

Missing People's 'Missing from Work' Policy

Guidance for employers when an employee is missing.

**missing
people**

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

Table of Contents

1	<i>Introduction.....</i>	3
2	<i>Definition of a missing person and the issue of missing.....</i>	3
3	<i>Employee records.....</i>	4
4	<i>Initial response if an employee does not arrive at work.....</i>	5
5	<i>Contacting the missing employee’s emergency contact/next of kin.....</i>	6
6	<i>Forming a Decision Group.....</i>	7
7	<i>Contacting the police.....</i>	8
8	<i>Making colleagues aware of a missing employee.....</i>	9
	8.1 <i>Managing colleague welfare.....</i>	9
	8.2 <i>If colleagues want to raise awareness.....</i>	10
	8.3 <i>Managing external communication.....</i>	10
9	<i>If a missing employee is found.....</i>	11
	9.1 <i>If the employee returns to work.....</i>	11
	9.2 <i>If the employee does not wish to return to work.....</i>	12
	9.3 <i>If the employee has died during their missing incident.....</i>	12
10	<i>Appendix 1 – Checklist.....</i>	13

1 Introduction

This guidance has been produced by the national charity Missing People and is based on Missing People's own missing from work policy.

It is designed to be used by employers in addition to their own policies and procedures so that they are prepared to be able to manage the rare situation where an employee is missing from work.

2 Definition of a missing person and the issue of missing

The College of Policing's definition of a missing person is as follows:

"Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise established."

Every 90 seconds, someone is reported missing in the UK. For many, leaving everything they know behind is a sign that they have reached breaking point. Most of the people who are reported missing may be experiencing vulnerability or risk. This can be exacerbated by being missing, particularly where someone goes missing more than once.

The complex reasons that cause one to go missing are vast, cutting through every corner of society regardless of race, gender, and age. Up to 80% of adults who go missing will have mental health issues. Other common causes which have been raised in conversations with adults contacting Missing People's Helpline are homelessness, dementia, or problems at home. This can include addiction, relationship breakdown or financial problems, as well as abuse or domestic violence.

There is no set waiting period to contact the police if you feel a person has gone missing. However, adults do have the legal right to go missing, unless they are detained under the Mental Health Act or are within the criminal justice system. Even if police find a missing person, they do not have to tell others where they are. Over 100,000 adults are reported missing each year; 75% of adults are found in 24 hours, 85% within two days, but 5% of adults will be missing longer than a week.

If you feel that an employee who goes missing may be at risk, it counts an emergency; do not hesitate to call the emergency services (please see Section 5).

3 Employee records

Up to date employee records are essential for responding quickly and effectively when an employee does not turn up to work as expected. This means that:

- Employees should be asked by HR to record their mobile and home phone numbers as well as personal email addresses and update these as and when they change, with annual reminders.
- Employees should be asked by HR to record contact details for at least one (and ideally two) emergency contacts, including a next of kin. Employees should be made aware that the emergency contacts may be contacted if they do not turn up to work as expected, and do not answer their phone when contacted.
- Employees and line managers must ensure that work calendars are up to date with flexible working hours; leave; external meetings; appointments; training; working from home, etc. This keeps employees safe and ensures managers and HR always know where employees are expected to be.

4 Initial response if an employee does not arrive at work (including remote working/working from home)

- Employers' HR teams need to develop a procedure for when an employee does not arrive at work (including remote working/working from home) as expected. This procedure should consider:
 - Who will check the employee's calendar/diary/leave records in case they are not expected to be at work as usual.
 - Who will try to contact the employee, after how much time, and how often. In Missing People's own policy, we aim to contact the employee up to 3 times by phone/text in the first 4 hours from the time they were due to be at work. The last of these voicemail/text messages to the employee should state that the employee's emergency contact/next of kin will be contacted at a specified time if we have not heard from the employee by then (see Section 5).
 - If appropriate, speak to the employee's colleagues to ascertain whether they are aware of any reason why the employee may not be in work, or if they have any concerns about the employee. This should be done sensitively and with the employee's privacy in mind.
 - Whether any urgent work/meetings the missing employee was responsible for can be covered by colleagues.

5 Contacting the missing employee's emergency contact/next of kin

- If no contact has been established with the employee after 4 hours of first attempt to contact, the line manager should consider contacting the employee's first emergency contact/next of kin.
- The employee's manager should discuss the following with the emergency contact:
 - Explain that the employee has not arrived or logged in for work, that they are concerned about their welfare and outline the steps that have been taken.
 - Ask if they know of the employee's whereabouts.
 - Find out if they live with the employee, or if there is someone they can contact who does.
 - Ask if they are aware of any issues with the employee or have any concerns for the employee's welfare.
 - Signpost the emergency contact to Missing People's Helpline on 116 000 if they need further support.
- Discuss informing the police if the emergency contact cannot contact the missing employee and decide who will do this and at what point (ideally agree that the emergency contact/next of kin will do this).
- Agree a main point of contact from the employer and how they will keep the emergency contact up-to-date and vice-versa. Ideally this contact from the employer will be a representative of the Decision Group (see Section 6).

