

Working with the Police

It is important to remember that there is no 24-hour waiting period to report a person missing! When a loved one has gone missing, it is an extremely stressful situation for the family. The police should understand this and should be able to have sympathy for what your family is going through. While you will feel worried and tense, always try to deal clearly and respectfully with the police. A positive relationship with the police helps everyone stay focused on finding the missing person. And if it happens that you have a concern about police behaviour, you will be better able to address your concern if you can show that you have done your part to build a positive relationship with the police.

What will the police ask?

Expect the police to ask you to complete your own search of family, friends, hangouts and hospitals before they take a missing persons report.

Be prepared to answer any number of questions. Your *Communication Log* will help you keep track of information. If you are unsure about why they are asking a particular question, you can just ask them why they want that information.

What to expect from the Police

- Always remember that as a family member of a missing person, you have rights.
- You can ask for your police contacts name and badge number.
- Remember to ask for the case file number.
- You can ask what follow ups the police will be doing.
- You can ask if similar cases have been reported.
- You can give consent to check if your loved ones identification has been used nationwide (drivers licence, credit cards, bank cards etc.)
- You can call missing persons with your case number and ask for updates or for clarity on information previously given to you.
- You can request police do media updates, a Crime Stoppers video (if foul play is suspected) and other awareness campaigns.
- Try hard to think of small details about the time before your loved one went missing – even small things can be very significant for police so do not hesitate to tell them everything.
- Do not hesitate to ask the police any questions you may have.
- If your family is offering a reward, make police aware of the details as it may impact the number of tips that are coming in about your loved one (rewards increase the number of tips). Police are not responsible for offering rewards, nor will they communicate the details of the reward that is being offered.

Information on Missing Persons Unit

At any given time, approximately eighty people are listed as missing in Winnipeg. Currently, the Winnipeg Police Service Missing Persons Unit investigates more than 5,000 cases each year. The majority of missing persons are located within three days; most are located within 24 hours of being reported missing.

Missing Persons cases include:

- Runaway youths
- Voluntarily missing adults
- Wandered/Alzheimer patients
- Parental abductions where there is immediate danger to the child
- Non-family abductions
- Unknown circumstances
- Unusual/suspicious circumstances

The Missing Persons Unit also handles requests from other agencies to try and locate people who may be in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Police Service Missing Person Unit is fully staffed and trained to use best practice tools and procedures in their investigations.

Endangered Missing Persons:

The Missing Persons Unit classifies some incidents involving missing persons as Endangered Missing Person incidents. An Endangered Missing Person is defined as:

- A person who is reported to possess a physical or mental disability
- A person who is elderly or very young
- A person who is dependent on prescription medications
- A person who is unfamiliar with the city

Persons reported to engage in a high-risk lifestyle or those associated with violent behaviour are also considered endangered. The perceived risk to a missing person can also be elevated through environmental conditions.

A Risk Assessment is conducted on every reported missing person and, if the assessment dictates, a uniform car will be dispatched to begin the investigation. Depending on the circumstances, members of the Missing Persons unit may be called upon to assist or lead the investigation.

If you believe your loved one is at risk and should be considered an Endangered Missing Person, ensure you share ALL relevant information with police immediately when giving your report.

Missing Children:

Most of the persons reported missing are under 18 years of age. Running away is the most common explanation of why children go missing from their place of residence. Unfortunately, children that run away expose themselves to a variety of risks, which may include being exploited by others.

Custody disputes also result in children being reported missing or abducted. Detectives in the 'district of occurrence' (where the event happened) normally investigate these reports unless the child is in immediate danger of bodily harm. In these cases, and others where the safety of the child is an issue or it is believed that the child is to be taken out of the province, or country, detectives from the Missing Persons unit will investigate.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (Child Find Manitoba) offers various services to families of missing children. The Winnipeg Police Service utilizes their assistance when investigating missing children. For a complete list of the services please visit their website at www.childfind.mb.ca

General Information on Reporting a Missing Person

It is not a crime to be missing. Adults can choose to leave home and cut off all contact with friends and family. This means law enforcement is limited in what it can do in these situations. Even if law enforcement locates a missing person, they cannot divulge any information about that person without specific permission from that person.

Remember: There is no 24-hour waiting period to report a person missing.

If there is some indication of foul play, contact police immediately at 9-1-1. If foul play is not suspected, and the person has gone missing in Winnipeg, contact the Missing Persons Unit at (204) 986-6250 and provide the following information:

Missing Children (under 18 years of age)

- Information about the child's school and teachers and whether or not the school was contacted and checked.
- A current photo of the missing child. This may be used by police when issuing a media release and helps officers identify the missing person.
- A description of the child, including date of birth, age, physical description and clothing worn when last seen.
- The time and place where the missing person was last seen and by whom.
- The names, addresses and phone numbers of friends and whether or not they have been checked prior to reporting the person missing.
- A list of possible hangouts or locations that the child may have gone and whether or not those locations have been checked.

