

# Missing People

*A lifeline when someone disappears*



## Adults at Risk and Missing

21st November 2023

**A lifeline when someone disappears**

[www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

**missing  
people**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1020419)  
and in Scotland (SC047419)

**missing  
people**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1122915)  
and in Scotland (SC047413)

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**#Adultsafeguarding**



# Agenda

1. Missing - the current picture
2. Why adults go missing
3. Missing and harm
4. Lived Experience
5. Adults missing from health care settings
6. Transitional Safeguarding
7. Person Centred Response
8. Missing Peoples services

# Introduction

- **Missing People have 30 years of experience in supporting missing people**
- **We are experts at delivering independent Return Home Interviews and Safe & Well checks**
- **We regularly deliver training, conferences and consultancy to help professionals across the UK to provide the best response to missing people**
- **Trigger warning – today's training is grounded in the experiences of adults who have experience of being missing and some of the content may be difficult to hear**

**We receive positive feedback from our training & really hope that you learn a lot from today**

***“Very interesting and informative, great sharing in the chat and engagement from participants”***

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**Jane Hunter**

Head of Research  
and Impact

**Missing adults:  
background,  
mental health  
and harm**

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# Missing: the current picture

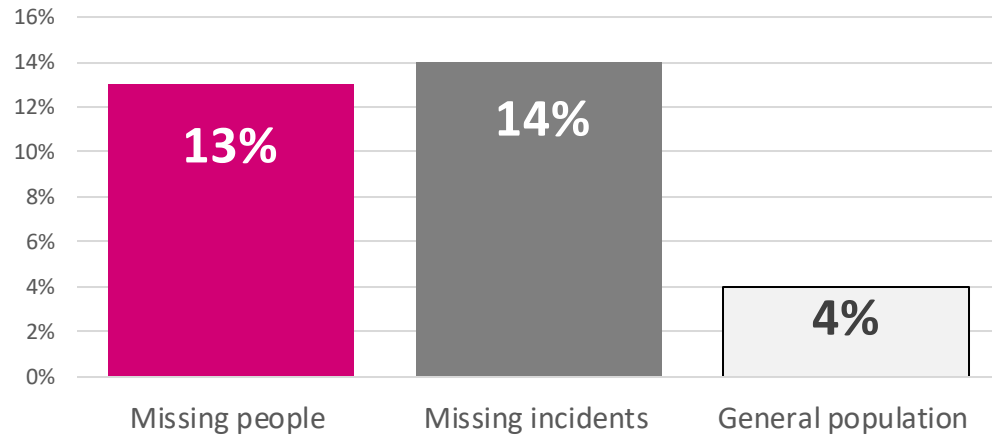
- **Someone is reported missing every 90 seconds in the UK**
- **170,000 people were reported missing in 2021 – 2022 in the UK, nearly 97,000 were adults**
- **There were over 320,000 reported missing incidents, more than 130,000 were adults**
- **400 adults are reported missing in the UK every day**
- **1 in every 500 adults goes missing every year**
- **Adults are less likely to be reported missing than children**

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# Missing and ethnicity

Missing Black people



- Black adults are **more likely to be missing for longer** than White and Asian adults
- Black and Asian adults are **less likely to be found by the police** than White adults
- Black and Asian adults are **less likely to have risk factors identified** than White adults

*“They diminished me I found later because of my accent and because of my colour.”*

*“[Caller] said she also felt that they were maybe being racially discriminated against because her son is black as she has seen that when white children going missing they get a lot more publicity and media attention.”* Notes from our case file.

*“They need to stop labelling black children as criminals. A police officer said to me Michael\* is not on our system. I said Michael\* would never have been on your system because he was not a criminal. He was a good boy. I raised him very well.”*

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# Why adults go missing

The most common issues raised in conversations with adults contacting our helpline are:

Homelessness



Mental health issues including risks of suicide or self-harm

Problems at home, including relationship breakdown

Abuse or domestic violence

## Mental health

- **8 in 10** adults have a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issue when they go missing
- **1 in 20** will go with the intention of taking their own life

## Financial problems

- **4 in 10** adults have stated this as a principal reason for missing

## Dementia

- Around **1 in 10** adult missing incidents
- **4 in every 10** people with dementia will go missing at some point

## Escaping violence

- **1 in 50** missing adults are escaping abuse

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# Links between missing and mental health: adults voices

Recent research found that 94% of missing adults were influenced to go missing due to 'their own feelings / mental health'

ADULT 1

"I just knew I had to get away. The only time I felt safe or OK was when I was missing."

ADULT 2

"Felt like voices were instructing me to do things."

