

Interviews

Where will interviews take place and what kind of questions am I likely to be asked?

One of the first decisions you will have to make is whether or not you are comfortable with the idea of being interviewed by journalists in your own home. Some people may find the familiarity of being on their own territory reassuring. To others the idea of having strangers in their personal space at a time of great distress may feel intrusive. A compromise might be the more neutral space of the home of a family member or friend, or a public space such as a café or park. Either way, a journalist is going to ask you several questions. There will be basic ones to establish a physical description and the age and gender of the missing person but also more emotive ones. These may include 'Has the person has gone missing before?', 'What you think happened to them?' and 'Do you believe they are still alive?' Below are some of the things you are likely to be asked immediately:

What information will I be asked to provide?

- Their date of birth, full name and any names they are known to use.
- A physical description of your missing person and of the clothes he or she was wearing when last seen.
- The place they were last seen if known.
- The most recent colour photographs you have.
- Details of any identifying features such as tattoos, birthmarks, piercings, scars.
- As much personal information as you are willing to provide.
- A contact number for people to ring with possible sightings. See [What Missing People Can Do](#) to see how Missing people can help with this.

What information should you disclose?

- Any information you disclose to a journalist may become public. How would the missing person feel if details of their relationships, sexuality, financial problems, health or criminal record were made public? Was this information told to you in confidence and would the person wish it to be known generally?
- You may be asked questions about their physical or mental health such as 'Were they depressed?' or 'Had they been diagnosed with any illness?' If you don't want to go into detail, one possible answer is to simply say that they take medication on a regular basis or had been 'unwell' to describe any mental health issue.

- Bear in mind how your missing person might react if he or she heard your appeal. Try to make the message to them positive and encouraging instead of one that might cause them to feel shame, guilt, resentment or pressure.
- Remember that you do not have to answer any questions that seem inappropriate or make you feel uncomfortable.
- Answer what you consider to be fair and relevant questions in as much detail as you choose but a simple 'I don't want to go into that' should stop any line of questioning you are unhappy with.
- It may be a good idea to have someone with you who is more removed from the situation and less emotional to allow them to step in and answer questions if necessary, and provide support.

Summary

It can be hard to know how to respond when you are being bombarded with questions. Part of you probably wants to be as cooperative as possible with journalists because they have the power to run your story quickly in the hope that it will reach your missing person or someone who can provide information or possible sightings.

Whilst it is obviously important to provide details that could help identify the missing person, you don't have to make every aspect of your relationship with them or the facts of their life public. If there are things that you would prefer to keep private, it's fine to do so. If there are things that you are worried that the media may sensationalise, it's fine not to disclose them. If they need regular medication, it's possible to express concern about this without explaining the reason why or revealing any physical or mental health issues the missing person has which may make them even more vulnerable. If you do not feel able to meet journalists alone or in your own home, it's perfectly acceptable to ask someone else to be with you or to schedule interviews over the phone or in another location such as the home of a friend or family member, a local hotel or cafe.

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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