

In this situation, families sometimes decide on a particular ritual that meets their needs and their cultural or religious traditions. This can be a very difficult and sad time for families and friends, however it may provide a chance to reconnect with the missing person and celebrate their life.

While locating a deceased loved one may provide certainty in terms of them being found, it may not necessarily answer all of the questions related to why the person went missing in the first place. It will not reduce the sense of grief associated with bereavement and loss and you will need to allow time for the normal grieving process to take place.



Whatever the circumstances, seeking support or counselling can help with the sense of isolation and powerlessness that you may feel when someone has gone missing, and when they are found.

A number of support services can assist you by providing more information and support for your particular situation.

Support organisations which may be able to assist you

FAMILIES & FRIENDS OF MISSING PERSONS COUNSELLING SERVICE

*A free and confidential counselling, referral and support service that can assist while someone is missing and at the time of reunion.
9am to 5pm – Monday to Friday*

Phone(02) 8688 8173
Freecall (except from mobiles) 1800 227 772
E-mail.....ffmpu@agd.nsw.gov.au
Websitewww.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/missingpersons

SALVATION ARMY FAMILY TRACING SERVICE

Operates a worldwide search network for missing family members aged over 18 and assists at the time of reunion.

Phone (NSW).....(02) 9211 0277

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE

Traces family members separated by migration, child abduction and adoption or other legal intervention, and assists at the time of reunion.

Phone(02) 9267 0300

LINK-UP (NSW) ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Provides reunion services to adult Aboriginals separated from their families and cultures by government intervention.

Freecall 1800 624 332

NATIONAL DEMENTIA HELPLINE

To discuss safety plans using the “safely home” bracelet contact the Dementia Helpline.

Freecall 1800 100 500

DoCS HELPLINE

Phone 132 111

MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Phone 1300 794 991

RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA

Phone 1300 364 227

INTER-RELATE

Phone 1300 763 966

KIDS HELP LINE

Freecall 1800 551 800

LIFELINE NSW

Phone 13 11 14

SALVO CARE LINE

Phone 1300 363 622

YOUTH EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION LINE

Metropolitan(02) 9318 1531

Rural (Freecall) 1800 424 830

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Families & Friends of Missing Persons
Attorney General & Justice

Reconnecting with a missing person

Information for families and friends of missing persons who have been located

The missing person has been located ... what now?

When a person who has been missing is found you may experience a range of emotions. Some feelings may be about how you have been affected by having someone missing, while other feelings may relate to the missing person and the reasons why they disappeared.

People around you might also react differently to you. Some people understand that families need to adjust to the discovery of the missing person, while others might make insensitive comments or expect you to recover as soon as the missing person is located.

The feelings you experience are very normal but can be confusing and may change over time.

You may find that you are feeling:

- ✦ relieved to hear your loved one has been located alive;
- ✦ happy or excited at seeing the person again;
- ✦ wanting to know why they went missing and what happened while they were away; or
- ✦ unsure how to explain what has happened since they left.

Or you may feel ...

- ✦ anxious or nervous about seeing a loved one again;
- ✦ worried they may not want to contact you;
- ✦ fearful that they may go missing again and unsure what to say to them in case they do;
- ✦ angry or hurt that you were left behind to wonder where and why your loved one was gone;

- ✦ panic about things being like they were before the person went missing; or
- ✦ overwhelmed, embarrassed, sad, guilty, insecure, jealous or rejected.

For those people who have been missing for a long time, significant events may have occurred while they were away – marriages, divorces, career changes, babies etc. Some families worry that the missing person might feel left out or that you were having a 'good' time while they were away.

Reconnecting ... reuniting

Reuniting with someone who was missing will depend on many things including the circumstances around how they went missing. It is likely both you and the person who was missing have changed since they went missing, especially if they have been missing for some time. It is important to be realistic and open to the changes that may occur in your relationship with the missing person now that they have been located. Understanding on both sides will be required.

Some things to think about:

- ✦ Expectations for you, other family members and the missing person may be very different.
- ✦ Try not to crowd, pressure or rush the missing person. You, your family and the person who was missing will have all been affected in different ways.
- ✦ Trust may first need to be established for reunion to be possible.
- ✦ Suggest to the missing person that you would like to hear about their experiences, as well as wanting to share with them what it was like for you not knowing where they were.

- ✦ If you kept a journal or a scrapbook while your loved one was missing you might like to share parts with them. This might help the missing person understand how important they are to you.
- ✦ If the missing person does not want to talk to you about things that are concerning them ask them if they would like some support in finding someone else to talk to.
- ✦ If the person goes missing on a regular basis, talk about options for them other than to go missing.
- ✦ If the person disappeared due to a health issue such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease, mental health, or a developmental delay, you may need to discuss a safety plan with the person, your family or relevant services.
- ✦ Remember reuniting can take time.

Counselling or mediation may help the reunion process and assist in dealing with the impact of missing for both the person who was missing and the family members who were left behind. Communication in a safe and open environment may also help prevent a person from disappearing again.

Reconnecting ... when reunion is not possible

In some instances reuniting is not possible, either for the person who has been missing, or for the family and friends who were left behind. It can be hard to know what to do in this situation and you may experience very mixed feelings.

Sometimes the missing person cannot return home due to mental health issues, ongoing conflict, or some other difficulties. There may also be safety,

protection, or legal reasons why you or the person who was missing cannot reunite. In these situations you may need to seek assistance to explore if reconnecting is possible or appropriate.

At other times, the missing person may not want to return home for all the reasons they left in the first place. This is their right and you need to be respectful of the missing person's decision, even though this can be very distressing or confusing.

The person who was missing may also just wish to stay in contact through other means – phone, email, or text message – to let you know they are alive and okay. They might agree to such contact without having to necessarily disclose their whereabouts.

What if the missing person is not found alive?

In a few circumstances the missing person who has been located may have died and families and friends can experience a whole range of new emotions and experiences. These may include:

- ✦ immediately losing any sense of hope of seeing their loved one alive again;
- ✦ experiencing the same grief as if the person had just died;
- ✦ relief that at least the searching is over;
- ✦ reliving many of the emotions experienced when their loved one first went missing;
- ✦ feeling upset by comments from others that they are "glad" or "happy" the missing person has been found or suggesting there is now "closure" for the family; and
- ✦ feeling isolated when friends move on because the person is no longer missing.