ADULT 3

"Psychosis, forced to stop my mental health medication, delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, feeling like home was suffocating, feeling my abusive support workers were going to kill me."

ADULT 4

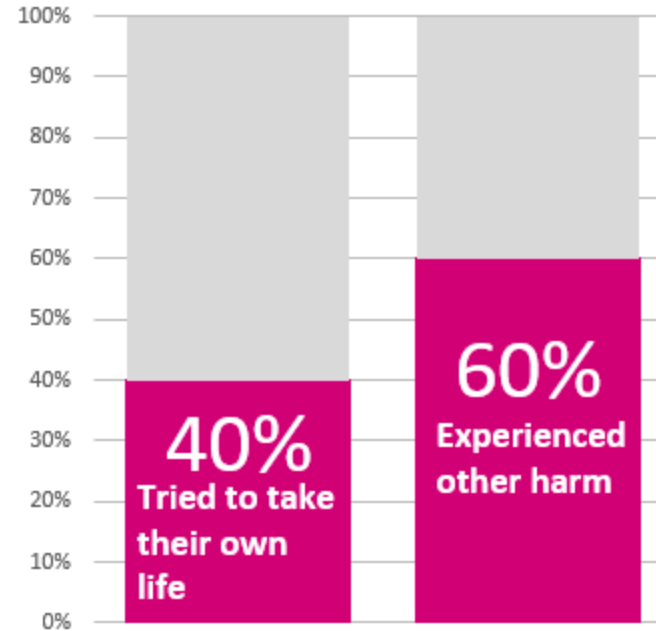
"I felt like I was going to lose everything, like my world was falling apart, like I was stuck in the same old cycle."

ADULT 5

"I was [experiencing] very low moods and wanted to end it and I felt like there wasn't enough support in place to be able to pick myself up."

# Harm experienced while missing

Over 3 in 4 adults disclosed experiencing harm while missing



In cases where the person died, the **most common cause of death was confirmed or suspected suicide**:

- 58% of Missing People records (52 of 89)
- 67% of Police records (12 of 18)

# The impact of being missing

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- Nearly **2/3rds of adults** disclosed that being missing had impacted their mental health (40 of 61)
- **Over half** said that being missing had a negative impact on their relationships with their family and their own sense of wellbeing (34 of 60)
- 65% (41 of 63) of missing adults did not try to access support or help while away

*“Adjusting back to normal life was difficult and I found it more difficult to interact with peers as I had had negative and dark experiences they hadn’t and probably wouldn’t understand.”*

*“Made mental health 10 [times] worse this time and physical pain”*

# Links between missing and suicide

- Around **1,000 people** die each year while missing
- Suicide is the most common reason for deaths of missing people: where cause of death is known, **2 in 3 deaths** are due to suicide
- Feeling suicidal is a common influence in adults going missing: **nearly 60% of adults** (38 of 64) told us they were feeling suicidal when they went missing
- In a case review of over 400 cases, suicide risk was the **second most commonly known or suspected risk** being experienced by missing adults
- **Nearly half** of returned missing adults told us that they had made an attempt to take their own life while missing

Sources: Missing People research (2022) "My World was Falling Apart"

FOI conducted by Missing People regarding 2021-22 and April – September 2022 missing data

Geoff Newiss (2011) "Learning from Fatal Disappearances"

# Lived Experience- Tanja's Story



**Josie Allan**

Policy &  
Campaigns  
Manager

**Adults Missing  
from Health  
Care Settings &  
Transitional  
Safeguarding**

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# The multi-agency response for adults missing from health and care settings

## A national framework for England

Published October 2020  
Updated August 2021



Home Office



# National Framework

## **The multi-agency response for adults missing from health and care settings: A national framework for England**

- NHS England
- Public Health England
- UK Missing Persons Unit
- Care Quality Commission
- HMICFRS
- College of Policing
- National Police Lead for Missing
- National Police Lead for Mental Health
- Local Government Association
- National Network for Safeguarding Adults Board Chairs
- ADASS
- NHS Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Group
- London Borough of Bexley Adult Safeguarding
- National Fire Chiefs Council
- Missing People

<https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/for-professionals/information-and-policy/policy/a-national-framework-for-the-response-to-adults-missing-from-health-and-care-settings>



# Definition – when to report/ take action

- A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts can't be established and:
- The context suggests the person may be a victim of crime; **or**
- The person is at risk of harm to themselves or another; **or**
- Where there is particular concern because the circumstances are out of character, or there are ongoing concerns for their safety because of a previous pattern of going missing.

