

Are you the parent of a sibling of a missing person?

Having a loved one disappear is a harrowing time for the family and friends left behind. Uncertainty about the health and whereabouts of someone you love can cause enormous challenges on you as an individual as well as on your significant relationships.

In 2005 the Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU) held a roundtable for siblings of missing persons to hear about their unique experiences.

One of the key issues identified by the siblings participating was a concern that their parents may have overlooked or misunderstood the hardship that they also experienced when their brother or sister vanished.

This fact sheet might help you identify ways in which you could support your children as well as an insight into their own journey of unresolved loss.

Common experiences of siblings of missing persons

The reactions of siblings of missing persons included:

- General emotions of fear, anxiety, anger, hopelessness etc.
- Their parents relying heavily on siblings to support them emotionally. In some ways siblings felt that their own emotions were subdued because they did not want to further concern their parents.
- Feeling torn between their parents – some felt that their mothers were outwardly emotional and that their fathers appeared quiet and withdrawn. This led to concerns for their parent's health and a sense that they could not provide adequate support.

How your experience may differ from that of your children

Some of the siblings spoke about:

- Feeling left out of the investigation process, as parents were often the contact for agencies

such as the police. Siblings felt that they may not have been consulted or kept up to date with the case.

- Feeling left out of the support provided by other people – siblings spoke about extended family members and friends asking how their parents were coping and not enquiring about their pain.
- Feeling guilty that their sibling didn't confide in them before they vanished. Many siblings felt that they should have known what their brother or sister was planning or "seen the signs" prior to their disappearance.
- Feeling that their own successes achieved, after their sibling went missing, were flawed by constant reminders of the absence of their sibling.
- Some siblings spoke about the need to "vanish" by taking extended overseas holidays or relocating to other states. This appeared to provide some respite and distance from the constant reminders that their sibling was missing.

What could you do as a parent to support siblings of missing persons?

- Involve your children and update them about the progress of the investigation.
- If you find this too challenging why not pass the contact details of the investigating officer on to your children so they can make their own enquiries.
- If you feel that you need additional support seek professional assistance or talk to a friend who is in some ways removed from the anguish.
- Understand that the ways in which you cope may differ, either slightly or significantly, from the experience of your children.
- Be aware that your family's identity is not just a "family of a missing person" that you all have lives where other achievements can also be realised.

Letting others know about resources and publications

Publications provided by missing person's agencies are intended for all family members and friends of missing persons. If an agency forwards publications to your family please ensure that everyone, including siblings, have access to the material as it may help them manage the traumatic and confusing response to a person vanishing.

Further information

For further information about the *Report on the Roundtable for Siblings of Missing Persons* or other material relevant to the missing persons experience contact FFMPU on the details below.

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
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