

National Missing Persons Coordination Centre



Missing Persons Cases: Proactive Media Guide

Media

Media can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about a missing person's disappearance. It can be used both immediately and long term to encourage those who have information about the whereabouts of a missing person to come forward.

Always speak with your case officer before approaching the media. In rare cases, police may advise against publicity. If so, they will explain the reasons why. While media attention can significantly increase community interest on a matter, sometimes it can hinder sensitive police enquiries.

MAKING A PUBLIC APPEAL

Families can often attract media attention by making a public appeal for information about the case. For an appeal, consider highlighting the case on the anniversary of their disappearance or their birthday. Anniversaries can help to draw renewed interest in the story, but this may also be a stressful and emotional time for you and your family knowing that your missing person is not here with you.

When looking to make a public appeal, first talk to the police or relevant search agencies involved in your missing persons case. Police have

communications professionals who will be able to help coordinate publicity and offer you practical advice and support. This will help you make sure that any activity you carry out has the greatest chance of success and aligns with assisting the police investigation.

What will the media want?

When creating a story about a missing person the media will require details including their name, age, a physical description, photograph/s and their last known whereabouts. You might find it helpful to prepare a media pack to send out which includes this information, along with telephone numbers for people to call with information.

Media are attracted to human interest stories. If an interview is conducted, it is likely that they will also want to know more detailed information about the circumstances that led to your loved one going missing and how this has affected you and your family. They are likely to ask questions such as:

- Can you describe the missing person's state of mind the day they went missing?
- How does it feel to have the person missing?
- How are you and your family coping with their disappearance?
- What would you say to the missing person if they were watching/reading?

What should you tell the media?

Preparation prior to a media interview should be thorough. You should discuss the information you can release with your case officer. In some situations, police may wish to keep particular details about the case out of the public arena, as certain information could inadvertently hinder an investigation.

Police have communication professionals that have experience in dealing with the media and conducting interviews. If you need assistance in preparing for an interview, it is recommended you contact them for practical advice and support.

Will the media run all stories?

There is no guarantee that the media will run any story, no matter how much effort you put in to attracting media attention. It is important for you to understand that your story may be one of many competing news items and it may not be shown in the media.

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REWARDS

In some cases a reward is offered to encourage people to come forward with information regarding the missing person's disappearance.

Police rewards are generally awarded for information which leads to a conviction or arrest (this would apply to missing persons cases where there is a suspicion of foul play). Private rewards may also be offered, but it is recommended that this is done in conjunction with the investigation and with the support of official channels for providing information on a missing person. If you wish to offer a private reward, this should be discussed with your case officer.

EVENTS

Events are a good way to encourage public support and media attention for your case. Many events have a fundraising element to either support your personal search efforts, or donate to a charity that supports missing persons. You may wish to seek assistance from political figures, influential members of the community or other high profile people who can help you gather media interest in your case.

If you do not wish to organise your own event, consider participating in existing events that raise awareness of missing persons such as International Missing Children's Day or National Missing Persons Week. Contacting other charities which hold events to raise awareness of missing persons or events impacting the community is another opportunity to take part in existing events.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MISSING PERSONS CASES

Social media is excellent for harnessing people power. When used correctly, it can help to raise awareness of missing persons cases in the community. Before starting a social media campaign it is important to discuss any plans with your case officer.

You should also consider the following long term implications.

Public access to information

Information shared in the public domain, such as social media, is freely accessible and generally open for public commentary. Given anyone can access the information in your social media campaign, be prepared that posts may attract negative attention.

Public information is also hard to control. Once information is online, it can be freely shared and used by others without consent. Once a case has been resolved, it will also be difficult to remove information about their disappearance completely from the public domain.

It is important to understand that sharing identifying details or updates about the case may jeopardise the investigation or alert perpetrators to potential police activity or enquiries.

Ensuring information is appropriately responded to and investigated

It is recommended that all information regarding missing persons cases be directed to Crime Stoppers or the

officers investigating the case. If you are calling for information to be provided or sent directly to your campaign pages or direct contact numbers, it can be difficult to ensure that information is appropriately responded to and investigated.

It is recommended you talk to your case officer about how they would like to receive the information to ensure it is directed to the right place.

Long term commitment

Starting up a social media campaign is a long term commitment.

While it is great to have community support and many people helping you search for your loved one, be aware that people who join your campaign will be eager for news. You may receive regular contact from people requesting updates and new information which can be distressing when there is no news for a long period of time. Consider sharing the responsibility for monitoring social media sites with friends or relatives to help ease the burden.