

When and How do you Report Someone Missing?

How do you report someone missing?

You can:

- contact your local police station (in person or by phone); or
- in an emergency, dial **999**

You can find your local police station online at: <http://www.police.uk>, or by using your local phone directory or ringing a directory enquiry phone number such as **118 118** or **118 247**. Alternatively, many police forces now use the number **101** for non-emergency calls; if the call handler believes the report should be made to **999** they can transfer it immediately.

You can report to YOUR local police station even if the missing person lives in another part of the UK – if they need to, the police will pass the details on to the relevant police force.

When do you report someone missing?

You can report to the police immediately – you do NOT have to wait until 24 hours after a disappearance.

If you think the missing person could be in danger, or he or she is vulnerable in some way (for example if they have dementia, could be suicidal, might have been abducted or their disappearance is out of character or worrying), you should report them missing to the police straight away.

If you don't think the missing person is in immediate danger, you might not be sure what to do. You might be feeling upset, angry, guilty or panic stricken and it may be difficult to think clearly. Before contacting the police you might want to visit the missing person's home or where he or she was last seen, or check texts, emails, voicemail, Facebook, or ask family, friends, colleagues or school friends if they have heard from him or her.

If you are unsure what to do you can ring Missing People on freephone number **116 000** or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk and we can discuss the situation with you and advise you. One option could be to ring the police to discuss what has happened – they may advise you to make a formal report, or they may suggest that you wait for a while to see if the situation resolves itself.

It can be a difficult decision to report to the police, especially if you are a family member left behind, but it can be a relief to report someone missing, to feel that you are confronting the situation and taking steps that hopefully will lead to a formal investigation and search.

If you make a report what information will the police ask for?

If the missing person is at risk

If you contact the police to make a report they will assess whether the missing person is at risk of harm. A police officer may come to see you and ask you for information relating to the disappearance.

If you meet the police, be prepared for them to ask lots of questions. Many of these will be personal to you and/or the person you have reported missing and you may feel uncomfortable answering, but the police will need this information to start a search. They will probably need to know, for example:

- the missing person's full name, date of birth, and physical description (including the clothes/jewellery they were last wearing, if known, and any tattoos, scars, etc)
- the missing person's address and email address, and home, work and mobile phone numbers
- details of the clothing, money or other personal belongings which have been taken
- details of the missing person's school/employment
- what might have caused the missing person to disappear, for example: family or relationship problems, employment or money issues, school or college problems, bullying or harassment, mental health issues such as depression, misuse of alcohol or drugs
- any physical or mental health conditions
- factors which might put the missing person at risk, for example, previous threats of suicide or an attempted suicide, previous self-harming, medication needs, drug or alcohol dependency, or a previous history of going missing
- any unusual behaviour
- suspected abduction or harm

The police may also ask for items belonging to the missing person such as:

- a recent photo
- any diary, laptop computer, or mobile phone
- any bank or credit card details
- other bank account details

The police may also want further details such as:

- the registration details/make of any car, motorbike or other vehicle the missing person owns
- places the missing person went to regularly or lived in previously
- email accounts, social networking sites, blogging sites, online document storage sites
- the missing person's doctor and dentist
- close friends or family members who might have relevant information

You may have information about yourself, your family, and/or the person you have reported missing which you are unsure about giving to the police; for example you may be concerned that they will pass the information to someone else. You should raise any issue you have about the confidentiality of information with the police directly, and discuss it with them.

If you meet with the police or speak with a police officer on the phone there are various questions you should ask them. Our [checklist](#) provides a list of the questions you should ask – keep this and the answers to your questions safe for future reference. The checklist also includes useful questions to ask yourself when you speak with the police.

The police may want to search the missing person's home or last place of residence to check for information which might be of use to their investigation. If you also live at this address they can only do this if you agree. You may feel that searching the house is unnecessary, but the police need to conduct their own thorough checks and sometimes items found in the house can help the police in their search for your loved one.

The police may want you to limit access to the missing person's room or home, and ask you not to wash or clean any room or personal possessions – if the search continues the police may need to look for further evidence, and personal items such as a toothbrush, hairbrush, clothing or bedding may provide vital DNA evidence. If the police don't mention this and you think it might be relevant you should raise the matter with them.

In some instances the police may ask to collect a DNA sample of the missing person, in high risk cases they may do this immediately, in medium or lower risk cases police may wait a number of days before collecting a sample. This is standard police practice and in the unlikely event that a person remains missing for a prolonged period, DNA samples will be submitted to a police database. The samples allow for matching against the body of an unidentified person and will be removed as soon as the missing person is found. Dental records and fingerprints for the missing person may also be collected at the same time.

If the missing person is not at risk

The police may not ask you for detailed information if they do not consider that the missing person is at immediate risk, on the basis of what you have told them, or if you have lost contact with him or her over time. They may think it best to wait for a few days at least to see if the missing person re-appears, or they may tell you that they are not prepared to investigate the disappearance at all.

It is not within the police's responsibility to investigate lost contact cases, these are cases where a person is not missing or at risk of harm but you have lost touch with them over a period of time.

If you are not happy with the situation you can contact Missing People on freephone number **116 000** or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk and we can advise you what to do. It might be appropriate for us to contact the police on your behalf to discuss matters further with them. Alternatively, we might suggest that you use our Lost Contact Family Tracing Service, or put you in touch with another organisation which might be able to help you with your search.

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