



WHAT TO DO WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER GOES MISSING

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**For more help and information
visit www.missingpersons.ie**



You DO NOT have to wait 24/48 hours before reporting a person missing

Your first port of call should always be Gardaí. You can report a person missing by contacting your local Garda Station.

They will ask you for information about the missing person, including:

- Their full name or aliases they use
- A full description of the missing person, including age, height, hair and eye colour, any distinguishing features/tattoos, what they were wearing when last seen.
- Their usual place of residence
- Their place and date of birth
- Details of where and when last seen by family or friends
- What the person was wearing, including jewellery
- Insofar as is possible, a contact list of their friends, relatives and colleagues
- A list of places often frequented
- Their bank details – if known
- Details of any vehicle owned or used by the person
- Details of medical conditions and/or medications they use
- Details of Social Media accounts they use
- Their Mobile Phone number
- Any other relevant information regarding recent events which may have contributed to them going missing.
- You should also give the Gardaí a recent photograph of the missing person, preferably in electronic format.

It may also be useful if you are next of kin, to give approval for the Gardaí to publish details of the Missing Person should a public appeal/alert be considered appropriate. Gardaí will assess the level of risk to the Missing Person and determine the best course of action.

Remember to take a note of the name, and station phone number of the Garda taking your missing person's report.





YOUR SEARCH OPTIONS

HELPING with the search It is strongly recommended to check with Gardaí before you undertake any search and inform them of your progress. All physical searches should be undertaken in an organised and safe manner. **Stay safe – do not enter or search dangerous areas alone.**

Properly trained and resourced search groups are located throughout the country and will respond to a Garda request.

KEEP RECORDS Keep details of all the organisations you contact for help including support services. Record specific details of any inquiries you conduct and people you speak to.

POSTERS If you are having posters made up featuring the missing person, it is strongly advised to only display Garda or the Helpline contact number, not your own private or mobile phone numbers.

Consider displaying posters in areas such as shopping centres, bus stops and railway stations, at local sporting and entertainment venues and community centres. Keep in mind that putting up posters on electricity poles etc. is considered “littering” and you may be asked to remove them. It is important that all posters are removed when no longer relevant i.e. when the person is located.

SOCIAL MEDIA Social Media is an invaluable tool when raising awareness for a missing loved one. Always stay safe online and remember that shared information can often be in circulation for many years after the person is found or located and thereby lead to further privacy issues.



Facebook is a great way to communicate with lots of different people around the world and get in contact with anyone who may be connected to your missing loved one. However, it can also be a great place for online trolls to take your personal photographs and send messages that may not be so supportive, especially if your loved one's case has escalated quickly. Follow Facebook guidelines.

It is recommended that you set your profile to 'friends only' and disable the feature for search engines to harvest your account. It is important that personal details such as your phone number, address etc., are secure and should ideally be set to 'yourself only'. Personal photographs are frequently used by the media if they are not restricted to friends only. To prevent being bombarded with friend requests by people you do not know in person, set the 'who can send you friend requests' feature to 'friends of friends' only.

The National Missing Persons Helpline will happily post details of all Garda Missing Persons Alerts to our Facebook page **Missing Persons Helpline Ireland** – please note however, that we are precluded under Privacy Legislation, from posting any details which are not first made public by Gardaí.

It is therefore vital that a report is made to Gardaí as soon as possible and that when making the report, if you are next of kin, that permission is given to issue a public appeal





Twitter / X is also an incredible way to raise awareness for a missing loved one, getting missing appeals shared means the face of the missing person can appear in the feeds of people across the world. But, just like Facebook, it can leave you open to vicious comments from trolls.

Twitter / X offers other security options in the Security and Privacy settings. You can select the Tweet Privacy option to limit who receives your tweets rather than just making them all public. You can also select the Photo tagging option to allow anyone to tag you in photos. Also, deselect the options that let others find you by your email address or phone number. You can also deselect the ability to receive Direct Messages in this section.

Keep personal details in your Twitter / X profile to a minimum. Leave out your phone numbers, email addresses, and other bits of personal data that might be ripe for harvest by SPAM bots and internet criminals.

Twitter / X features the option to add your location to each tweet. While this might be a useful feature for some, it can be a big security risk for others. You may want to take this feature off to avoid anyone finding out where you live.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Always consult your Garda Liaison officer (FLO) before approaching the media

Deciding to make a public appeal If you would like to involve the media, the first step is to talk to Gardaí. You should not expect your case officer to immediately turn to the media for help unless the missing person has an urgent medical need or there are grave concerns for their safety.