6 Forming a Decision Group

A Decision Group should be formed to consider the implications of a member of staff who is missing. The initial formation of this group should take place on Day 1 if contact has not been established with the missing employee, and if the emergency contact does not know where the person is. The Decision Group is likely to involve a representative of the HR team, the employee's line manager and, if relevant, a senior member of the missing employee's team. The following should be taken into consideration by this group if, and when, appropriate:

- Whether to contact the police (see Section 7).
- Meeting the emergency contact/next of kin, either at the office or at home/externally, to discuss the situation in person, help with plans and offer support.
- What facts and information should be shared with colleagues, in what format and when (see Section 8).
- The potential impacts of the disappearance on colleagues and what support they may need to deal with these impacts.
- The impact of different outcomes on the employee, their family, colleagues, and the organisation. Planning for these potential outcomes could include that the employee returns to work, the employee is missing long-term, the employee is found to have had an accident or died while missing.
- Whether to continue the missing employee's salary. Consider pay against the employer's pre-established compassionate and sick leave policies, seeking legal advice in each instance of missing.

7 Contacting the police

- Contacting the police is mainly done by the emergency contact/next of kin and does not need any set time to have passed before doing so.
- If it is out of character for someone to disappear or there are any concerns about an individual's welfare, the police should be contacted immediately after attempting to contact the employee and their emergency contact.
- If the emergency contact/next of kin does not wish to contact the police, attempts to encourage them should be made with further support to understand the importance of this.
- However, if the emergency contact/next of kin still does not wish to report the person as missing, the Decision Group may need to discuss whether to inform the police.
- If the Decision Group decides that one of them will report the employee to the police as missing, they should inform the emergency contact/next of kin that they plan to do this.
- The police can be contacted on 101 to report a missing person. Alternatively, the emergency contact/next of kin can call 999 if the employee is believed to be at serious risk of harm.
- The police will need the following information when someone is reported missing¹:
 - All personal details known about the individual, including their full name, date of birth, home address and employment details.
 - Any details relating to the disappearance; when contact was last had with the individual, who that was with, and any details relating to possible reasons behind their disappearance.
 - If known, a description of the missing person including what they were wearing when they disappeared. The police may also ask for a photo of the missing person.
 - Any factors that might put the individual at risk. These may include the fact that the missing person has physical or mental health issues, has a drug or alcohol dependency or has recently been unhappy or previously suffered a trauma.
 - Police may ask for various personal items belonging to the missing person if they are left behind. This may include mobile phones, diaries and laptop computers.
 - Police are also likely to want to visit the person's address to carry out a routine search.

¹ Missing People Family Guidance: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/missing-people/families-and-friends/family-guidance>

8 Making employees aware of a missing colleague

- Making staff aware is a decision to be considered by the Decision Group.
- The timing of informing the team should be decided on a case-by-case basis, considering circumstances, and respecting the employee's privacy as much as is possible.
- Senior management should be informed by the Decision Group with an opportunity for discussion and should then inform their own teams in person (where possible) regarding the situation, giving an outline of steps taken and whether there are any implications for the team or individuals.
- Ensure colleagues know what information is confidential and what can be shared externally (see Section 8.3).

8.1 Managing colleague welfare

- Colleagues will benefit from being able to talk about the impact of a disappearance in a supportive setting. This could be in a supervised group setting. If there is budget available, hiring a counsellor or similar external professional will relieve pressure on managers, who may be affected themselves.
- Consider facilitating opportunities for colleagues to spend time together away from workstations or have longer breaks if needed.
- Conversations about allocating any of the missing employee's work to colleagues should be handled sensitively. However, encouraging staff to cover duties for their absent colleague may be positive for them. A sense of 'caretaking' their colleague's work and making sure things are in a good state on their return can help take the focus from worst possible outcomes.
- Encourage colleagues to reach out for support from Missing People through their Helpline on 116 000, or their website at www.missingpeople.org.uk.

8.2 If colleagues want to raise awareness

- If the disappearance becomes known in the organisation you may find their colleagues are eager to do things to help. This will have to be managed carefully because there may not be a lot they can do practically. The desire to 'do something' is a natural response in a situation that people do not have a lot of control over. Some things staff could do:
 - Sharing the official appeal on social media and within their networks².
 - Finding places to distribute official posters; if there is an appeal on the Missing People website it can be downloaded and printed off to be displayed or handed out.
 - Searching. Police may ask for volunteers to search certain areas and some staff may want to take part in such activities. However, they should be discouraged from setting up their own searches or going out on their own looking for the missing person.
 - Participating in a fundraising activity for Missing People.

8.3 Managing external communication

- Consider what staff can communicate to clients and other stakeholders about the missing employee. Agree what wording can be used if people call and ask for the missing employee, or if an appointment needs to be arranged. The missing employee's privacy is important; consider following established protocols for sudden staff absence.
- If the disappearance gains media attention, staff may be worried they will be approached for comments or information from journalists; it is helpful to decide upon some proactive guidance on this.

