

HAS SOMEONE YOU KNOW GONE MISSING?

Information on the police investigation

THIS FACTSHEET INCLUDES INFORMATION ON:

- Information about missing person investigations Page 2
- Forensic material Page 3
- Family Liaison Officers 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.

Information about missing person investigations

The National Police Chiefs' Council definition of missing is "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located, and their well-being or otherwise confirmed."

The priority for the police is to safeguard vulnerable people, locate people who are missing and ensure that they are safe and well.

Once a police officer has taken a report from you and agreed that a missing investigation will commence the person will be recorded 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. 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.

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.

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.

The police will consider all lines of enquiry which are appropriate and necessary in the circumstances. 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; having information to determine what may have happened helps the police to plan searches and develop their lines of enquiry. 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.

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 another UKMPU factsheet called "Lost Contact" which you may find helpful, available to download at www.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.

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.

The level of police response will be informed by the risk assessment process completed by the police.

Forensic material

As part of their investigation, the police may collect items and material that can provide forensic evidence, which will assist with their search and enquiries.

- 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. This may be important if the person remains missing for a long period.

In addition to DNA and fingerprints, other forensic material like dental records (if the missing person was registered with a dentist) may also be useful to the investigation. The police can also make sure that this forensic information is added to the UK Missing Persons DNA Database and UK Missing Persons Dental Record Database, which contains this kind of information. These databases can assist the police if they find an unidentified person or body that they think might be the person who you have reported missing.

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. More information is on our DNA factsheet.

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.

It is worth remembering that DNA is only used to help identify the person and is not used for any other purposes. Also, once the missing person is found, the DNA profile is deleted from the Missing Persons database.

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.

Police guidance

There is guidance that the police use when investigating cases of people who have gone missing. The Authorised Professional Practice (APP) is developed and owned by the College of Policing and can be accessed on line. Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons is the main document which guides the way that the police investigate missing person cases. Actual police force policy on missing persons may vary from force to force, but should reflect this guidance.

If you wish to understand more about the police investigation, you can access the College of Policing NPCC guidance document investigating missing person cases and other related information, on the UK Missing Persons Unit website www.missingpersons.police.uk.



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



[@UKMissingPersonsUnit](https://www.facebook.com/UKMissingPersonsUnit)



[@UKMissingPerson](https://twitter.com/UKMissingPerson)



[@ukmissingpersons](https://www.instagram.com/ukmissingpersons)