

Has someone you know gone missing?

Information on the police investigation

Factsheet 5

This factsheet includes information on:

- **Initial actions when someone is reported missing.....Page 2**
- **Publicity.....Page 3**
- **Forensic Material.....Page 3**
- **Family Liaison Officers.....Page 3**
- **Cases which may not be dealt with by the police.....Page 4**
- **Police Guidance.....Page 4**

After you have reported someone missing, you may wish to know more about how the police run a missing person investigation. Although actual procedures to deal with missing person cases may vary between police forces across the UK, the information provided below should give you a general idea of what to expect.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) states "anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed".

A person may be missing for one of the following reasons (these are not police categories):

- Lost – due to an accident, misadventure or a condition like dementia
- Unintentionally missing because they changed their plans or forgot to tell someone where they were going
- Unintentionally missing because they have become a victim of crime such as abduction or another serious offence
- Intentionally missing, perhaps due to personal reasons they may not have shared with anyone, or due to problems that they may be experiencing, such as arguments or relationship problems, financial troubles or medical issues like depression.

A person in any of these groups may be at risk of harm; the police's aim will be to locate the individual and try to prevent any harm to them. In order to do this they will need to gather information to determine what may have happened.

Initial actions when someone is reported missing

Once a police officer has taken a report from you, they will record them as missing on police systems. They will then use the information and evidence they collect (including the information that you provide) during their initial enquiries to conduct a risk assessment.

The risk assessment provides an indication of the risk of harm to the person who is reported

missing. This assessment uses a risk continuum, with four levels:

- No apparent risk
- Low risk
- Medium risk
- High risk

During the risk assessment, the police will take into account factors like the person's age, the circumstances of their disappearance, whether the disappearance is out of character and whether the person needs essential medication or treatment, among other considerations.

If you believe that the person who is missing is at risk of harm, it is important that you tell the police and provide details of this. The police may gather information from other people who know the missing person, in addition to speaking to you and other family members.

Searching the home address

Officers may need to search the home address of the missing person to confirm that the person is not there and to establish if there is any information or clues within their home, which may assist with the search for them. This is standard procedure when someone is reported missing.

It will be helpful for you to be aware of this and be prepared for the police to enter your home and to investigate every possible scenario. This is likely to involve speaking to you to determine your whereabouts and your relationship with the missing person. Again, this is all normal procedure.

It is important that you tell the police the truth, even if it is uncomfortable, embarrassing or relates to illegal behaviour; the police need to know everything in order to investigate fully. Failing to tell the police all relevant information may impair their ability to find the missing person. The police will treat the information that you provide in confidence. However, if the information suggests that the person is a risk to themselves or others, or is engaging in illegal behaviour, the police may need to act on that information.

Potential actions by the police

Police lines of enquiry may include:

- Searching the area where the person was last seen

- Checks on mobile phones and computers used by the missing person
- House to house enquiries
- Reviewing CCTV footage
- Specialist searches (for example using helicopters, divers or dogs), particularly for high risk cases
- Co-ordinating media coverage to raise awareness.

Should the missing person not be found following the initial lines of enquiry, then the investigation may be passed to a nominated officer within the police station who will deal with all further enquiries that can be carried out. This may be the officer on duty at the time, referred to as the Duty Officer.

In some circumstances, if the missing person is not considered to be at risk of harm, the police may wait for a period before taking further action. This is because most people who are reported missing return or are found quickly.

Publicity

The police may also seek your consent for publicity. Using the media to appeal for information can be very effective, but this needs to be done in co-ordination with the police investigation. The police may ask for photographs (preferably recent) of the missing person.

For further information about publicising missing people, see our factsheet '*How publicity can help*' or contact the charity Missing People:

Telephone: **116000**

Email: 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Website: www.missingpeople.org.uk

Forensic Material

As part of their investigation, the police may collect items and material that can provide a means of identifying the person, referred to as forensic material or evidence. This includes items for DNA sampling, as well as fingerprints and dental records. These can assist the police if they find an unidentified person or body that they think might be the person who you have reported missing.

UKMPUFactsheet5

To aid this you should 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 (or other items used only by the missing person) and when police conduct a search, ensure that these items are highlighted to police, as they may wish to take them for the collection of DNA and fingerprints.

If the police cannot get a DNA sample for the missing person, it may be helpful for them to obtain a DNA sample from you and/or other family members in order to assist with the DNA identification process in the future.

The police may also ask for details of the missing person's dentist and/or doctor in order to obtain their dental, medical and possibly hospital records; in some cases your permission may be sought to obtain these.

This material can be kept on national forensic databases, managed by the UK Missing Persons Unit. It is worth remembering that this material is only used to help identify the person and is not used for any other purposes. Also, once the missing person is found, the material is deleted from the missing person databases.

If you would like more information on DNA, please refer to the document *DNA information for families*, which can be downloaded from the UK Missing Persons Unit website: <http://missingpersons.police.uk>

If you have any questions about the use of forensic material in a missing person investigation please contact the UK Missing Persons Unit by:

Telephone: **0800 234 6034**

Email: ukmpu@nca.gov.uk

Family Liaison Officers

In some cases, the police may allocate a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) to assist with the investigation. A FLO is more likely to be allocated in suspicious cases where the police believe that the missing person may have come to harm.

If you are allocated a FLO, there is a possibility that they may be withdrawn from the case after a period of time, even if the missing person has not been found. Family Liaison Officers may also be able to help you get in touch with a charity, such as Missing People, which can provide support and assistance during this difficult time.

Cases which may not be dealt with by the police

There will be circumstances where a person may be missing, but police involvement may not be required.

If the person you are trying to trace is a relative that you have lost contact with and there is no known risk to this person, the police will not normally investigate this kind of case. The police may ask you some questions to make sure that there are no identifiable risks and once satisfied, close the case and refer family members to appropriate tracing services.

Advice can be obtained from the www.direct.gov.uk website on how to trace lost relatives. Other organisations may be able to provide assistance, for example Missing People, the Salvation Army or internet tracing companies. There is a factsheet called *Looking for someone you have lost touch with* which you may find helpful, available to download at <http://missingpersons.police.uk>

If a person is missing, but it appears that they may have entered the UK without appropriate authority, this may not be investigated by the police as a missing person case. The circumstances of the case, the risk to the person, their age and other factors will be taken into consideration by the police when managing this type of case.

Police Guidance

Guidance for the police when investigating missing person reports is set by the College of Policing, and is publicly available at: <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons>

Actual police force policy on missing persons may vary from force to force, but will reflect the standards established in this guidance.

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

To enquire about the content of this document or request the information in an alternative format, please contact the UK Missing Persons Unit on 0800 234 6034 or email ukmpu@nca.gov.uk

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