²Missing People Guidance on Publicity <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help/help->

9 If a missing employee is found

- If the missing employee's emergency contact/next of kin informs the employer's main contact that the employee has been found, report this to the wider Decision Group and follow the pre-agree strategy in accordance with the potential outcomes.
- If the employee has been found without harm, this strategy should include a process of who will contact the employee, how (often) this will be done, and if/when a return to work could begin.
- **Many people will go missing more than once, with half of all missing incidents being repeat missing incidents.** Great care is needed during any initial conversations with the employee and possible re-introduction to the workforce, to prevent further stress and another missing incident. **If they do go missing again, it is fundamental that the entire process outlined in this document is repeated to ensure their safety.**

9.1 If the employee returns to work

- An employee returning to work after a missing incident should have as minimum the standard return to work meeting or interview as per the employer's guidelines. A return-to-work meeting or interview might be quite overwhelming for the employee, so consider breaking it into two meetings. Create a confidential space for the employee to discuss worries they may have in returning to work, and what the organisation can do to prevent further missing incidents.
- Consider a phased return for the returning employee, or flexible hours, especially if the employee came to harm during their missing incident.
- Let the employee decide how they would like colleagues to be updated on their missing incident, and their subsequent return to work.
- Line managers should make sure they regularly check in with the returned employee with pre-arranged meetings.
- If colleagues across the organisation have been encouraged to share appeals for the missing person, they should be asked to remove these immediately.
- If possible, offer the returned employee a session with an in-house or external counsellor.
- Make the employee aware that Missing People's Helpline is available to provide them with free and expert support on 116 000, where they can remain anonymous if they wish.

9.2 If the employee does not wish to return to work

- If the employee chooses not to return to work and is unable to work a notice period, consult pre-established policies and procedures that may cover similar situations, and seek legal advice if necessary.

9.3 If the employee has died during their missing incident

- If the employee has died during their missing incident, the Decision Group should liaise with their emergency contact/next of kin on their wishes of how the organisation should respond to this, and what information should be shared with colleagues.
- The employer should follow the pre-established policies and procedures of the organisation regarding death in service and seek legal advice if necessary.
- If the employee has died during their missing incident, continue managing wider colleague welfare in accordance with Section 8.1.³

³ Bereavement support services can be found at <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help/my-loved-one-is-missing/bereavement-agencies>

10 Appendix 1 – Checklist

1 st Day	Reviewed / Action / Comment
Check calendar/diary/leave, as well as online for any travel issues.	
Try to contact missing employee up to 3 times with some time elapsed in between each contact, unless there are immediate concerns for their wellbeing.	
Check with HR for any health issues, disability or other circumstances that need to be considered.	
<p>Liaise with emergency contact/next of kin for information on employee's whereabouts if employee has not responded to contacts.</p> <p>Suggest to the emergency contact/next of kin that they may wish to contact the charity Missing People's Helpline for advice and support: call or text 116 000, www.missingpeople.org.uk</p>	
Form a Decision Group if necessary	
Discuss with emergency contact/next of kin whether they will report the employee as missing to the police and when.	
If emergency contact/next of kin will not report person missing, Decision Group to decide whether they should report them as missing and when.	
Liaise with police as necessary (this may not be relevant on the first day, depending on circumstances).	
Inform staff and volunteers of situation as necessary (this may not be relevant on the first day, depending on circumstances).	
If an employee remains missing after 1 day	Reviewed / Action / Comment
The Decision Group will need to consider cover of the employee's role, and whether any other HR policies need to be followed.	

Support for the employee's team, both in workload and emotional support, will need to be offered. The Decision Group will consider this on a case-by-case basis considering the operational requirements of the organisation as well as missing employee.	
If an employee comes back to work after an established missing incident	Reviewed / Action / Comment
Meet with the employee to check they are fit to be back at work and ensure they are updated on the steps that were taken while they were missing. Agree what messaging to share with colleagues about the incident. Recommend the returned person seeks advice and support from Missing People's Helpline www.missingpeople.org.uk or call/text 116 000.	
HR, the employee, and line manager should then draw up a back to work plan (considering support needed by the employee).	
Inform colleagues of situation if necessary (in agreement with messages discussed and agreed with found employee and in a sensitive manner).	
Look at amount of time away from work and calculate sick, compassionate, unpaid, and annual leave.	
Set up a review period to ensure they are supported and adjusting to being back at work.	
If an employee has come to harm or died while missing	Reviewed / Action / Comment
Decision Group to liaise with emergency contact/next of kin on their wishes of how the organisation should respond to this and what information should be shared with colleagues.	
Decision Group to inform colleagues in a sensitive manner based on messaging from emergency contact/next of kin.	

<p>Decision Group to consider and offer specialist support for colleagues (Missing People’s Services team can advise on which agencies could offer this).</p>	
<p>Decision Group to consider potential media interest and how to approach this.</p>	
<p>Decision Group to agree how to liaise with the family longer-term.</p>	

Please note, these guidelines are issued to aid companies to best respond when an employee goes missing. Missing People issues this guidance for reference only and has no legal responsibility for guidance that organisations take in their HR policies.