



## Your First 10 Steps

### 1. Contact Authorities

Making a police report is the first and most vital step in initiating a search for a missing person. Filing a police report ensures local law enforcement is alerted to the disappearance and can assess the situation to determine if the person may be in danger and if an investigation needs to be conducted. When a child goes missing, law enforcement is required by federal mandate to take the report immediately and enter the child's information into the National Crime Information Center at the FBI. However, when an adult goes missing, law enforcement is not required to take an immediate report or enter the person into NCIC and may cite a 24-48 hour waiting period as policy. There is no federal mandate requiring law enforcement to wait to take a report. It helps to be calm while insisting they take a report.

Though many law enforcement agencies will take an immediate report, it is recommended to inform officers of anything to classify the person as endangered such as needing medications for a medical condition, suffering from mental illness, being a danger to themselves or others, a domestic violence situation, any threats the person may have received, a situation where it is out of normal behavior to vanish for any length of time. For example, if a mother regularly picks up her child at daycare and fails to arrive to pick their child up, this would be considered out of the behavioral norm.

Be prepared to provide authorities with the missing person's descriptive information, a current photograph, a list of places the person frequents, list of friends and family, description of the missing person's vehicle, a list of possessions missing or left behind, etc.

Once a report has been filed, be sure to keep a copy. Also request the NCIC number (this reflects the person has been entered into the national FBI database and available nationwide to all law enforcement, medical examiners, and Coroners).

Regardless of the circumstance of the disappearance, making a police report is beneficial.

### 2. Keep a Log

Keeping a log with the full names and contact information of all people you talk to is important in maintaining good communication with everyone involved in the search for the missing person and staying organized.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed when making numerous phone calls, sending emails, etc. Keeping a log is a simple but important way to stay organized and maintain effectiveness, in addition to reducing stress.

### 3. Contact Family, Friends and Coworkers

Many times, a simple lack of communication can occur, and a missing person can be found by contacting family, friends, and coworkers.

Even after making a missing person report to police, be sure to reach out to others to find out if they have seen the individual or told where the person may be going. Life can become busy and simple miscommunication can contribute to a person being out of touch for extended periods of time. Cover all your bases by calling or texting friends to find out if they have heard from the missing person.

#### **4. Social Networks**

Social networks like Facebook can be integral to the search for a missing person from the moment the person is missing to an ongoing search if necessary.

Look at the missing person's social media pages for their last posts, any information about their plans and even state of mind. Look to see if they received any harassing or strange communications from others. Contact Facebook friends and ask if they have heard from or seen the missing person. It is important to provide any pertinent information you receive from others to the investigating law enforcement agency.

Also, Facebook and Instagram are the perfect places to obtain current photographs of the missing person to be provided to law enforcement and to make fliers.

#### **5. Contact Jails, Homeless Shelters, Hospitals and Morgues**

It is important to remain cognizant of law enforcement's limitations when searching for a missing person, especially adults as they have a right to go missing if they so choose.

As difficult as it can be, it is necessary to contact hospitals and morgues to see if the individual is injured in the hospital or unidentified in a morgue. This can be a very difficult task and you may want to ask a friend or family member to help make the calls.

#### **6. Register the Missing Person with Organizations Offering Resources**

If you are searching for a missing child, call the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) as soon as possible. NCMEC specializes in providing services for families and children who are missing. NCMEC can be reached at 1-800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678).

For families searching for someone with mental illness, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides resources for families. Their website also offers many resources.

Contact the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NAMUS) at [www.findthemissing.org](http://www.findthemissing.org) or [www.namus.org](http://www.namus.org). NAMUS is a powerful resource where information about missing persons is entered by family members of missing persons, the criminal justice community, law enforcement, and medical examiners and is publicly accessible.

#### **7. Make a One-Page Flyer**

Make a one-page flyer of the missing person. The flyer should contain the following:

- Preferably two current photographs of the missing person
- Full name
- Height, Weight, Age
- Photo of vehicle and license plate
- Place last seen
- Phone number of investigating law enforcement

## **8. Create a Website and Social Media Page**

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and other social network sites can be instrumental when searching for a missing loved one, especially if they are not found immediately. With any missing person case, it is important to maintain awareness and keep the public engaged in the search.

- Create a site with an engaging name like “Find Jane Doe” or “Missing Jane Smith”. This will help bring your page up in Google and related search results.
- Post recent pictures and include specific descriptive information to include the clothing they were last wearing, jewelry, glasses, tattoos, scars, etc.
- Upload a PDF version of the flier so others can share and download to post in their communities.
- If your loved one has a mental illness, you may want to simply say the person is “endangered” due to a medical condition or vulnerable and needs medications.
- Add links to any news stories.
- Upload a video and make a personal public appeal.
- Make sure to provide the investigating law enforcement agency’s number and encourage people to call them directly with information and leads.

## **9. Alert your Local Newspapers and Media**

Getting local media to assist can sometimes be difficult. News stations are not likely to cover a missing person story unless it comes from law enforcement. It is much easier if law enforcement puts out a press release indicating a person is in danger. Speak to the detectives and ask if they will issue a press release.

## **10. Hiring a Private Investigator**

When is it time to hire a private investigator? There is no easy answer, but it is encouraged to consult with one early on, especially if the person has not returned home within a few days. Because there is only so much law enforcement can do, at times finding the missing person requires additional assistance, both professional and specialized.

A missing person private investigator has access to databases and systems the general public does not, making finding a missing person a much easier task. An experienced private detective with experience working with law enforcement can be an asset to a missing person investigation, and can ease the burden off families, allowing family and friends to concentrate on other efforts, like social networking and keeping the public engaged.

Experienced private investigators can access information, interview witnesses and community members in order to generate new leads for an investigation, sharing information with the investigating law enforcement agency to ensure all rocks are being overturned.

Because their missing person private investigation services are being paid for, a private investigator will ensure locating the missing person has their full attention. It is also advisable to look for a missing person private investigator who has experience working with media, so they may comment on the case without compromising law enforcement’s investigation.

