

# National Missing Persons Coordination Centre



## MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT MISSING PERSONS

## FACT SHEET

### You do not have to wait 24 hours before reporting someone as missing

A missing person is defined as anyone who is reported missing to the police, whose whereabouts is unknown and there are fears for the safety or welfare of that person.

#### DISPELLING MYTHS

**Myth:** Adults cannot be reported as missing.

**Fact:** In Australia, anyone can be reported as missing if their disappearance is out of character and there are concerns for their safety and welfare.

**Myth:** People 'choose' to go missing.

**Fact:** Circumstances can limit people's choices and make them more vulnerable to leaving their usual environment and go missing. There are a number of triggers such as mental illness, economic and/or social problems.

**Myth:** When children are missing they are likely to have been abducted.

**Fact:** Most children that are reported missing are located safe and well within 24 hours. Common reasons for children going missing include a breakdown in communication and disciplinary issues.

**Myth:** Details about missing persons are not confidential.

**Fact:** All details about missing persons are kept confidential and are not made available to the public unless permission has been granted by the family and investigating officers.

**Myth:** If someone has been reported missing and they are then located, you cannot report them if they go missing again.

**Fact:** Each time a person goes missing, even if they have gone missing before, it is treated as an individual report.

**Myth:** When a missing person is located their address will be provided to the person who reported them missing.

**Fact:** When located, a missing person must give permission before their whereabouts are released. A decision to release a missing child's details will be determined by the circumstances surrounding the reasons the child went missing.

**Myth:** If Australians are missing overseas, there is nothing that can be done.

**Fact:** The Australian Federal Police and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade work with agencies overseas in investigating such cases where

Australians are missing overseas. Tracing agencies such as the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the International Social Service Australia also work to reunite people missing overseas.

#### KEY FACTS

- Going missing is not a crime.
- An estimated 38,000 people are reported missing to police each year—that's one person every 15 minutes.
- 99.5 per cent of people are located—85 per cent within a week of being reported missing.
- Parental abductions are handled by the Family Court of Australia and the Australian Federal Police.
- Approximately one-third of missing persons go missing more than once.
- Approximately two-thirds of missing persons are under the age of 18 (i.e. around 25,000).
- Many young missing persons are located at a friend's house.
- Stranger abductions are rare—most people are located safe and well.
- People go missing for a number of reasons—whether voluntarily or involuntarily.



**What to do if someone you know goes missing - contact agencies / information**

**Local police**

**First point of contact for a missing persons report in Australia.**

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Police Missing Persons Units  | <p><b>ACT</b> (02) 6256 7503</p> <p><b>NSW</b> (02) 8835 7656 or 1800 025 091 (toll free)</p> <p><b>NT</b> (08) 8999 5511 or (08) 8922 1560</p> <p><b>QLD</b> (07) 3364 6213 or 1800 017 744 (toll free)</p> <p><b>SA</b> (08) 8172 5467</p> <p><b>TAS</b> (03) 6173 2606</p> <p><b>VIC</b> (03) 8690 2884</p> <p><b>WA</b> (08) 9351 0699</p> |   |
| Crime Stoppers  | <b>1800 333 000</b>  | If you have any information regarding a missing person.   |
| Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Consular Emergency Service         | <b>1300 555 135</b><br>(24 hours, 7 days a week)   | If an Australian who is travelling overseas goes missing.   |
| National Missing Persons Coordination Centre                                      | <b>1800 000 634</b><br><a href="http://www.missingpersons.gov.au">www.missingpersons.gov.au</a>  | Provides information and awareness on missing persons issues in Australia. Does not conduct individual searches and enquires. |
| Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit Attorney General's Department of NSW | <b>1800 227 772</b><br><a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/missingpersons">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/missingpersons</a>  | Provides counselling support to families of missing persons—available in NSW only.  |
| Australian Red Cross International Tracing and Refugee Services                   | <a href="http://www.redcross.org.au">www.redcross.org.au</a>   | Conducts worldwide searches in over 177 countries. May be a cost involved.  |
| Salvation Army Family Tracing Service   | <a href="http://salvos.org.au/need-help/missing-persons/">salvos.org.au/need-help/missing-persons/</a>   | Provides a limited service to trace people over 18 years of age. May be a cost involved.                                      |
| Local Community Contact   |  | (Fill in the name and contact details for your local community support agency.)   |

**WHAT IF YOU NEED AN INTERPRETER?**

If you require assistance in contacting the above services the TIS National interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for the English speakers who need to communicate with them is available for this purpose.

TIS National has more than 30 years of experience in the interpreting industry, and has access to over 1750 contracted interpreters across Australia, speaking more than 170 languages and dialects.

TIS National is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any person or organisation in Australia requiring interpreting services. Information translated by TIS National Services is kept strictly confidential.

**TIS National Services are contactable on 13 14 50.**