

Missing People guidance for the police during COVID-19

Missing People would like to share our appreciation for the hard work that Police forces across the UK are doing to protect vulnerable people during these new and unprecedented times for policing. We hope that you, your families and your colleagues are safe.

We continue to offer a 24 hour, free and confidential service to missing people, their families and police forces across the UK. Please continue to seek our support when needed. We are still here.

Missing should continue to be a priority for both the police and agencies who work alongside the police to safeguard vulnerable people. Many of the push and pull factors which can cause someone to go missing will be exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. For those who do go missing the situation may be even more difficult – with fewer support options available, fewer safe places to go, and for many people, experiencing worsening mental health.

Responding to missing people...

We are aware that officers are being encouraged to Engage, Explain, Encourage and using Enforcement as a last resort. We would also like to highlight the following:

- Young people may not be intentionally disregarding advice and may have left home to keep themselves safe. They may also be under pressure from people who are exploiting them to be outside. This will not be immediately clear, so it is important to look past any behaviour they may be displaying and remain professionally curious.
- Many people will be experiencing worsening mental health while access to immediate crisis support and other services will be more limited. Call-takers and police officers should be aware of the heightened risk of suicide and self-harm.
- While the need to enforce the stay at home order is vital to public health, police officers should be conscious of the potential vulnerability of people who are out of their homes, and engage them in a supportive and understanding way.
- All missing people should be asked about whether they currently feel safe at home and whether home is a safe place to return to. Returning them to an address they have run away from may put them at increased risk.
- It is unlikely that fining parents or local authorities when a child is repeatedly going missing will help to safeguard the child or protect public health. Where possible a more nuanced approach should be taken,

working with the person responsible for the child's care to keep them safe. The missing person themselves may be concerned that they will be fined/prosecuted for leaving the house. Please offer reassurance and support.

- Officers should be mindful that parents and carers may delay reporting a person missing due to misunderstanding that they may be fined/prosecuted under new Covid-19 powers. Where possible, please make it clear that this is not the case and provide reassurance that missing reports are still being accepted during this time.
- Police will be one of the few professionals to come into face-to-face contact with young people during this time. This contact now matters more than ever to maintain their trust and ability to report potential exploitation and/or abuse.

Please share the details for our helpline with any missing or vulnerable people who you encounter, as well as families of missing people.

Encourage them to speak to us if they need to talk to someone outside of the home, or if they're feeling overwhelmed. We're available 24/7 and completely free to contact. They can call us by phone (116 000), text (116 000), or young people can chat with us online at www.runawayhelpline.org.uk.



missing people

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