

# GAIA'S GUIDE

A COMMUNITY ORGANISING GUIDE  
TO HELP KEEP MISSING PEOPLE SAFE



Thanks to the dedication of a small team of volunteers, within hours Gaia's disappearance gained national attention and hundreds of people were mobilised in the search to bring her home safely. We've produced this guide to explain how we did it because we know for a fact that friends, family and community can make a world of difference.

## **1. KEY ISSUES**

What you need to know when a loved one goes missing or if you're volunteering to help find someone.

## **2. BUILDING A TEAM**

How to bring family, friends and community together into a team that works.

## **3. SOCIAL MEDIA**

How to make effective use of social media to coordinate search efforts and share information.

## **4. ON THE GROUND**

How to organise on the ground logistics for community search efforts.

## **5. GETTING THE WORD OUT**

How to get the word out to volunteers, locals and the wider public.

## **6. DEALING WITH THE POLICE**

How to engage with the police, knowing your rights and what to expect.

## **7. GAIA'S STORY**

Find out more about Gaia's story and her family's campaign for justice.

## **8. RESOURCES**

Template press release and links to other organisations who might be able to help.



## WHY DO PEOPLE GO MISSING?

Someone is reported missing in the UK every 90 seconds. That's 180,000 people a year and that number is rising fast: a 77% increase in London alone since 2010. Why? People from low income or Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and those with physical or mental health conditions are most at risk. Since 2010 government **austerity cuts have crippled the health and social care supports and services people rely on in time of difficulty, illness or trauma.**(1)

### MAIN FACTORS

- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues account for up to 8/10 missing adults.
- Relationship breakdown and abuse is the next most common cause (3/10).
- Dementia accounts for around 1/10 adult missing incidents.
- BAME people are twice as likely to go missing and less likely to be found. (2)

Other common issues include **homelessness, abuse and domestic violence, mental distress, including risks of suicide or self-harm and relationship breakdown or trouble at home.** The most common reason for children to go missing are:

- Conflict, abuse and neglect: more than half of missing children have experienced this and 1 in 5 children felt forced to leave because of it.
- Sexual exploitation: 7 in 10 young people who have been sexually exploited have also been reported missing.
- Mental health issues: account for at least 1 in 10 missing children.

"Most of the people who are reported missing are vulnerable or at risk and many are reported missing multiple times, making them even more vulnerable... There are a wide range of reasons why adults and children go missing, with varying levels of intentionality, and often more than one cause."

- SUSANNAH DRURY, MISSING PEOPLE

The most common issues raised by children are abuse, domestic violence and child sexual exploitation, mental health issues including risks of suicide or self harm and problems at home or in care.

Many of these are distressing - and deeply personal - issues. But whether you're a loved one or a volunteer, it is important to consider all of these possibilities so that you can...

- **Assess whether the missing person is at significant risk of harm.** If not, much of the advice in this guide may not apply.
- **Decide whether a high-profile community search is the right choice.**
- **Avoid unintentionally exposing them to physical danger or undue mental distress** by returning them to an unsafe environment or alerting their abuser to their location.
- **How to help them feel safe** if you encounter them.
- **Consider how contact with these issues may affect you personally** and decide whether you want to be out searching or find another way to contribute.

## CONSENT AND LEADERSHIP

In an emergency, **it is important to act fast but even more important to act in the right way.** Trying to help someone who is missing is especially complicated because you can't ask them what they want or request their consent before you act.

Unlike the police, you won't have rules and policies that tell you what to do. This can be a great strength because you have more freedom to respond quickly and do some important stuff the police may not be able to.

However, it's important to be organised, establish clear areas of responsibility and consider consent and leadership. This helps the community search work not just fast but well, and in the interests of the person you're trying to help.

**When a missing person is found, it is very important that they control what happens next.** While someone is missing the best thing the community can do is allow their loved ones to make big decisions. In most cases, this will be their next of kin, such as a parent or spouse.

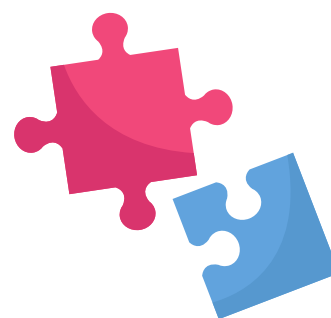
## A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

The community effort should adopt a person-centred approach by working within the boundaries of what the missing person's loved ones feel comfortable with.

Just one example may be that some families may want your help to secure as much press coverage as possible to get the word out; others may be reluctant and it's important that this is respected and not interrogated. As members of the community all you can do is support the effort in whatever way makes loved ones feel supported. It's simply about asking what you can do to help - there is no one "right way."

