

THE POLICE RESPONSE TO MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES...

missing people

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



Over 300,000 missing incidents are reported to the police each year.

The initial report, the risk assessment process and the subsequent investigation mean there are a significant number of interactions between the police and members of the public in relation to these incidents. However, missing people and their families do not always know what to expect from the police response.

The following principles are based on existing police guidance, including Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and the Code of Ethics, and aim to clarify what that response will involve.

Members of the public should be able to expect that the principles will be consistently adhered to for all missing person investigations. All forces should ensure they are able to deliver against these principles.

Missing People, a UK charity, provide support to missing people and their families, while working in partnership with the police to support their investigations. Information about the charity's services and how they can help can be found www.missingpeople.org.uk/police or call **116 000**.



“ This document sets out what families and the public are entitled to expect from the police when a person is reported missing. Keeping families informed and being open and honest about the investigation is an important aspect of every missing person investigation. ”

DCC Hankinson, National Police Chief's Council Lead for Missing

PRINCIPLES FOR THE RESPONSE TO MISSING PEOPLE

- 1. The police will always aim to make missing people safer through their actions.** They will be flexible in their approach, focussing on what is in the best interests of the missing person.
- 2. When a person is reported missing, the police should always consider the unique circumstances and risks for that individual in that incident.** This will include considering whether the circumstances are out of character, or if previous missing incidents mean the person is at higher risk of harm.
The police should use professional curiosity and endeavour to gather all relevant information that is reasonably available from the reporting person, relatives, friends and professionals to inform the risk assessment and investigation.
- 3. The police will not discriminate against any missing person.** They will always check their thinking to prevent any assumptions or bias from affecting decisions, including about whether to accept the missing report, the risk level, or investigative actions needed.
- 4. The police should try to take a compassionate approach,** seeking to understand what is happening for the missing person, including consideration of the full circumstances around the missing incident, and whether they may have been a victim of exploitation or abuse.
- 5. When speaking to a missing person on their return the police will endeavour to listen in a non-judgemental way to the returned person** and provide space for the returned person to share information about why they went and what happened to them while away. They will give information in a way that is easy to understand and provide any necessary help to the missing person to ensure they can be understood.
- 6. The police will consider every missing person's right to privacy balanced with their safeguarding needs in the investigation,** including when deciding whether to launch a public appeal to find them, or whether to use non-public appeals. In the case of missing adults once they have been found, the police will respect their wishes in regards to sharing information about their location and what happened during the missing incident with the reporting person.
- 7. The police should consider referring or signposting to relevant local support services,** and consider requesting the charity Missing People reach out to each missing person via [TextSafe®](https://www.textsafe.org/) to offer the charity's confidential safeguarding and support services.



THE POLICE RESPONSE TO MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES...

PRINCIPLES FOR THE RESPONSE TO FAMILIES OF MISSING PEOPLE

- 1. The police should enable the reporting person and other family and friends to fully share their concerns about the missing person.** They will record those concerns and explain how they will inform the police response and investigation.

The police will be transparent with families about their understanding of the risk and missing person's vulnerability, and what enquiries they intend to conduct to find their missing person, unless it would harm the investigation to do so.

If the police decide that the incident does not warrant a missing person investigation they will be transparent in explaining this to the reporting person.

- 2. The police will aim to provide families of missing people with contact details for an officer or team responsible for conducting enquiries at each point of the missing investigation.** The police should aim to provide families with a reference number to prevent them being required to repeat information unnecessarily.
- 3. The police should give families of missing people regular updates on the investigation,** even when there have been no significant developments.

The regularity of updates and contact preferences should be discussed and reviewed with the family. The police will be conscious of how scared or worried families of missing people may be, and will be thoughtful and respectful in their interactions.



- 4. The police will not discriminate against anyone reporting someone as missing.** They will always check their thinking to prevent any assumptions or bias impacting how they treat the family, or informing any action they take to investigate the report.

They will give information in a way that is easy to understand and provide any necessary help to the family to ensure they can be understood.

- 5. The police should acknowledge the family's right to privacy** and wherever possible seek agreement to any publicity or information shared in the public domain about the family or the missing person.
- 6. The police should consider referring families of missing people to support services,** including any relevant local services, and to Missing People's family support, missing or exploitation services when they would benefit from additional help.

Members of the public should be able to expect that the principles will be consistently adhered to for all missing person investigations.

ALL FORCES SHOULD ENSURE THEY ARE ABLE TO DELIVER AGAINST THESE PRINCIPLES.

