

# Has someone you know gone missing?

## Coping with practical issues

Factsheet 3

**After you have reported a loved one missing, there are some practical issues which may need to be addressed if the person remains missing for more than a few days. You may find it hard to think about what to do during this distressing time, so below is a list of things that you may find helpful to consider.**

### **Inform the necessary people**

- Contact, or ask a supportive friend to contact, key individuals to advise them that the person has gone missing. For example: their employer, school, landlord and any other key family members or friends who may not know that the person is missing
- If appropriate, perhaps if the person has been missing for some time, you may need to consider cancelling any social engagements, business appointments or travel plans your loved one may have scheduled.

### **Personal Property**

- If the missing person lives alone, arrange for someone to collect or manage their post and regularly check on their house
- If your missing loved one has pets, make sure that someone takes on the responsibility of caring for them
- If someone will be driving the missing person's car, they should make sure that they have the appropriate insurance cover.

### **Finances**

- If the person remains missing for more than a few weeks, it may be necessary to check whether they have a mortgage, rent, household bills or other financial obligations. If so, contact the related organisations (e.g. banks or building societies) to notify them that the person is missing and see what arrangements can be made with regards to their financial commitments
- Depending on how long your loved one is missing for, it may be worth discussing with the police whether monitoring their bank account(s) may assist with the investigation.

### **Legal issues**

Only a very small percentage of people who go missing remain missing for a long time. However, if your relative or friend is missing for an extended period, you may find it helpful to obtain some legal advice; for example, to help manage issues such as your missing loved one's life insurance and pensions and to find out what to do with their personal property such as their house or car. Assistance with legal issues may be obtained from the Citizen's Advice Bureau or the Law Society.

- **Citizen's Advice Bureau**

Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB) provide free, confidential and independent advice from over 3,000 locations. Advice is available face to face and by telephone. Most CABs offer home visits and some also provide advice by email.

<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

- **The Law Society**

The Law Society's website contains a searchable database to help you find a solicitor, along with information on what to expect from a solicitor, guides to common legal problems and advice on what to do if things go wrong. It also includes guidance on paying for legal services and finding specialist solicitors.

<http://www.lawsociety.co.uk/choosing/gandusing/findasolicitor.law>

## **Use of Private Investigators**

You may consider using Private Investigators if your loved one has been missing for some time. However, only do so if you are convinced that they can do something different from, or in addition to, what is already being done by the police. Otherwise, you may be wasting money which could be spent more productively in other ways.

It is best to discuss the involvement of a private detective with the police. They may have experience of dealing some of these individuals and may help you to decide whether or not to employ one. If you do decide to use a private detective, always:

- Check for references and be wary of claims that are 'too good to be true'
- Inform the police about your decision to hire a private investigator. It may be necessary for the police to speak to them before they become involved in the case
- Make sure you are paying a reasonable rate and insist that expenses are itemised and accompanied with receipts
- Notify the police of any information collected by the private investigator.

## **Psychics**

Missing person cases often attract the interest of psychics or clairvoyants. Although these individuals may genuinely wish to help, hearing their dreams and visions can cause distress and can either make you lose hope or give you an unrealistic sense of hope. Previous police searches for missing people actually show little or no evidence of any successful psychic involvement. If you do wish to consult

a psychic, it may be helpful for you to consider the following points:

- Keep your expectations realistic, it is rare for a psychic to locate a missing person
- Consider the motive of the psychic, especially where they stand to gain financially for their involvement
- Ask how they work and how they receive their information. Ask if they have any evidence of previous successes
- Be careful about supplying information to the psychic, especially information that the police would prefer to be withheld or information that you and the missing person would rather was not made public
- Do not allow a psychic to go into the missing person's room unattended or allow them to remove anything from the room
- If any information is provided, pass it on to the police to establish the value of it
- Discuss financial compensation beforehand. Some psychics provide their services free, with the aim of helping people. Do not part with any money unless this has been agreed in advance, for example, for travel expenses.

## **Presumption of death**

The majority of people who go missing are found or return quite quickly. However, if your family member or friend has been missing for many years, you may eventually need to consider initiating the process to declare them legally dead.

Although this is a very hard decision and emotionally may be very distressing, this legal process is necessary to manage a number of legal and property issues; for example, in order to administer your missing loved one's estate, claim benefits and life insurance, dissolve their marriage and arrange their financial affairs. These things cannot be done without a death certificate.

At the moment, there are two kinds of legal processes: Leave to Swear Death and Presumption of Death. In general, it takes a minimum of seven years for a missing person to be presumed dead in the UK, although the legal processes are different depending on whether you live in England, Wales, Scotland

or Northern Ireland. Leave to Swear Death can, in some cases, be arranged before this seven year period.

You may find it helpful to obtain legal advice if you do need to go through this process. Assistance with legal issues may be obtained from the Citizen's Advice Bureau or the Law Society as outlined previously.

### **What to do when the missing person is located or found**

The majority of missing people return or are found within 48 hours, with only around 1% still missing after a year. If your friend or relative returns after you have reported them missing to the police, you must contact the police to let them know. When the missing person has returned or has been located, the police will need to establish that they are safe and well. The police may wish to see the person who was missing, to confirm this.

Do not forget to let other friends or volunteers who have helped with the search know that the missing person has been located. Also ensure that any charities that you have contacted are made aware.

People do not usually go missing without a reason. After the person is found or returns home, it is important to find out the reasons for their disappearance. If the issues that caused the disappearance are not addressed, there is a possibility that the person may go missing again. It may be helpful for you to discuss this with them or get them to discuss this with a friend or someone else they feel comfortable talking to.

In some circumstances, the police, Social Services or another organisation, such as a local charity, may wish to carry out a 'Return from Missing' interview with the returned/found person. The aim is to discuss why the person went missing and to help identify and address any problems or concerns that person may have.

If no 'Return from Missing' interview is conducted, it might be helpful for the person to speak to a charity or their GP to discuss any issues they may have and to access any support systems or services which they may find helpful.

Sometimes, adults who go missing voluntarily may, once found, wish for their location to remain secret. This is their right and in these

circumstances, the police are legally obliged to respect their wishes. You will be told this if this is the case. The police will, however, ensure that they pass on any information that they are able to.

### **Support and advice can be sought from organisations such as:**

#### **Missing People**

116 000

[www.missingpeople.org.uk/](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/)  
[info@missingpeople.org.uk](mailto:info@missingpeople.org.uk)

#### **Samaritans**

08457 90 90 90

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

#### **The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

01455 883 300

[bacp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk)  
[www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk](http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk)

For additional copies, to enquire about the content of this document or request the information in an alternative format, please contact the UK Missing Persons Bureau on **0845 000 5481** or email [missingpersons bureau@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:missingpersons bureau@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk)

The information in this guide is not definitive and should be utilised in conjunction with police guidance and independent legal advice.