What the media will require? The media will need basic information about the missing person such as their name, age, a physical description and their last known whereabouts. **WHERE DEEMED APPROPRIATE, THIS INFORMATION WILL NORMALLY BE UNDERTAKEN BY WAY OF A GARDA PRESS RELEASE/APPEAL** and distributed to television, radio and newspapers. If you have already provided a photograph, and release permission, this may also be offered for publication or broadcast. Photos should be recent, as clear as possible and preferably in colour.

Who should talk to the media? It may be helpful to appoint a relative or close friend to act as a family spokesperson or you can ask your Garda Family Liaison Officer to provide someone to brief the media. It is often helpful if you have a Garda with you if you are being interviewed by the media. They may be able to provide additional information or step in if you are unable to continue.

What you should tell the media? If you decide to go ahead with an interview, prepare thoroughly. Talk to your Garda Family Liaison Officer about the type of information you should and should not discuss about the missing person. In some situations, Gardaí may wish to keep particular details out of the public arena. Revealing certain information could inadvertently hinder an investigation.

You may wish to read a prepared statement and not answer questions rather than be interviewed.





Once you have provided the media with a statement or an interview, there is no guarantee they will run a story. Your story is one of many news items that come across an editor's or news director's desk every day. Sometimes, another story may be considered more significant.

It is advisable not to argue with journalists if they don't run your story. You may need their assistance at another time.

Dealing with the media at your home There may be occasions when the media approaches you at home to ask for an interview or for photographs. You do not have to invite the media inside your home if you are uncomfortable or prefer to maintain your privacy.

If you have already provided Gardaí with photographs, video footage or any other items it is best to direct media representatives to them. Take care not to give original photos or any other valuable or precious items to the media. There is no guarantee they will be returned.

It is always a good idea to contact your Garda Family Liaison Officer for advice before you participate in an interview at home.

Dealing with intrusive media If members of the media are being overly intrusive or disruptive, request that they respect your privacy. If this fails, you should not hesitate to discuss any problems with your Garda Family Liaison Officer. They may be able to liaise with journalists about your privacy wishes.

ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA

If you care for someone with dementia you can fill in the [Herbert Protocol Form](#) containing information to give to the Gardaí if the person goes missing. This means you don't have to remember the information when you are under stress if someone goes missing. And it saves time, so the Gardaí can start the search sooner. You can fill in this form on your computer or print it out and fill it in by hand. Keep it somewhere safe where you can easily find it if the person goes missing. You could give a copy to other family members. Keep this information up to date whenever something changes. You only need to give the form to the Gardaí if the person goes missing. Details are helpful, but don't worry if you can't answer every question. There is space at the end of the form if you run out of space for any of the questions. And you can always add another page to a printout or add something to an email.

- Download the [Herbert Protocol Form](#)
- [Link to Alzheimer's Society Ireland](#)

'Wandering' is the term used for those people with dementia who may wander from their usual environments. Wandering is quite common amongst people with dementia and can be very worrying for families and carers concerned for their safety and well-being. The person's failing memory and declining ability to communicate may make it impossible for them to remember or explain the reason why they wandered.





There are many reasons why someone with dementia may wander. These include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• changed environment• confusion• excess energy• searching for the past• expressing boredom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• confusing night with day• continuing a habit• agitation, discomfort or pain• a job to perform
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A person with dementia may feel uncertain and disorientated in a new environment such as a new house or day centre. It could happen because a person may forget where they were going or why. Wandering can be a way of using up excess energy which might indicate the person needs more regular exercise. People with dementia may become confused and wander off in search of someone or something, relating to their past.

As dementia progresses people find it harder to concentrate for any length of time and wandering may be their way of keeping occupied. People who have been used to walking long distances may simply wish to continue doing so.

Agitation, discomfort, any physical pain, tight clothing, excessive heat or needing to find a toilet can all be causes for wandering. Sometimes people leave the house because they believe they have to go to work or pick up their children in the afternoon.

What are the challenges for those who are missing? There are many challenges the missing person may face such as safety, vulnerabilities, no access to medication, exposure to the elements, loss of orientation around current time, and inability to communicate as to where they are supposed to be.

It is important to note that a person with dementia will have their short-term memory affected and may be very confused and scared. They might have difficulty remembering their name, address or phone number.

What are the challenges for those left behind? Those left behind may face anxiety, fear and confusion about where to search and how to look for their loved one. It is important to stay calm. Initially a person should make a thorough search of the house, garden, garage and shed. Write down what the person was wearing and perhaps notify the neighbours.

