

Reconnecting when a missing person is located

The role of police

The role of police in a missing person's case is to ascertain if the missing person is safe and well. Police need to sight the person before removing them from the missing person's register. If you are in contact with the missing person and are unsure if police are still searching for them, you, or the missing person, can speak to the officer in charge of the investigation. Sightings of a missing person in Australia can also be reported to Crimestoppers on:

Phone: 1800 333 000

In some cases, the missing person does not wish to get back in touch with family and friends when they are found. If the missing person is an adult, police will respect the privacy of the missing person and will not provide details of their whereabouts without their permission. In this situation, police can only tell families that the person has been sighted.

Police may involve social or health services if the missing person is vulnerable due to age, mental health, or other health reasons. Families dealing with children who run away may find the Parentline information sheet on 'Adolescent Runaways' helpful at:

Web: www.parentline.org.au

The emotional response

When a person who has been missing is found you may experience a range of emotions. People around you might react differently to you. Some people understand that families need to adjust to the discovery of the missing person, while others might expect you to recover as soon as the missing person is located.

For those people who have been missing for a long time, significant events may have occurred while they were away – marriages, divorces, career changes, deaths. It will take some time to explore the impact of these changes.

The feelings you experience can be confusing and may change over time. This is normal. You may find yourself feeling:

- relieved they are alive;
- happy, excited, anxious, or nervous about seeing them again;
- wanting answers;
- uncertain how to talk with them about what led to them going missing and what happened while they were away;
- worried they may not want contact with you, or fearful they may go missing again;
- angry or hurt that you were left behind to deal with the worry you felt;
- overwhelmed, embarrassed, sad, guilty, insecure, jealous or rejected.

Reconnecting with a missing person

Sometimes the located missing person wishes to reunite with family and friends. Reuniting will depend on many things including the circumstances around them going missing. It is important to be realistic and open to the changes that may have occurred. Understanding on both sides will be required.

Some things to consider:

- It is helpful to discuss your expectations for reunion as they may vary greatly between individuals.
- Reuniting can take time. Try not to crowd, pressure or rush each other.
- Trust may need to be re-established for reunion to be possible.
- Suggest to the missing person that you would like to hear about their experiences, as well as wanting to share with them what it was like for you.
- If you kept a journal or a scrapbook while your loved one was missing you might like to share parts of it with them. This might help the missing person understand your experience.
- If the missing person does not want to talk to you about things that are concerning them ask them if they would like some support in finding someone else to talk to.

- If you think the person is at risk of going missing again talk about options for them other than to go missing e.g. carrying support numbers in their wallet or identifying a support person they can call to say they are alive and okay.
- If a health issue such as dementia, mental health, or a developmental delay is thought to have contributed to their disappearance, you may need to discuss a safety plan with them, other family members or relevant services.

Counselling or mediation may help with reunion, in dealing with the impact of missing and in the development of safety strategies.

When reunion is not possible

In some instances reunion is not possible. Sometimes the missing person does not wish to or cannot return home due to mental health issues, ongoing conflict or another difficulty. It can be hard to know what to do in this situation and you may experience feelings of confusion and distress.

Some things to think about:

- You may need to seek advice about whether reunion is possible or appropriate as each circumstance is different.
- It is important to be respectful of the missing person's request for privacy. Be mindful that continuing to attempt to contact someone against their wishes may push them further away. Providing space and time may benefit the relationship in the long run.
- The person who was missing may be open to staying in contact through other means, including phone, email, or text message, to let you know they are alive and alright. They might agree to such contact without disclosing their whereabouts.
- It can be distressing being separated from a loved family member or friend. You may find you have unanswered questions. Finding a space to talk about this separation with family, friends, or in a counselling environment might be helpful to you.

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 • **Email** ffmpu@justice.nsw.gov.au

www.missingpersons.justice.nsw.gov.au

Where to get help

The Families & Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU)

Free and confidential support, counselling, and information to families and friends of missing persons in NSW (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Phone: (02) 8688 8186 or or 1800 227 772 (Freecall)

Email: ffmpu@justice.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.missingpersons.justice.nsw.gov.au

Your local general practitioner (GP) or Community Health Centre (CHC)

Consult your local GP for a counselling referral (using Medicare rebate) or your local CHC for advice around counselling support options.

Web: www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/communityhealth

Lifeline

A national 24-hour telephone counselling and referral service.

Phone: 13 11 14

Relationships Australia

Relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

Phone: 1300 364 227

Web: www.relationships.org.au

Inter-relate

Provide personal, family and relationship counselling in NSW:

Phone: 1300 763 966

Web: www.interrelate.org.au

Homeless Persons Information Centre

Telephone information and referral service for those in NSW who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness:

Phone: 1800 234 566 (Tollfree)