- If the missing person requires any medications:
 - Find out if they have the medications with them.
 - How often they need to take the medication.

Adults (18 years of age and older)

- A current photo of the missing person. This may be used by police when issuing a media release and helps officers identify the missing person.
- A description of the person including the date of birth, age, physical description and clothing worn when last seen.
- The names, addresses and phone numbers of friends and whether or not they have been checked prior to reporting the person missing.
- Check all the hospitals prior to contacting police.
- A list of possible hangouts or locations that the adult may have gone and whether or not these locations have been checked.
- If the missing person requires any medications:
 - Find out if they have the medications with them.
 - How often they need to take the medication.
- Ensure the missing person is not at work prior to contacting police.

NOTES:

Working with the Media

You will find a ***Draft Media Release*** on the next page of this checklist, as well as a listing of Media Contacts in the ***Medicine Bear Resource Guide*** within this kit to support you in communicating with the media.

- You CAN request a media interview! The police can issue an initial request for the public's help in locating your loved one, however they cannot keep your loved one's story in the media. Have your family media representative call or email different media outlets (radio, TV, large and small local papers) to suggest they cover your loved one's story.
- In this toolkit you will find a ***Draft Media Release*** which is also available online for personalization at www.kanikanichihk.ca. **If you need assistance creating the media release please call Ka Ni Kanichihk at 953-5820.** After sending out the initial media release, do weekly follow up media releases if your loved one still has not returned home.
- Most reporters will carry a business card listing their name, contact information and what media organization they work for. Always ask for and keep their card handy. It makes it easier for you to track the coverage of your story and contact them for future stories and updates.
- Never assume a reporter interviewing you knows what your story is about. Reporters are given many assignments every day and they often will not have real information on your story. This can be frustrating, but try not to take it personally. It's nothing about you: it's just the nature of their job. Always remember, you are the expert on your story. Be prepared to tell the reporter everything they need to know, so they can do a good story.
- You can request a gentle and respectful approach to reporting your loved one's case. You can request that reporters do not use stereotypes in their stories. You can provide the photograph so that they don't use file photos from the police.
- When you find a reporter has done a story you really appreciate, call them and thank them for the story. This helps you build a positive relationship with the best reporters. When a reporter has done a story that is inaccurate or that you feel is unfair, call them and tell them the specific problems you had with their story. This helps you to educate a reporter and can lead to better stories in the future. If the reporter will not accept your feedback, call the editor. If a media outlet publishes inaccurate information, you can and should ask them to provide a correction.
- The media will ask you for the phone number of local police or RCMP and the name of the investigator who is handling your case.
- Always provide media with the Crime Stoppers phone number and remind them that Crime Stoppers provides a \$2000 cash reward for information.

City/town, Province
Month, day, year

DRAFT - Media Advisory **For Immediate Release**

Missing Person – (name of missing person)

The family of (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) requests the public's assistance in their efforts to locate their missing loved one. In collaboration with the (INSERT POLICE AGENCY NAME HERE) and the Missing Persons Unit, they are attempting to determine the whereabouts of (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) from (CITY, PROVINCE HERE). On (DATE, MONTH YEAR), (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) was reported to the police as missing. Repeated attempts to contact (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE), as well as an initial search, have been unsuccessful.

(MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) was last seen or heard from on (DATE, MONTH, YEAR, TIME HERE), and was last seen at (LOCATION HERE-CHECK WITH POLICE IF OK TO RELEASE). (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) is (ETHNICITY HERE) and was last seen wearing (DESCRIPTION OF CLOTHING HERE). (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) has (EYE COLOUR/GLASSES/CONTACTS/HAIR COLOUR AND STYLE), is (HEIGHT AND WEIGHT HERE), and has (TATTOOS, SCARS, PIERCINGS, BIRTHMARKS, DISTINGUISHING MARKS HERE). Please take the time to look at the attached photographs and help us locate our loved one.

Any assistance with locating (MISSING PERSON'S NAME HERE) is greatly appreciated by the family.

If you have seen, have any knowledge of the location of, or have any information that could help us locate our loved one please contact (POLICE AGENCY HERE) at (POLICE PHONE NUMBER) or Crime Stoppers at 1-800- 222-8477 as soon as possible. Callers to Crime Stoppers never have to reveal their identity and may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$2,000.

Contact: (INSERT FAMILY MEDIA CONTACT NAME, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL ETC. INSERT POLICE/RCMP CONTACT NUMBERS HERE AGAIN