

HAS SOMEONE YOU KNOW GONE MISSING?

A reference guide

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It can be a traumatic experience when someone you know goes missing. This factsheet is intended as a starting point to help you by setting out a list of things to do, or to think about, when you first realise that someone has gone missing.

The First Hour

It may be difficult to know what to do when someone goes missing; however, it is critical that you take immediate action, especially if the person could be in danger.

- Search their home or the place the person was last seen in case the missing person is hiding or has been injured.
- Look out for any messages, notes or clues that may suggest where they are.
- Contact family members, friends and their work or school to check that they are actually missing.

It may be helpful to keep a record of what you have done, every phone conversation you have had and anything that seems out of the ordinary or suspicious.

However, do not delay – if you have established that someone is missing, report them as missing to your local police immediately.

Remember, you do not have to wait 24 hours before reporting someone as missing to the police.

Provide detailed information to the police

The police may take full details straight away or they may take some basic details to help them carry out initial enquiries and come back to you to obtain more detailed information if the person has still not returned. This is because most people return or are found quite quickly. Information that the police will find helpful includes:

- Physical description of the missing person, including details of birthmarks, scars, tattoos, glasses and details of what clothes they are wearing, if known

- Any medication that they are taking and any medical issues they may have (including physical and mental illnesses such as depression). Let the police know if they have taken their medication with them.
- What their last known movements were.
- Any other information which may suggest they are vulnerable.
- Anything unusual or out of character – think about the normal routine of the person who is missing and what they were doing at the time they went missing
- What you think the missing person may have taken with them. Tell the police if the missing person has not taken something with them that they would normally have with them (for example, keys, mobile phone, purse, etc). Check to see if they have taken their passport (if they have one).
- Details of the missing person's mobile phone number and network operator (if known).
- Details and information about the missing person's computer or laptop, including email addresses and details of social networking sites, blogs, personal websites or online information-sharing sites. You or the police may wish to use them to obtain information.
- If the missing person's car or motorcycle is missing, you need to mention this to the police and give them a description and the registration number (if you know it). If the person uses public transport, has a bus pass or train card.

Give the police as much relevant information as you can and let them know of any steps you have already taken to try to locate the missing person.

Make a list of contacts for the police

This list should include contact details for other people who know the person who is missing and might be able to help the police, for example:

- Family
- Friends

- Their employer or school
- Anyone else who may have information on their whereabouts.

Remember to write down their full names, telephone numbers, home addresses, work numbers and work addresses if known. If you have already spoken to any of these people, tell the police and let them know what information they were able to provide.

If you are going to be making lots of phone calls to relatives and friends, you may find it best to do this in a way that keeps your own telephone free for receiving incoming calls, in case the missing person is trying to contact you. For example, you could use a friend's mobile phone.

If you leave the house, you might want to arrange for someone else to be there to answer your phone, or instead make sure that your voicemail or answering machine is switched on.

Make a list of possible locations

- Consider places the person may have gone, such as places they like to visit or previous addresses and make a list of these places.
- Include places where they have been found in this list, if they have ever been missing before.

Provide photographs

- Find some recent photos of the missing person and give them to the investigating officer. Head shots are best if possible.
- If you don't have any recent photos, make sure that you advise the police officer of the year the photo was taken and whether there are any differences in the person's appearance now.
- If you have any video or DVD footage of the missing person, it may also be of use to the investigating team.

Advise the police if the missing person is a child at risk of harm

- If the missing person is a child who may be at serious risk of harm, in certain circumstances the police may be able to launch a Child Rescue Alert.
- If you think that your child may be taken outside the country for some reason (e.g., abducted by the other parent), tell the police as they can take certain measures to ensure that they are alerted if the abductor tries to leave the country.

Contact local hospitals

- The police may also be doing this, but if you contact them this may reduce the time taken to locate someone. You may want to do this prior to reporting them missing.
- If the missing person has been in an accident and is or has been unconscious, they may not be able to give their name. You may need to ask about any recent admissions where the person's name is unknown.
- The police may have a local means of circulating an alert around the NHS trust area in which the person has gone missing.
- The police are likely to contact their Coroner's Liaison Officer to ask whether the local coroner has received details of any unidentified persons that meet the description of the missing person. The police may also contact the UK Missing Persons Unit to check if they know of any unidentified persons found in other areas of the UK that might meet the description of the missing person.

Searching for the missing person

- You may wish to search the areas your family member or friend went missing from, places they like to go, or where you last saw them. However, you need to ensure that you discuss this with the police. This is because the police will be managing the overall search strategy and you will need to ensure that any searches that you or other volunteers undertake are co-ordinated with them.