# Recommendations

## Multi-agency working

Strategic Oversight Group created/assigned responsibility for missing adults to develop protocol, training and data requirements

Operational Group created/ assigned to implement protocol and multi- agency training, and monitor data and report progress to Strategic Group

Shared data collection and monitoring to assess hotspots, local trends/ challenges and impact of protocol

## Protocol

Agencies responsibilities at each stage inc clear actions: prevention – risk assessment and investigation – return

## Before missing / prevention

- Protocols (based on Herbert/ Philomena)
- Trigger plans

## Risk assessments – while missing

Consider individual's circumstances and potential risks being faced:

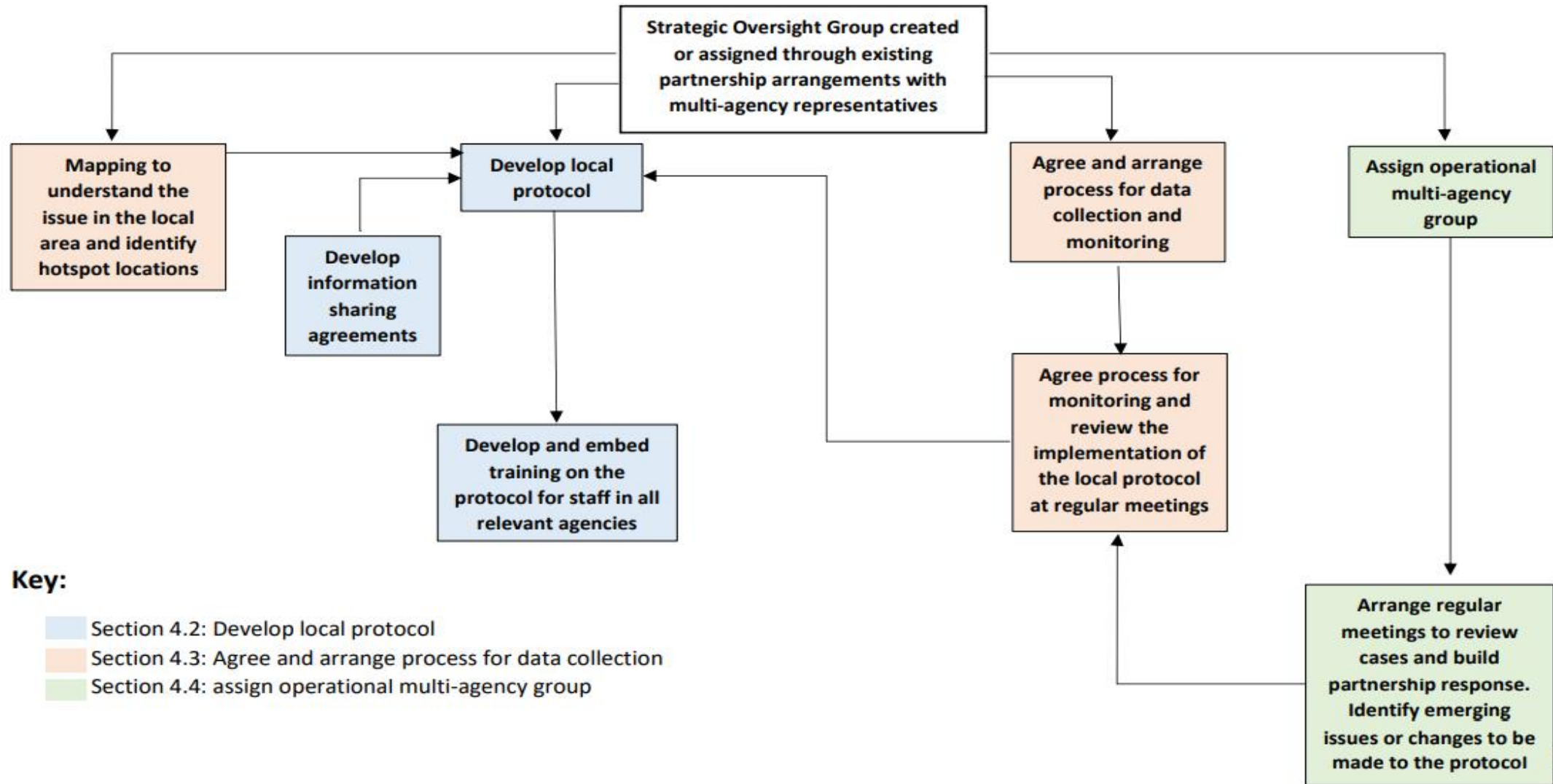
- Use professional curiosity
- Seeking information from other agencies
- Reporting person - critical

## After missing

- Safe & Well Checks/ Prevention Interview– with mental health support/ delivery
- Clear referral routes into NHS, social care, financial and other services

# Part Two: How to set up the strategic response for missing adults in your area

## Flow chart for local protocols



# Good practice

## Operational multi-agency meetings

The Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust hold monthly meetings to discuss missing adult cases.

