

What Happens After you have Reported Someone Missing?

What the police will do

Once you have made a report, what the police do will depend on the circumstances of the disappearance and to what extent the police consider the missing person to be at risk.

If someone has gone missing recently and unexpectedly the police will usually investigate. They will assess the level of risk for the missing person by considering his/her age, the circumstances of their disappearance, whether this is out of character, and whether he/she needs medication or treatment.

If the police assess that the missing person is at risk, and they continue to be missing, the police will make some enquiries, which may include:

- a search of the missing person's home, or last known address
- a search of the area where the missing person was last seen
- attempts to make contact with them by phone, if they have a mobile
- checks on his/her mobile phone/ computer
- house to house enquiries
- checking local hospital admissions
- review of CCTV footage
- land and air searches, particularly in high risk cases
- co-ordinating any media coverage
- issuing a press release to the local media appealing for help from the public

If the missing person has not been found after 3 days, the police must notify an organisation called the Missing Persons Bureau which will then also help the police in their investigation. The police may also put the missing person's details on their Police National Computer database (sometimes referred to by the police as PNC) for circulation nationwide. If police in any part of the country need to identify a person, these records on the PNC can be helpful. From time to time, when police discover an unidentified person who is no longer alive, they will need to involve a coroner.

The police won't usually investigate if you have lost contact with someone over time, or if they consider that the missing person is not at risk of harm. The police may also wait for a few days before taking further action if the missing person is not thought to be at immediate risk of harm. This is because most people who are reported missing return within 48 hours.

If a child is kidnapped or abducted the police can launch a Child Rescue Alert which uses the media to raise publicity. If a child has gone missing abroad, or been abducted, the police and other organisations can help – see our web pages and guidance on [Someone is missing abroad](#).

Keeping informed

The police may provide the family or carer of the missing person, or otherwise the friend or interested person who has made the missing report, with the name of a specified contact person within the police. However in smaller forces the case may be dealt with by the response team so the person dealing with the incident may change from shift to shift, and as such a single named contact cannot be provided.

Ensure that you make a note of the unique reference number the police will have created. If you have difficulty getting hold of the named contact or department who are investigating your case you can ring the switchboard and quote this number, they will then direct you to the best person to speak to.

What you can do

If a search is underway the situation may be overwhelming, but it is important to look after yourself, and seek emotional and/or practical support if you need it. You also shouldn't feel that you must be part of the ongoing search – you have done the most important job by reporting to the police, and they are the right people to be searching for the person who has gone missing.

However if you do want to do more, and it helps you to keep focus, ask the police what you can do to assist the search. Try to agree with them what you will do and what they will do so there is no duplication. You could, for example:

- continue to contact friends and family to find out where/when they last saw the missing person and whether they have any new information
- think about giving other people the contact details for the police – someone may have useful information to give to the police which they would rather you didn't know about
- contact places the missing person may be (for example, homeless shelters, hostels, hotels, hospitals), or places where they have been found if they have gone missing before
- keep a diary of who you speak to and when, and what they say: this may be useful for reference

If you do get new information, or if the person who is missing returns or makes contact, let the police know as soon as you can as this will affect their search.

Family support

Unfortunately the police can't provide direct family support to the families of every missing person. If they can't help, seek support from the people you would normally go to for help, such as friends or family. If you need practical help with anything, don't be afraid to ask them for it, or it may help just to talk through how you are feeling. Missing People are always at hand to offer emotional support and can be contacted on **116 000** or 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

The police may appoint a Family Liaison Officer to help with the investigation and to support the family if someone has gone missing in suspicious circumstances and it is thought that they may have come to harm. The appointment of Family Liaison Officers varies from region to region.

Publicity and the media

Missing People can help you create publicity by producing poster appeals, website appeals and by using social media. You may also want to approach the media to raise awareness of the missing person's disappearance, and if the police have launched a search they may be able to arrange a press conference for you. Publicity can also be generated with newspaper appeals, press releases and interviews. Information on involving the media, and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, can be found in our web pages [Working with the media](#).

Before disclosing any information to the media, however, it is vital to remember that once it is disclosed, it becomes public, so you need to think about the consequences of giving out information which is personal or distressing, or which may subsequently feel embarrassing to you and/or the person who is missing.

It is also very important that information which might interfere with or impede the police investigation is not made public. You and the police should discuss and agree what information is, and is not, appropriate to make public, and the police should agree with you not to disclose any personal or distressing information without your prior consent.

As the search continues

If the search for the missing person continues, you need to be prepared for the police asking for extra personal information to help in their search. For example, they may want to take away items such as a toothbrush, hairbrush or razor belonging to the person who is missing, or even similar items from close family relatives. The police will do this so they can put the DNA details on a UK Missing Persons DNA Database, which can be used to help to identify someone who has gone missing. (Once he or she is found the DNA details are deleted). The police may also ask for the missing person's dental records and their medical records from their doctor or hospital (you or another family member may need to agree to this).

In due course you might want to check some or all of the following with the police:

- How at risk do they assess the missing person to be?
- Are the missing person's details still on the Police National Computer?

- Have the police contacted the Missing Persons Bureau?
- Have the police given the missing person's dental records and any fingerprints taken from personal possessions to the Missing Persons Bureau?
- Have the police made sure that any DNA samples have been added to the National Missing Persons DNA database?

Keep a record of all the information the police give you for future reference.

There may be developments in the case which alter the original risk assessment. This may lead to a change in the approach taken by the police and the nature of their enquiries. The police should keep you informed of any major developments which alter the initial risk assessment they have made.

As further time elapses the police may not provide regular updates unless new information comes to light. You will probably need to come to an agreement with the police as to how often you can expect to hear from them, and if you don't, how regularly you will contact them for an update.

This guidance has been produced with the kind assistance of the Missing Persons Bureau

First Published: December 2011. Updated: December 2015

For further information and guidance on the issues addressed in this guidance sheet, or for support relating to any aspect of someone going missing, call or text Missing People's free and confidential 24 hour helpline on **116 000** or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

Whilst this information has been provided in good faith, it should not be taken as legal advice. For information tailored to your circumstances, please contact your police force, solicitor or an advisory organisation as appropriate to your query.

Please let us know whether this guidance has been useful, either by answering a few short questions at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MissingPeopleGuidance> or by emailing your comments to policyandresearch@missingpeople.org.uk