These issues alone can be extremely stress producing. Unfortunately the reality is that there are parents who are already inclined to use their children as an outlet for emotions and urges. They are even more likely to do so when under the pressure of increased anxiety. Many survivors of childhood abuse report that they were abuse became more intense around and over holidays.

This is written as a reminder to all survivors: **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

It is not uncommon for symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) to emerge after times of relative remission and/or intensify in those already struggling. You may experience an increase in disturbing thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks.

Thoughts of self-harm, even suicide, may be an issue. The important thing to remember is these feelings are about the past, that the abuse is over, and that it is of utmost importance for you to be kind to and gentle with yourself.

Over the years we have spoken to many adult survivors who find it very painful to even consider going to services at a synagogue. This is OK. Someday you may feel different, but if the pain is too intense, it is important that you do things that can be healing, that you set boundaries to do what feels safe for you.

One survivor shared that she felt uncomfortable not doing anything for the high holidays, so she'd rent the movies that had a Jewish theme to them. Another survivor would invite other Jewish Survivors over to her home and they would create a ritual that seemed healing for their services.

It's important to remember that whatever works for you is ok --know that you are not alone, not wrong, not bad for having second and third and forth thoughts about how to celebrate and if to celebrate the holidays. Look into yourself and see what you need, then do what you can to do it, and be kind to yourself for needing to make these adjustments.

Today Rabah  
for Surviving!

