

# Best practice principles for counselling the families and friends of missing people

Counsellors will possess well-developed basic counselling skills recognising the importance of empathy and genuineness, and treat all clients with courtesy, compassion and respect.

Counsellors will have a detailed knowledge of the psychological and emotional experiences faced by families and friends of missing persons, and an awareness of the personal, social, interpersonal, legal and practical issues confronting their reality.

Counsellors will have an understanding of the concept of continuous grieving faced by families and friends of missing people, and avoid applying grief and loss models that emphasise 'closure' and rigid stages of grieving.

Counsellors will have an awareness of the different cultural and religious customs associated with the experience of grief and loss.

Counsellors will be aware of the long term support needs of families and friends of missing people, as they live with the pain of not knowing, feelings of hope, and triggers that may unsettle their emotional balance.

Counsellors will support families and friends of long-term missing people to redefine and reinterpret their altered relationship with the missing person.

Counsellors need to have the ability to sit with the uncertainty and lack of resolution faced by many of the families and friends of missing people.

Counsellors will have an understanding of family dynamics and the reasons why some people may choose to go missing.

## Contact details

For further information about this material or other topics, please call us on:

**Phone** (02) 8688 8173 or 1800 227 772 • **National Relay Service** 1800 555 677

**Facebook** [www.facebook.com/missing.501](https://www.facebook.com/missing.501) • **Email** [ffmpu@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ffmpu@justice.nsw.gov.au)

[www.missingpersons.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.missingpersons.justice.nsw.gov.au)

Counsellors will ensure that families and friends of missing people have access to information on search agencies and legal issues.

If the missing person is located and wishes to be reunited with family and friends, counsellors will have an awareness of and sensitivity to the issues that may be raised in a reunion.

A need for understanding and knowledge of grief and loss issues is required by the counsellor where the missing person is located but does not wish to be reunited with family and friends.

Counsellors will maintain knowledge of support groups for families and friends of missing people.

Based on recommendations from *"It's the Hope That Hurts" Best Practice in Counselling Models Relevant To Families and Friends of Missing Persons*, Hunter Institute of Mental Health, funded by the Families & Friends of Missing Persons Unit.