- If the area the person went missing from was near a lake, river or sea, the police will have considered searching the water as part of their search planning. It is important that you co-ordinate with police and let specialist teams search dangerous areas.

Do not place yourself at risk of harm at any time

- If your family member or friend went missing in a remote area, for example while hill walking or mountaineering, the police may contact the local Mountain or Lowland Search and Rescue team who can assist with the search. You must always inform the police if you request assistance from a search and rescue team yourself as the Police Search Advisor (PolSA) will need to co-ordinate the search. Again, do not place yourself at risk of harm.
- Depending on the circumstances, the police will check their custody system to confirm whether the missing person has been arrested.

Consider limiting access to the missing person's bedroom or home until the police have searched and collected evidence

- Remember that clothing, bedding and other personal items may hold important evidence and information for the police so do not wash anything or clean their room. Do not touch their hairbrush or toothbrush, but ensure that these items are highlighted to the police as they may wish to take them for the collection of DNA. This is important if the person is missing for a long period.

Make notes

- Keep a notepad with you at all times to write down information given to you by friends, family and the police.
- Use it to record any questions you have thought of that you may wish to ask the police next time you speak to them.
- Write down the name and number of the officer investigating the case and/or the police force's Missing Persons Co-ordinator.

- Ask what the risk assessment is for the missing person (low, medium or high) and make a note of it along with the police reference number.

Think about you

Take care of yourself and your family and do not be afraid to ask others for help or support where possible. A number of charities can provide support and advice.

Contact details can be found in the UKMPU factsheet **Organisations that can help** and online.

The First Week

Establish regular contact

- Ensure you have a point of contact within the police and establish how often they will be in contact to provide updates and how often or when you may contact them.
- You may wish to speak to the investigating officer about the steps that are being taken to find the missing person. The police will provide information, where possible, on what is being done. You may wish to ask: what searches have been conducted, which organisations, have been contacted and is the person listed as missing on the Police National Computer?

Publicity

Raising awareness of your missing friend or family member may assist in locating them. However in some circumstances publicity may have a negative impact on the missing person.

Discuss with the police officer investigating the case to decide whether publicity would be suitable and what publicity to circulate.

More information on publicity can be obtained from the factsheet **How publicity can help**, available on the UK Missing Persons Unit website (<http://missingpersons.police.uk>).

Your Neighbourhood Watch group might be able to distribute posters.

Provide additional information to the police

- Consider whether there are additional details that may be of assistance to the police. Expand your list of contacts to include anyone who may have seen the person before or after they went missing, for example: additional friends, acquaintances, extended family members, delivery companies, postal delivery staff, etc.
- If you haven't already done so, provide the police with the contact details of your family's doctor and dentist. As part of their collection of details on the missing person, the police may wish to contact their doctor and dentist to obtain their medical and dental records.

Make a list of things others can do to help

If relevant, contact local shelters

Depending on the circumstances, it might be worth contacting local homeless shelters or hotels to see if the missing person may be staying there.

Next Steps

If you have not already done so, you may wish to consider some of the following steps:

- Develop a plan for continuing the search for the missing person.
- Schedule regular contact visits or telephone calls with the investigating officer to review the status of the investigation and to receive updates at a mutually agreed frequency. Keep in mind that the police may not be able to share some information with you. However, if at any stage you have new or important information, make sure you contact the police immediately.

- Consider highlighting the case on the anniversary of their disappearance and their birthday. This will continue to raise awareness regardless of how much time has passed.
- Most people who go missing return or are found quite quickly. However, if the missing person has been missing for several years, there are tools such as age-progressed images that can be utilised. You can discuss this with your police force.
- Confirm that any DNA obtained for the missing person (e.g. from toothbrushes or hair brushes) has been added to the Missing Persons DNA Database. This DNA sample will only be used to cross reference with missing and unidentified persons. It will not be added to the national criminal database or used for any other purpose. The DNA will also be destroyed once the missing person is found.
- Confirm all available biometrics have been obtained.



If you require more information, other factsheets can be downloaded from the UK Missing Persons Unit website: <http://missingpersons.police.uk>.

The information in this guide is not definitive and should be utilised in conjunction with police guidance and independent legal advice.

ABOUT THE UKMPU

The Missing Persons Unit is the UK national and international point of contact for all missing person and unidentified body cases. We're the only UK agency focused exclusively on missing people. We serve all UK police forces as well as overseas police agencies.

We are a hub for the exchange of information and provision of expertise on the subject of missing persons. We provide a comprehensive service for all missing person investigations, supporting law enforcement and other agencies.



www.missingpersons.police.uk



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