

# When a Loved One Goes Missing

How families' beliefs about a disappearance shape  
their experience of trauma and their behaviour,  
expectations and ability to cope

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*“You don't know what to do,  
you don't know what they're doing,  
you don't know where they are,  
it's just the complete mystery of it.*

*You don't know whether to grieve,  
or to be angry with them  
or whether to be desperately worried,  
and you're a combination of all of those things  
at all times.”*

(Sister of a missing man)

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## Research methods

- Interviews were conducted with 22 adults from 20 families of currently missing adults
- 17 women and 5 men were interviewed; 5 mothers, 2 fathers, 9 siblings (or siblings-in-law) and 6 sons or daughters of missing people.
- The missing family members were: 9 women and 11 men; 2 teenagers, 8 aged 20-39, 7 aged 40-60 and 3 aged 60 or more.
- 3 of the missing people had been gone for less than 1 year, 7 had been missing for 1-3 years, 6 had been missing for 4-10 years, and 4 had been missing for 10+ years.

<http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/uploads/files/Technical%20Appendix.pdf>

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## Emotional and social impacts

- Personal experiences
  - Sadness
  - Emotional rollercoaster
  - Physical pain
  - Guilt
  - Anger
  - No news is good news

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## Emotional and social impacts

- Family and relationships
- Reactions of others
  - Concern
  - Negative comments
  - Guarded
- Perceptions of the disappearance
  - Level of intent
  - Outcome

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*“We’re doing as much as we can do then.  
Obviously if he wants to be found, he’ll be found.  
If he doesn’t then...it’s up to him.”*

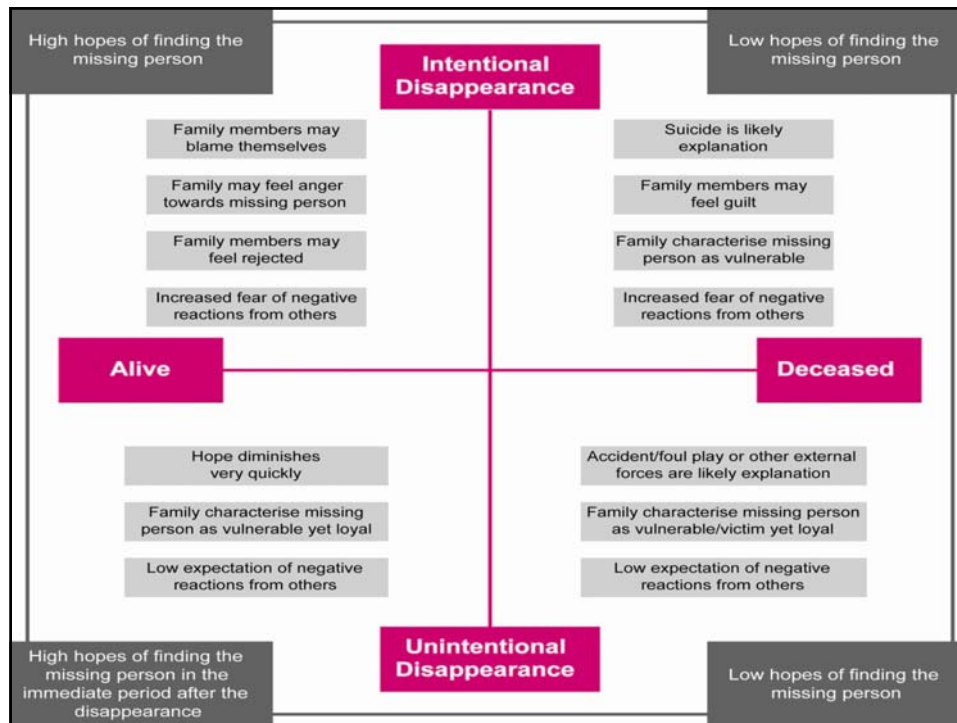
(Brother of a missing man)

*“I’m more inclined that something has happened to her.  
Because I just don’t think, for one minute,  
that she would just up and go.”*

(Daughter of a missing woman)

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## Emotional and social impacts

- The passage of time
  - Never get over it
  - In limbo
- Coping strategies
  - Getting on with life
  - Psychics and mediums
  - Counselling
  - Medication
  - Religion
  - Friends and family

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## Living in Limbo in the media

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7784014.stm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/dec/15/missing-people-change-law-families>

<http://www.gm.tv/index.cfm?articleid=32348>

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7859485.stm>

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