

Internet Safety Guidelines

When someone you know goes missing, you want to do everything you can to find them. The internet is usually first port of call. Here are some guidelines that will help you stay safe when using online tools to search for your missing loved one.

Social media is an invaluable tool when raising awareness for a missing loved one. Unfortunately, it can also be a dangerous place where trolls and predators are able to anonymously prey on vulnerabilities; making their target susceptible to press and public intrusion. It's important to stay safe online, The Child Online and [Online Protection Command \(CEOP\) offer](#) excellent guidelines to help you do this.

Armchair Detectives

'Armchair detectives' is a term used for individuals who have a tendency to congregate on missing persons pages to speculate and offer their theories about a case. This culture is renowned for difference in opinion that can sometimes escalate into inflammatory exchange of comments. Should your missing loved one be following your group/page, this type of behaviour has potential to deter them from making contact. Do not be afraid to remove offensive or upsetting posts.

Internet Trolls

'Troll' is a term that defines someone who posts on online groups and forums for the sole purpose of causing discord. They often operate via fake online profiles.

Trolls may target vulnerable people such as families of a missing person. Trolls may bombard the main family correspondent with messages, claiming the loved one is deceased or that something horrible has happened to them. Specific locations, such as deposition sites are sometimes suggested which, in desperation, can lead to members of the public or families to perform their own searches. Should you receive any personal messages or posts of this nature, do not respond, but relay to your Police contact or Missing People.

Security & Privacy

Facebook is a great way to communicate with lots of different people around the world and get in contact with anyone who may be connected to your missing loved one. However, it can also be a great place for journalists or online trolls to take your personal photographs and send messages that may not be so supportive, especially if your loved one's case has escalated quickly. This can all become quite overwhelming, so ensure you take time to follow Facebook guidelines to stay safe and secure.

In particular, it is recommended that you set your profile to 'friends only' and disable the feature for search engines to harvest your account. It is important that personal details such as your phone number, address etc., are secure and should ideally be set to 'yourself only'. Personal photographs are frequently used by the media if they are not restricted to friends only. To prevent being bombarded with friend requests by people you do not know in person, set the 'who can send you friend requests' feature to 'friends of friends' only.

[You can find out some more information about staying safe on Facebook here.](#)

Missing People Guidance Sheet - written in association with a family member

Facebook Pages

Facebook Pages are a good way to keep abreast of the interest in your missing loved one and offer insights into statistics & analytical data. However, they don't offer the same level of security and privacy features as Facebook groups. Missing People is the only registered UK charity specialised in missing persons. If you are approached by a third party to create a page, please bear in mind the creator will have access to all the private messages sent to the page. Unless the person is a family member or friend, this is a means to breach any complexities surrounding the case and is a breach of your privacy.

[More info about Facebook pages can be found here.](#)

Facebook Groups

In recent years, Facebook Groups have become increasingly popular as a means to promote publicity for your missing loved one. However, there has been an increase in members attempting to intimidate family members demanding information about the case. Don't feel tempted to offer confidential details publicly; it could potentially jeopardise the investigation should it ever become necessary to be escalated to a criminal enquiry.

To maximise security, configure your group to 'closed' or 'private' to ensure you have control join request and what content is posted. This feature also protects you from spammers who take advantage of such groups.

[Group control options can be found here.](#)

Twitter

Twitter is also an incredible way to raise awareness for a missing loved one, getting missing appeals shared means the face of the missing person can appear in the feeds of people across the world. But, just like Facebook, it can leave you open to vicious comments from trolls.

Twitter offers other security options in the Security and Privacy settings. You can select the Tweet Privacy option to limit who receives your tweets rather than just making them all public. You can also select the Photo tagging option to allow anyone to tag you in photos. Also, deselect the options that let others find you by your email address or phone number. You can also deselect the ability to receive Direct Messages in this section.

Given that the Twittersphere seems to be more public than Facebook, it's wise to keep the personal details in your Twitter profile down to a minimum. Leave out your phone numbers, email addresses, and other bits of personal data that might be ripe for harvest by SPAM bots and internet criminals.

Twitter features the option to add your location to each tweet. While this might be a cool feature for some, it can be a big security risk for others. You may want to take this feature off to avoid anyone finding out where you live.

[You can find out more information about how to be safe on Twitter here.](#)

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Poster Campaigns

Many families with missing loved ones choose to design their own poster to circulate. As much as it may be tempting to use your own telephone number, it will also attract unwanted attention by predators. Missing People can create an appeal and liaise with police to ensure the appeal isn't interfering with any open enquiries.

[You can find out more about how our publicity works here.](#)

You can get in contact with them for free at any time by email at 116000@missingpeople.org.uk or by phone or text on 116 000

Blogs

Some hardened 'web sleuths' prey on vulnerable victims of crime and families of missing persons. Some claim to be qualified criminologists and can approach families purporting to offer them exposure, but may publish blogs using their own theories. This is of huge concern as they divulge private and sometimes distorted information obtained by devious methods. Unfortunately, over time their theories can be twisted as facts which greatly impede a police investigation. These people can become aggressive if you request the content be removed, and it is therefore recommended not to get into conversation with them and report to your Senior Investigating Officer.

Media Sources

The press can be helpful in providing extra publicity for your missing loved one. However, there have been cases where they have invaded the privacy of families. Recent years has seen popularity of online media sources, who like 'trolls' can intimidate families and friends via Messenger. Be aware of non-registered online sources. All registered media outlets are governed by the [Independent Press Standards Organisation \(IPSO\)](#).

If you are unsure, you are more than welcome to get in contact with your case worker at Missing People or the press team to assist you with media enquiries and extra publicity.

Fundraising

Crowd funding has become extremely popular as a means to quickly accumulate funds to help victims. While this method can have benefits, there are pitfalls. Members of the public have been known to take it upon themselves to launch a fundraiser without permission from a family member. There have also been some cases where false crowd funding has been set up to obtain funds illegally.

Some Facebook groups advertise their own Paypal account to fundraise for work they intend to carry out on your behalf. Unless it is a dedicated registered charity, caution should be applied before promoting this practice.

[Missing People set up regular fundraising activities](#); this whilst being safe can also be a good opportunity to meet people in a similar situation.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Always be cautious about what you do online, which sites you visit, and what you share. Use comprehensive security software, and make sure to back up your data on a regular basis in case something goes wrong. By taking preventative measures, you can save yourself from problems later on. If you ever feel stuck or feel like you need support or are receiving negative feedback get in contact with us and we can advise you further. Free 24/7 on

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