**The police, press, volunteers and family should collaborate and communicate as closely as possible.** Each bring unique strengths and resources which should come together to ensure the safety of the missing person. In an ideal scenario, the police press officer will help raise awareness in consultation with the family while the Police Search Advisor (PoLSA) will be assigned to coordinate police and volunteer search efforts.

Unfortunately this doesn't always happen. When Gaia was missing, we had little to no contact with either the police press office or the PoLSA so we had to figure a lot of this out on our own. The good news is that our experience shows how much community volunteers can achieve even without much expert help. We organised everything ourselves, kept everyone safe, made all details of our past and planned activity openly available on our facebook group, developed our own relationship with the media and raised hundreds of pounds to fund the search. We engaged thousands of people across the UK in the effort to Find Gaia and hundreds of people went out searching for her. And with this guide to help you, there's no reason you can't do the same.





## MENTAL HEALTH

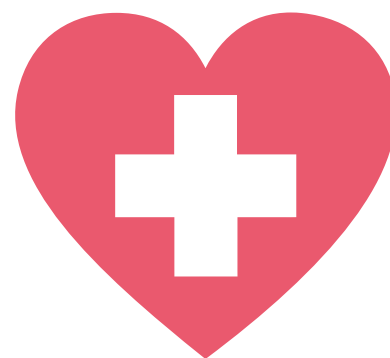
Because missing persons cases involve and create severe mental distress, the mental health needs of everyone involved must be made a priority. This includes volunteers but applies especially to close family and friends, who will be going through an immensely traumatic time.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- When experiencing trauma, it's easy to forget basic self-care so make sure someone appropriate is making food regularly and readily available. It can also help to remind people that they need to eat to stay strong for their loved one.
- Make sure someone trusted by the family who is able to make notes and provide support can be present during any meetings with police or other officials.
- Don't take any unusual behaviour to heart. Anger, irritability, depression, guilt and fear are all signs of trauma. It helps to assure the person that all these responses are normal and nothing to be ashamed of.
- Ask what kind of support is needed from you and focus on that.
- Assure the person you are there to listen and support without judgement, and respect their confidence.
- Make Missing People's confidential helpline accessible to anyone who needs it.

***Everyone responds differently to trauma. Some will want to talk and need lots of company; others will prefer to keep busy with practical matters or need space and quiet. Be guided by what the person tells you they need.***

**The missing person's mental health should also be a key consideration, especially in relation to their privacy.** Before any personal information is shared publicly, consider: will publicising this information help? Could publicising it negatively impact their mental health and inhibit them from coming home or seeking help because they feel ashamed or afraid they are in trouble?



# Freephone Helpline: 116 000

Missing People is the UK's leading charity that supports missing people and their families, and their free helpline is open 24/7. Make sure that friends, family and volunteers all have access to this number for when they need it.



## THE CORE TEAM

Building a core team is the first step if you intend to organise searches and family support. These people might naturally arise to fill in gaps or you might want to allocate roles. Friends and loved ones are a good way place to start, especially for sensitive roles like family support or liaising with police and press.



Make use of as many volunteers from the the wider community as you can but be sure your core team is made of people who are **trusted, reliable and organised**. This is a very high stress, high pressure situation, mistakes will be made and you want a team that can self-organise and adapt to whatever is thrown at them. Here are some of the things your core team - or specific individuals within it - might be responsible for:

### Managing social media



### Communicating with the police regarding searches



### Organising searches



### Finding places for volunteers to meet



### Organising press interviews and keeping the media updated





## REACH OUT

If you're social media savvy and want to start a twitter account too, then great. But with over 39 million users in the UK alone, Facebook is the world's biggest social media network and can be a great organising tool. Create a Facebook group with a simple name (ours was called "Find Gaia") and get as many people as you can to encourage others to join. The bigger, the better.

You can then use this space to **recruit and coordinate volunteers, raise awareness, share updates and even raise funds.** Whatever support you're asking for, the golden rule is to speak from the heart. Videos and personal appeals from friends and family will be most effective.



### MONITORING FACEBOOK

- The Facebook group can be monitored remotely, so you can delegate this to free up people who are able to help you in the local area. It's important that all admin on the Facebook group have the same information and are clear about the rules. These should be people you trust because information may be sensitive or urgent.
- Sometimes people might post information to the Facebook group first so it's important to monitor the group as much as possible so potential sightings, for example, can be reported immediately to the police.
- Create guidelines for people who are monitoring the group. These should be developed in collaboration with the police where possible. You can find a template in the resources section.
- Be sure to have a process in place for possible sightings. You can see an example of this below.

**Step 1.** People report potential sightings directly on the Facebook group.

**Step 2.** Ask them if they have called the police, where this was and at what time.

**Step 3.** Call the police yourself if you have a personal number to call or if you think the call isn't going through quickly enough.