These meetings resulted in reducing the numbers of missing reports, and valuable relationships between the police and different parts of NHS.

The meetings were chaired by Trust staff and attended by representatives of the police missing or mental health teams, as well as by ward managers.

An additional benefit of these meetings, was allowing better safeguarding of specific individuals who are at high risk or may not have previously been given a multi-agency focus.

## Joint training

In South Yorkshire, having identified a local hotspot, the police co-developed training with the NHS trust to be delivered to ward staff in that location.

The training clearly outlined the responsibilities of both agencies and provided an opportunity for questions from the ward staff to be addressed, as well as space for myth-busting some long-held assumptions about each agencies' responsibilities.

The training was supported by the development of a flowchart for frontline staff so there was clear, accessible guidance on the action to be taken if a patient was not where they were supposed to be.

# The National Framework – making it happen locally

1. What is in place for adults missing from health/ care settings?
2. What is the role of the police, NHS, local authority, others?
3. What's working well and where are the gaps?

Oversight – operational (protocol, training, data)

Prevention → risk assessment → investigation → return → review  
support

# Case study 1 – what would good practice look like?

Geoff, 45 has not returned to his mental health ward after going out for a cigarette an hour ago. He has been reported missing from the ward twice before – one time he returned and one time the police found him. He has a history of self-harm and depression, and attempted to take his own life last year.

1. What would staff on the ward do?
2. How should the police respond?
3. How might Geoff be feeling?
4. What risk level would Geoff be assessed as and why?
5. Would there be a trigger plan?
6. What would happen when Geoff was found?

# Transitional Safeguarding

‘The response to missing young people during the transition from childhood to adulthood: A survey exploring challenges and good practice in supporting this group.’

- In October 2022, Missing People, alongside the NWG and the National Police Chief’s Council, published a report on the response for young people who are regularly going missing as they approach and pass the age of 18.
- **Harms do not go away when a child reaches adulthood** as many will continue to go missing. In spite of this, **much of the support they receive from professionals drops away.**
- Surveyed professionals across the country to explore what is currently happening for young people as they transition to adulthood.

[www.missingpeople.org.uk/transitional-safeguarding-and-missing-young-people](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/transitional-safeguarding-and-missing-young-people)

# Transitional Safeguarding: What is happening for those about to turn 18?

- Support can drop off after the young person turns 18 (at any point between 16-25)
- Risk of continued sexual and criminal exploitation but poorer professional response
- Not enough preparation for independent living/limited independence skills
- Less support if the young person goes missing/likely or more likely to go missing
- Lack of resources/agencies to support the transition.



### QUOTE 1

"Too many to list. The vulnerabilities don't end on the date of the 18th birthday, but access to services may do. We find that there is rarely a good handover from child services to adult services in the council."

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### QUOTE 2

"Yes, I work in adult safeguarding and we never get any referrals or information about vulnerable transitioning teens. This is really worrying as my background is youth offending and again post 18 there is no safeguarding information shared re these very vulnerable young people"

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### QUOTE 3

"There is a challenge for the police in that there is a perception that a child is naturally vulnerable due to age, but an adult may well not be. Just because a person changes age by a few days it does not mean their risk declines. The perception of the risk automatically lowers in the minds of responders."

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### QUOTE 4

*"Young people are reluctant to engage. Difficult to make safeguarding decisions given their age"*

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### QUOTE 5

*"They are often still treated as children rather than young people approaching adulthood which they find intrusive and often belittling."*

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# Good Practice

- Centring the young person/young adult
- Multi-agency planning and communication (including child and adult services, organisations, regulators, providers and commissioners), in particular around:
  - safeguarding concerns and disclosures
  - communication when young people are placed out of area/ working across borders
  - support for young people with multiple and complex needs.
- Understanding and utilising the young person's support system, including peers, extended family and professional support.
- Early planning and preparation for transitions/independence, inclusive of the young person's voice

# The case for change

- Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs, harms, and routes to protection. These are often 'contextual' or 'extra-familial' and are underpinned by complex social and biological drivers.
- Harm and its effects do not abruptly end at 18 but support may do. *Local Authorities have a legal duty to support Care Experienced People until the age of 25.*
- **Transition** to adulthood is a particularly challenging and vulnerable time, we may need care and support without having explicit support needs. Dependency is not a bad thing.
- Need to consider promoting **resilience** and their changing **developmental** needs.

