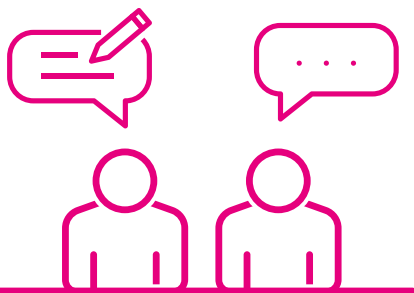


RETURN DISCUSSION TIPS

missing people

Registered charity in England and Wales (1020419)
and in Scotland (SC047419)



A lifeline when someone disappears

Going **MISSING** may be the first indication that there are problems or vulnerabilities for a person. A Return Discussion is an opportunity to support the individual who has gone missing and identify any underlying causes, including any ongoing risk of harm and an opportunity to refer the individual to appropriate support services. In Scotland, 84% of Return Discussions are completed by police (Police Scotland Missing Persons Annual Report 2018-2019). However, the Framework and good practice encourages the returned person to be given a choice as to who they would like to complete their Return Discussion.

The below ten tips are for any professional to consider when completing a Return Discussion.

Please remember that when completing a Return Discussion, any information that a missing person shares that makes you concerned for their safety, or the safety of others must be shared with the relevant agencies, and any disclosures of crime, harm or intelligence shared with police.

1

Are you the right person to be completing the Return Discussion?

The Framework recommends that the Return Discussion should be arranged with the returned person within 72 hours, and completed within 1 week. Who is best placed locally to follow this good practice, and has the returned person been offered a choice of who completes their Return Discussion?

2

Be prepared

Have any details from the missing episode (times, dates associates, means of travel) that can aid the Return Discussion and understanding more about what might have happened. If possible, have an awareness of the missing person's background, for example, any existing mental health concerns or adverse childhood experiences. This information could be crucial for exploring the reason for the missing episode, and in effectively safeguarding them.

3

Environment

Where is the Return Discussion being carried out? Ask the person if they're happy holding the Return Discussion where you have suggested. Where else would they feel comfortable? Is the place a safe, calm and quiet environment? Can the person talk freely without being overheard by others? Consider how much time you may also need to complete an in-depth discussion.

4

Be transparent

From the start, ensure the person understands your role, and an awareness that what they share with you may be shared with other professionals if there is a safeguarding concern. Do not promise confidentiality unless you are able to uphold this.

5

Listen, acknowledge, empathise

A person's perception of being missing can be different from that of professionals, parents or carers. Active listening and seeking to understand the person's experience and point of view is vital to build trust, gather information, and have the person feel supported. Be non-judgemental and respectful of what the person shares with you. Clarify anything you don't understand, and acknowledge what you have heard.

6

Adapt your approach

The majority of communication is non-verbal. Think about your body language during the Return Discussion, including eye contact. Where is the most suitable position for you to sit in order to make the person feel comfortable? Does the person have any additional needs that require you to adapt your approach, involve an interpreter or trusted person? In some cases, it may be necessary to persevere with the Return Discussion, and build rapport. It may take time for a person to trust you and want to engage and they may initially refuse to.

7

Establish what happened before, during and after the missing episode

Understanding each of these stages in a person's missing journey is vital to identify any harm they may have suffered, safeguard them and help prevent any future missing episodes. Ensure to clearly identify the push and pull factors that have led to them going missing and consider any risk or exploitation that they may have experienced or currently be experiencing. Is the person now safe that they have returned home, or are they still at risk? Does the person now require medical attention or medication? Do they need to be kept safe from a person/persons or a place?

8

Identify the Person's Current Support Network & Signpost to Missing People and other relevant support services

Who is currently supporting the person – other professionals, family, friends, or nobody? Working with the person to identify who they can rely on for support in the short or long-term could prevent them going missing again, and helps you to identify any support that they may need. Signpost the person or their family to Missing People's free, confidential helpline on 116 000 for additional support. Make sure to consider other third sector support and organisations that can also offer support, such as Samaritans Scotland, Alzheimer's Scotland, or Purple Alert.

9

Recording: Capture their voice

Consider where you are going to record the information that the person shares with you during the Return Discussion. Does your local area have a Return Discussion form? If so, this should be completed and stored according to GDPR. Any record of the Return Discussion should contain an account of what happened before, during and after the missing episode; a consideration of any risk or harm experienced by the person, as well as any safeguarding concerns and further support offered. It is also useful to think about and record how likely you feel that they are to go missing again. This information should be recorded in a way that most accurately reflects the experience of the missing person, using quotations where possible to annotate their voice.

10

Information sharing and action

A good Return Discussion is only effective if relevant, proportionate information is shared with other local professionals and agencies, and actions are taken based on this information to safeguard, support, and prevent the person from going missing again. Make sure that you manage the person's expectations around what information you will be sharing with other professionals after the Return Discussion, and what might happen next if you need to report any incidents of crime or harm to the police.