It might be a good idea to walk or drive around the immediate area and to any places the person may regularly visit. If possible, have somebody stay at home in case the person comes home and so that the telephone can be answered.

If you still cannot locate the person, you need to visit your local Garda station to make a missing person's report. The Gardaí may ask for a recent colour photograph and any identifying characteristics about the person who has wandered.





MISSING ABROAD

The majority of people reported missing, within Ireland and internationally, are found safe. The individual circumstances when a family member or friend is missing overseas vary greatly, much like someone going missing in Ireland. However, the difficulties that arise can be further complicated by a range of factors, including: distance, borders, language and customs.

Making a missing persons report in Ireland - If you have concerns for a family member or friend who is travelling overseas and normally resides in Ireland, you can make a missing persons report to the Garda station where you live. If the missing person is an Irish citizen but resides overseas, a missing persons report may also be made by family or friends at the nearest Garda station in Ireland, regardless of where the person went missing.

Visiting a Garda station to report someone as missing can be a daunting and unsettling experience; however it is your legal right to do so. You do not have to wait 24 hours to file a missing person's report. The sooner you notify the Gardai that your loved one is missing, the sooner they will be able to initiate their Missing Person protocols.

Make sure that you follow up with all relevant agencies on a regular basis for an update on progress, especially in the early stages. Don't assume that once you have notified local Gardai that everything is in train. Expect that at times you may be the conduit between different agencies to make things happen.

Garda/Police report When you attend a Garda station to report someone missing abroad, it will help if you can provide the following information, where possible:

- A recent photo of the person.
- A detailed description of the person, including height, weight, age, hair colour, eye colour, build, and any other distinguishing features.
- The person's full name, including any aliases or nicknames they use.
- Date and place of birth.
- Address in Ireland and overseas, phone numbers, email accounts, social network accounts (for example, Facebook).
- License and passport details.
- Last known address overseas, and the country in which the person is believed to be missing.
- Description of the time and place they were last seen, clothes last seen wearing, people they were last sighted with, and where they were heading.
- Travel itinerary of probable destinations.
- Details of any transport being used, including car registration number, make, model, hire company or any other transport the person may be using, such as a motorbike, bicycle, train, bus.
- Names and known contact details of fellow travellers.
- Contact details for relatives, friends and work colleagues overseas.





- When and how you last had contact, for example last social media contact, last telephone call/text/ email/letter.
- Contact details of the missing person's doctor, dentist or any other health practitioner.
- Any medical conditions or medication requirements.
- Bank, credit card or other financial accounts.
- DSP benefits or other benefits they may have been receiving.
- Description of previous missing episodes, the circumstances and where they were found.
- Any behavioural changes, personal, medical or emotional problems they may have experienced before they went missing.
- Any factors that give you concern for their current wellbeing.

Keep a record of the Garda report. It may be helpful to record the following information: Garda reference number for the investigation - Garda station, name and contact details of the Garda who takes the report. After a report has been lodged and accepted, Gardai may contact Interpol if deemed appropriate, Interpol may facilitate international cooperation in investigating the whereabouts of the missing person.

MISSING ABROAD – CONSULAR ASSISTANCE FROM

(Published in Information Guide for families and friends of Missing Persons issued December 2022)

The Department of Foreign Affairs is regularly contacted by families and friends of Irish citizens who are concerned for the whereabouts of their loved ones abroad. The Department advises family members or friends who may have particular concerns, to make a missing person report at their local Garda Station.

An Garda Síochána engages with Interpol which transmits Missing Persons reports to the Interpol Central Bureau of the country in which the individual is presumed missing and liaises with the relevant authorities of that country – investigations into Missing Persons in other jurisdictions are generally the responsibility of Police services.

How to access Consular support The Department of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic offices abroad can liaise with the relevant authorities of other jurisdictions to make enquiries about the progress of a case, where appropriate. Many Missing Persons cases are resolved quickly, however a small number of cases may result in full investigations.

The Department of Foreign Affairs can be contacted for Consular assistance Monday to Friday, from 09.00 – 17.00 on 01 408 2527 or in case of emergency outside office hours, on 01 408 2000.

Additional information is available at www.dfa.ie/travel/assistance-abroad/missing-person/

The Department of Foreign Affairs' Consular Charter outlines the type of help the Department can provide and is available at www.dfa.ie/travel/our-services/consular-assistance-charter/

For more help and information, visit www.missingpersons.ie