**Jane Berry**

Senior Development  
& Projects Manager

**Person-Centred  
Responses**

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# Person Centred Training

- In 2021 Missing People were funded to create a new training 'person centred responses to missing children and adults' aimed at police forces
- The content was co-created with people who have been missing and family members affected by missing
- We usually deliver this as a half day training and this is a condensed version for you, focussed on adults
- The content is endorsed by UK Missing Person's Unit, Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme and National Police Chiefs Council

*"Sometimes in the rush of having to attend the vast volume of jobs we have we forget how we would feel in these circumstances. Taking a step back just emphasises how our Police involvement impacts people's everyday lives and just being able comfort family members in those difficult times means a lot to them" Police Delegate.*

# Person Centred Responses to Missing Adults

**What does being person centred mean to you?**

- Keeping the person at the heart of your interactions
- Empowering the person and their family
- Being human in your approach
- Treating the person (and their family) as the expert
- Approach is widely used in health & social care settings
- The opposite of person centred is process/policy driven

**To what extent do you feel you can be person centred in your role?**

**How would you feel?**







# Policies and Processes for missing adults

- ✓ [Herbert Protocol](#) is a simple risk reduction tool to help the police in their search for people with Dementia who go missing
- ✓ [Winnie Protocol](#) is a missing adult information form for carers and professionals to record information which could be used if an adult going missing & particularly useful for those adults who have repeat missing episodes. It was created by Northumbria Police and the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Safeguarding Adult Boards.
- ✓ [The multi-agency response for adults missing from health and care settings](#)  
[A national framework for England](#)

These promote a **person-centred** approach aimed at supporting that **person** and to prevent repeat 'going **missing**' incidents

# Search Dog Heroes

- Funded by People's Postcode Lottery (PPL) in 2018, and partnered with Lowland Rescue.
- Aim: To help find the most high-risk missing people in society.
- Use of trailing dogs and scent kits.
- Successfully found 9 missing people and supported police in further searches.



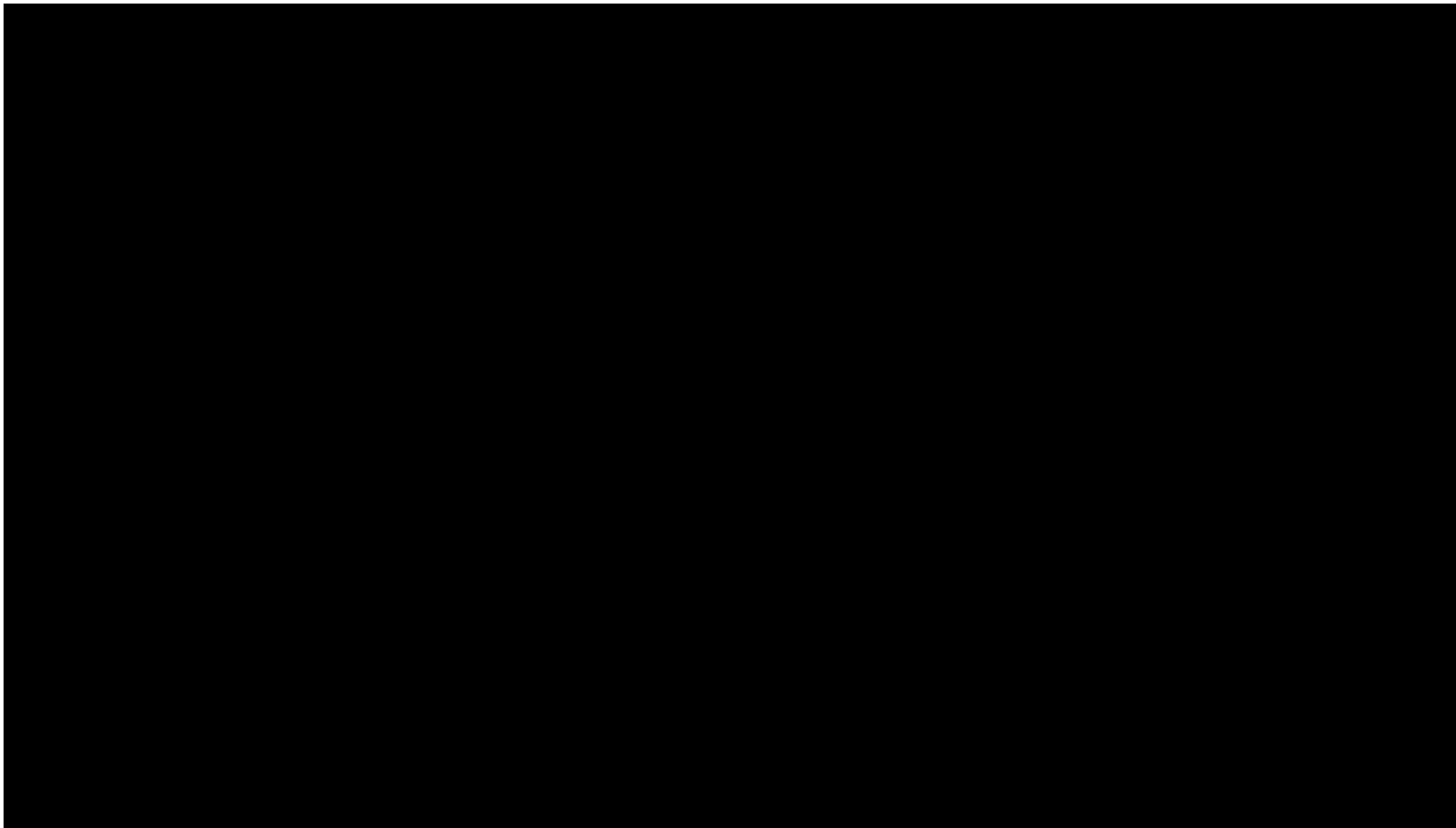
# Top Tips for professionals from people who have been missing

