

What happens when a missing person is located deceased?

Sometimes a missing person is located deceased. Families and friends may be confronted with a range of distressing emotions and experiences, which can include:

- a loss of hope of seeing the missing person again;
- grief regardless of the length of time the person has been missing;
- disbelief that the missing person has died (even after positive identification);
- relief that, at least, the searching is over;
- reliving emotions experienced when your loved one first went missing.
- being distressed by others' comments that they are "glad" or "happy" that the missing person has been found;
- feeling isolated when friends appear to move on because the person is no longer missing;
- ongoing questions around the circumstances of the disappearance, what happened and how they died, if these remain unclear;
- concern about media interest;
- being confused about how you are responding to the news of a death versus the way you imagined you might have responded;
- challenges in responding to the different range of conflicting feelings – relief, anger, guilt;
- a feeling of emptiness after the search is over, particularly if this has been a large part of your focus for a long time;
- frustration or confusion if the process of identification of the missing person takes some time.

What might help

Allow yourself time to grieve. Be patient and kind to yourself. Remember there is no right or wrong way to feel at this time. Those around you may respond in different ways. Allow space and understanding for individual differences.

The stress of losing a loved one may take a toll on you physically and emotionally. It is important to take care of yourself by maintaining healthy eating, sleeping, and exercise where possible.

Families sometimes decide on a particular ritual or ceremony to allow an opportunity to acknowledge the person who was missing and to say goodbye. This might be guided by religious, cultural or spiritual beliefs or traditions. Explore these ideas with your family and friends when you feel ready.

Talk about your experience with others. Reach out for, and accept support from friends, family, local community groups and support agencies. Investigate bereavement services that meet your individual needs and circumstances.

Grief support services may be offered as telephone, face-to-face, individual, family, or support groups.

Where to get help

Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit

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 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 or CHC for advice about counselling options.

Lifeline

A 24-hour telephone counselling and referral service.

Phone: 13 11 14

National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG)

Offers grief and loss training and information, support groups and a grief support line. Contact the line on:

Phone: (02) 9489 6644

Web: www.nalag.org.au

Bereavement services information

A NSW Health brochure which contains information on general bereavement support can be found here:

Web: www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2003/pdf.bereavement_care.pdf

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

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