

Should I use the Media?

Using the media

Media appeals may be the quickest and most effective way of raising awareness of your missing person and helping in the continuing search for him or her. But not everyone feels comfortable using the media. Different newspapers and magazines have different interviewing techniques and styles. Whilst many journalists will be sympathetic, others may appear forceful, cold or aggressive or behave in other ways which seem insensitive to what you are going through. Some people don't trust the media or want their circumstances made public; others feel overwhelmed by the thought of dealing with journalists and being asked probing and personal questions about their missing person. We are happy to offer advice to help you reach an informed decision but the following may be helpful when considering your options:

What are the advantages of using the media?

- People may report sightings or be able to provide other valuable information
- The missing person may see or hear any message you wish to send them and choose to make contact if they know you are worried for their safety
- You may get some comfort from feeling you are doing all you can to find them
- Other families in the same situation may come forward to offer support
- Continuing coverage will keep the search fresh in people's minds

What are the drawbacks of using the media?

- Media interest may feel overwhelming, intrusive or frightening
- You may feel that your privacy has been invaded
- There is no guarantee that your story will be used
- You may be asked questions you find insensitive
- You may feel that you are losing control of an already out of control situation
- The missing person may not welcome the attention or wish to be 'found'
- Publicity may put already vulnerable people at even greater risk by forcing them further away if they do not wish to be found

- It can be very hard for someone who has been missing to then 'walk back into their life' knowing that extensive publicity about them has been distributed in the national or local media

I don't think I can cope with dealing with the media personally. Is there an alternative?

Audiences empathise with the fear and anguish people feel when someone close goes missing and will generally respond with compassion. You don't have to be a great speaker to make an appeal. However if you feel unable to deal with journalists yourself, consider asking a close friend or family member to act as your spokesperson.

If you are unsure or confused about dealing with the media, Missing People are always happy to help, by offering impartial advice and making practical suggestions.

Summary

Whether or not to use the media is a very personal decision. It is certainly the speediest and most effective way of reaching a large and diverse audience to ask for help, information and possible sightings. But the experience of having to deal with journalists, answer many questions, disclose personal information about your missing person and yourself and being thrown into the media spotlight may not be one you feel you can handle. Missing People will support your decision either way.

Though some cases will attract a large amount of media attention, in other cases it can be very difficult to gain any media interest at all. Whilst this can be frustrating, Missing People can support you in ensuring the local search is effective and coordinated, with or without the interest and support of the mainstream media.

First Published: December 2011. Updated: May 2012

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 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