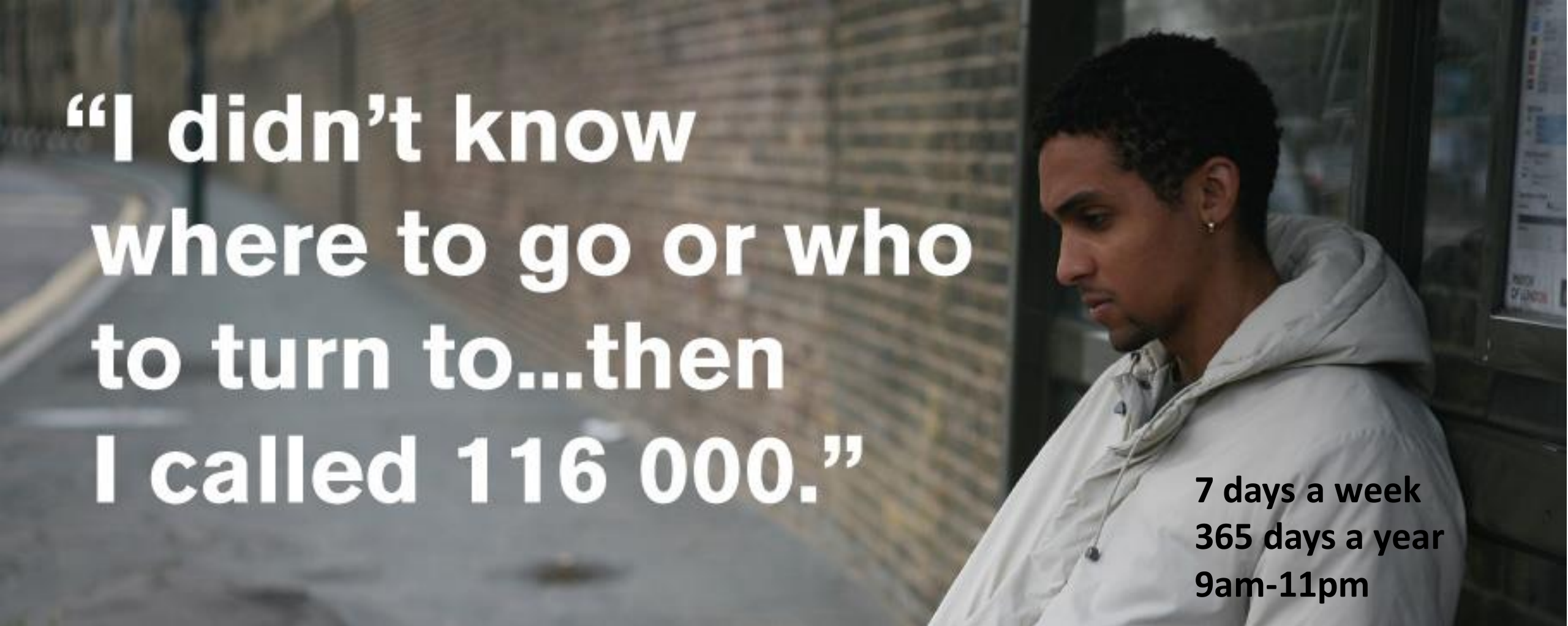
1. Make them safer
2. Trauma-informed
3. Treating everyone as an individual
4. Being kind and respectful
5. Acknowledging people's autonomy
6. Respecting people's privacy
7. Be flexible

