

Briefing Note on The Investigation of Missing Persons



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This document gives an overview of the key roles and responsibilities in relation to the investigation of missing persons. More detailed information can be found in the **ACPO (2010) Guidance on the Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons**, hereinafter referred to as '**The Guidance**'.

Key issues

Missing should be considered as an indicator, not just an event in itself. People do not go missing without a reason and if those reasons are understood, future incidents of going missing may be prevented.

Gathering and sharing information about missing persons, either individually or collectively, can provide links to serious offences.

The process of managing missing persons should be seen as a cycle and is described in full in **The Guidance, 1.3 The Investigation Cycle**.

Children and other vulnerable people, such as those with a relevant disability and the elderly, have particular significance in this area and the risks in relation to them should be properly understood. That they have been missing on more than one occasion does not equate to a reduced risk.

Risk Assessment

The existing question set that supports professional judgement in determining risk in relation to a missing person investigations should still be used. This should, however, be used in conjunction with the National Decision Model for the Police Service, which can be found on POLKA <https://polka.pnn.police.uk> with **The Guidance**.

Initial call taker

The extent of detail that is recorded at this stage will depend on individual force procedures. The minimum requirement is that there is sufficient information to assess the nature of the incident and the level of response that is required, descriptive details of the missing person and any relevant information, including latest location information that may lead to their early discovery. The control room supervisor should be notified of all high risk cases immediately. See ***The Guidance, 2 Initial Reporting.***

Control room supervisor

This is an oversight role to ensure that the initial assessment of the incident and the level of response is correct. All high risk cases should be immediately referred to the supervisor who should, where appropriate notify the supervisor(s) responsible for the area in which the investigation is to take place. Part of the role will be to ensure that adequate resources are given to the investigation. See ***The Guidance, 2.1 Duty of Positive Action.***

Investigating officer

There are three key roles:

- Investigate
- Search
- Make an assessment of risk

It must be remembered that an investigation should be carried out; it is not sufficient to follow a process and fill in a form. The missing person form is comprehensive but should be filled in only to an extent that is proportionate to the investigation.

The search must be proportionate but thorough in order to:

- Locate the missing person;
- Identify any information that may lead to their discovery;
- Establish whether a crime has been committed against the missing person.

The areas searched, not searched and any outcomes should be recorded in case of any further search and investigative activity.

Assessing risk is always difficult as it is based on partial information but all factors should be taken into account to make a reasonable judgement. All cases should be referred to a supervisor as soon as practicable. The assessment of risk should be monitored throughout the investigation and any new information considered as to whether it influences earlier assessments. See ***The Guidance, 4 Investigation.***

Return

When a missing person is located, it is important that their well-being is established. A safe and well check should consider the following:

- Did the person suffer any harm?
- Were they the victim of a crime?
- Have they committed any crimes?

- Why did they go missing?
- Where did they go and who were they with?

When speaking to them, consider that missing should be considered as an indicator of an event in their lives and it is important to understand why they went away.

Consideration is to be given to the need for the involvement of specialists within the police services or other agencies. See **The Guidance, 4.12 Management of the Return.**

Supervision

Active supervision is required to ensure that the assessment of risk and management of the investigation is conducted correctly. The risk level for all cases should be checked as soon as is reasonably practicable and all actions outlined for investigating officers are properly carried out and recorded.

When there is a shift changeover and responsibility is passed on, the level of risk should be considered as to whether or not it is correct.

In significant cases, it may be better to give one person responsibility for conducting the investigation, rather than passing it from person to person as shifts change. See The Guidance 4.4 Supervision.

The review process

The cycle of reviews is set out within the main guidance document, but the first review by a detective supervisor should take place after 48 hours or sooner if required.

It is recommended that missing person cases are managed through the daily tasking meetings to ensure that they are being progressed and resourced properly. See **The Guidance, 4.4.3 Daily Review, 4.4.6 The Purpose of the Supervision and Review Process** and **4.11.3 Long-Term Case Reviews.**

Missing Person Co-ordinators

The role of the 'missing person coordinator' should be seen as good practice in knitting together the multi agency response in the cases of young and/or vulnerable missing people. It is important that this role takes forward our responsibilities as a service but does not do the work or the role that is required from other agencies. The reduction in incidents will only be replicated if all partners work together in the way that Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) have worked to reduce incident of repeat domestic violence. See **The Guidance, 4.15 Governance and Missing Person Coordinators.**

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