# Top Tips for professionals from families

1. Communication is key
2. Refer families to Missing People for support ASAP
3. Take a report of a missing person seriously from the outset
4. Empathy, sensitivity and understanding
5. Ensure key evidence or intelligence is kept securely
6. Tell families whenever any publicity is going out
7. Update even when there are no updates
8. Make things as simple as possible for families
9. Have a single direct point of contact & them staying with you throughout
10. Professional curiosity: Clues, Curiosity, Communication (College of Policing) [Recognising and responding to vulnerability related risks: Guidelines](#)

# Lived Experience- Karens Story





**“I didn’t know  
where to go or who  
to turn to...then  
I called 116 000.”**

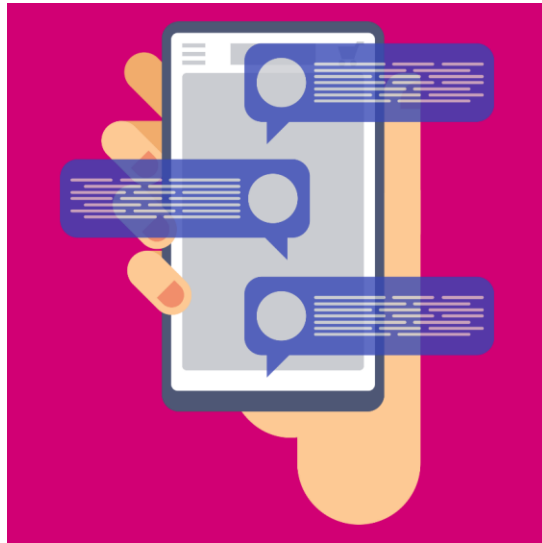
**7 days a week  
365 days a year  
9am-11pm**

- Helpline support
- Message home
- Safeguarding
- Signposting

**Helpline, Text & E-mail**

[Home - Missing People](#)

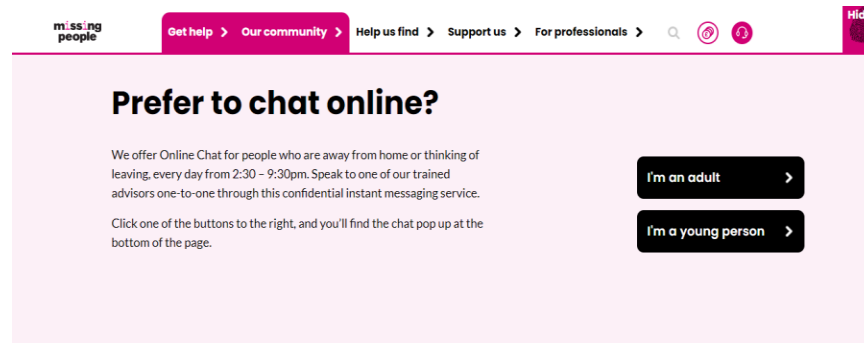
# Suicide Risk TextSafe®



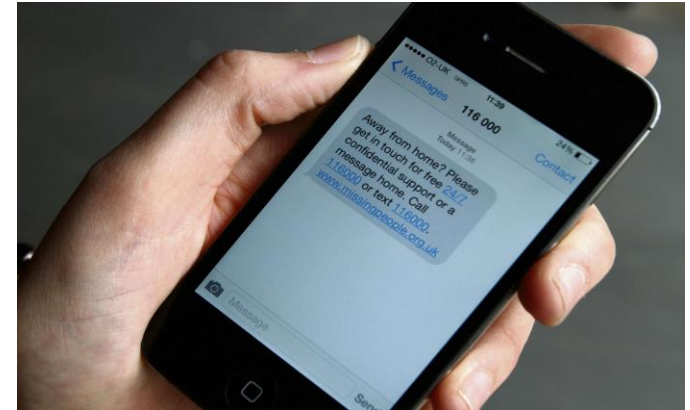
**For free confidential support from the charity Missing People call/text 116000 or for Samaritans call 116123.**

**Samaritans will try calling you soon from a withheld number.**

## 1-2-1 Chat



# TextSafe®



-We know sometimes life can get too much. If you are missing or thinking of leaving Runaway Helpline can help you stay safe. We will listen, we care & we will not judge. We are free & confidential to call/text- [116000](tel:116000) 9am-11pm or Chat via our website.

## Message Home and 3-way Calls

**A unique service, where those who are missing or away from home are given the space to safely reconnect or pass a message back.**





# Family Support

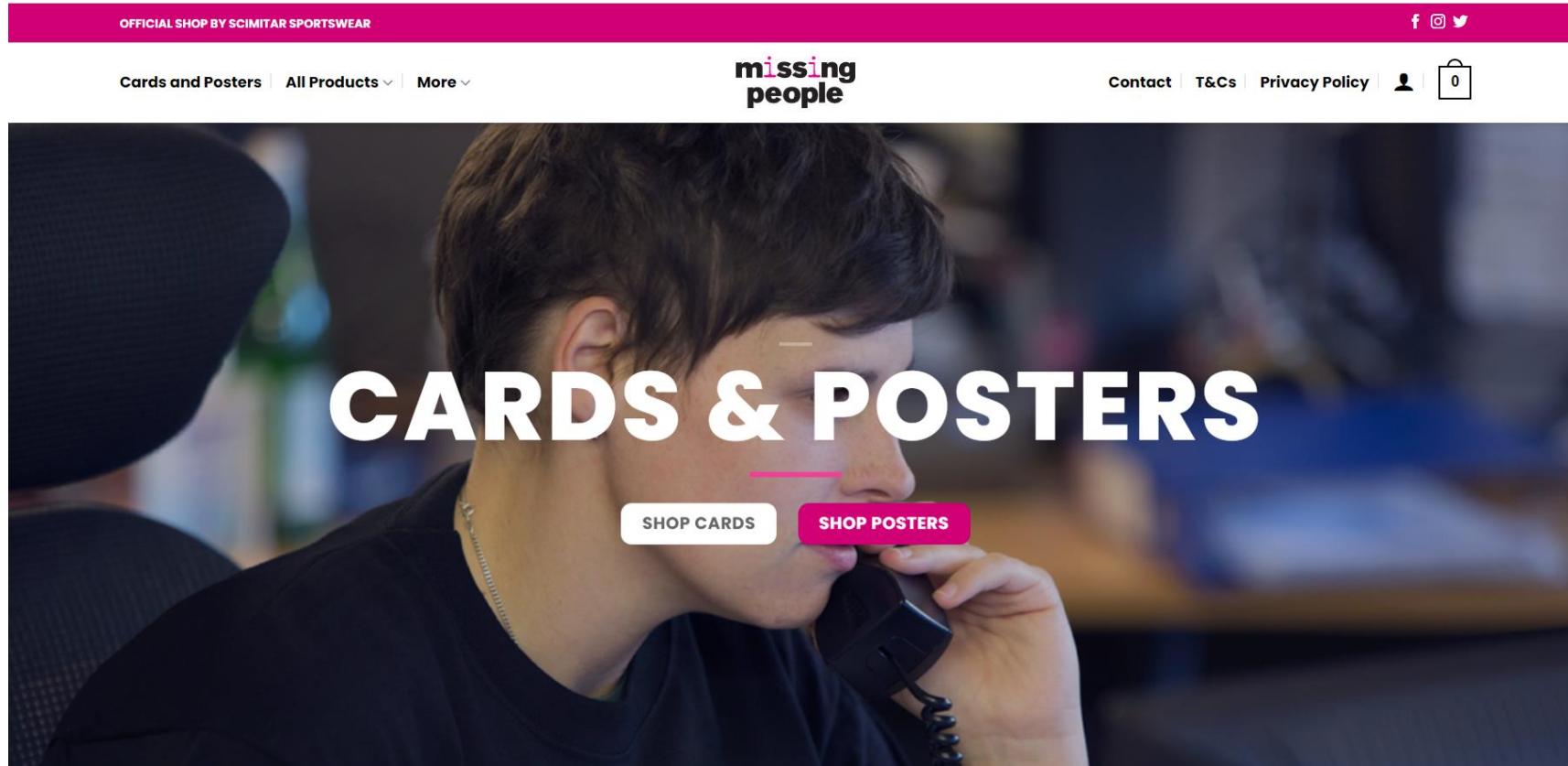
Services available to help families and friends



- Named support worker
- Written guidance
- Telephone counselling
- Online family forum
- Events

[Family support - Missing People](#)

# Order resources



[Cards and Posters - Missing People Charity Shop - Official Merchandise by Scimitar Sportswear](#)

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Follow us on LinkedIn  
[Missing Specialists | LinkedIn](#)

Meet our team of  
experts on missing

Any further questions about the training, please contact  
[consultancy@missingpeople.org.uk](mailto:consultancy@missingpeople.org.uk)