**Step 4.** After the police have checked it out, update people on social media.

**Step 5.** Take note of the date, time, person and description of the potential sighting.

## MANAGING FACEBOOK

Start by allowing all comments but depending on how things develop and how many people are getting involved you might want to change how this works. The more high profile the search becomes, the more attention you will get from psychics, conspiracy theorists and trolls.

You can consider deleting all comments that are not directly linked to the logistics of the search. This way the only information left on your group will be relative making it easier to find relevant information.

Ask people to start their posts with headings, eg 'Possible sighting//', 'Search Location//', 'Flyer Distribution//'. This will make searching for something specific a lot easier, for you and for volunteers.

Keep one post with all the most important, up to date information 'pinned' to the top of the page so it's the first thing people see. This can include any updates, locations people can pick up flyers, a meet up location for searches if there is one and guidelines on how to use the group.

**"It is a common belief that you have to wait 24 hours before reporting but this is not true, you can make a report to the police as soon as you think a person is missing."**

- UK MISSING PERSONS UNIT







## WHERE TO START

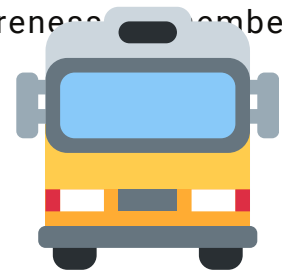
If you have volunteers, it's time to start organising them! They can be friends, family or complete strangers. We relied heavily on the people power from the local community and support from people around the country. Don't be afraid to ask people to help, do a shout out on the Facebook group and from your personal profiles, you might be surprised at the amount of people willing to lend a hand.

Think about what they can do, where they can search and what you might need. **People don't have to be local to help.** They can donate to a crowdfunder, order flyers, raise awareness online, phone shelters and hospitals and much more.



### LOGISTICS

- **Have a base** where people can meet, plan and collect flyers. This could be a local café, church or youth centre.
- **Make a missing persons poster as soon as you can.** Missing People can produce these for you but in the first instance it'll be faster to make them yourselves. Be sure to include the person's name, age, physical description including last known outfit, last known whereabouts, what to do if they see the person and a high quality recent photo. (Try and choose recent and realistic pictures as people can look very different shaven or without makeup!)
- Contact print shops; they might be able to help you with discounted rates/free prints for flyers and posters.
- Put posters wherever you can. Ask permission to display in shop windows, hand flyers to people in the street and post them through doors to raise awareness. Remember to coordinate to cover more ground efficiently!



### TRANSPORT

It is important to think about transport routes in and around the last known location. If the missing person doesn't have use of a car then they or someone who knows where they are might have used public transport.

- Contact local taxi, bus and train companies. Explain the situation and ask if they can notify their staff or if you can put posters up on their bus/train/taxi.
- Flyer train stations and bus stops during volunteer searches. This way if they haven't left the area yet, people who take that route will be on the lookout or may remember seeing them before.
- Target bus stops and transport links that run around the time they were last seen, commuters who travel regularly around that time might have seen them.

## GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTEER SEARCHERS

Joining the search is only one of many ways to help when someone goes missing and no one should be pressured to go out searching, though loved ones should also be supported to join the search if they feel it's right for them. Regardless, anyone who joins the search needs to **know how stay safe and what to do** if they find something.

### STAY SAFE

- Never go out alone.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Make sure your mobile phone is fully charged.
- Make sure you have weather appropriate clothing, footwear and provisions.
- If searching rural areas, consider the terrain and make sure you have appropriate clothing and provisions if necessary.
- Do not follow up a lead or sighting yourself. Call the police or Missing People immediately.



Remember, if volunteer search efforts end up putting anyone at risk, this will discourage others from volunteering and the police may call for a halt to community efforts so keeping yourself and others safe is essential.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND SOMETHING

If you find something that might be a piece of evidence - for example, an item of clothing that fits the description of what the missing person was last seen wearing - it's very important that you **do not touch it or disturb the surrounding area**. You should report your finding immediately to the police and if it is safe to do so, remain on site until the police arrive to help protect the area from anyone else who may disturb the scene.

## What to do if you find the missing person

It is extremely important that they are in control of what happens next, where they go and who is informed of their location. There may be key information you're not aware of and nobody else knows their needs better than them - not even parents or partners - and that's why Missing People is a great place for both you and them to seek confidential and expert advice.

- If they are injured or in immediate danger, call 999 immediately.
- Otherwise, remain calm and offer food, water and warmth if you can do so safely.
- Reassure them that you only want to make sure they're safe and that you won't do anything or call anyone against their will.
- Ask if they would be willing to speak confidentially to the Missing Person's Helpline. If yes, help them to make the call. If not, invite them to tell you what they need, try to respect their wishes and seek advice from the helpline yourself.

## SEARCHING

This strategy for searching was developed by the Find Gaia core team and informed by Search & Rescue practices once we already had a significant number of volunteer searchers. **Adjust your approach based on the number of volunteers** you have and the specific circumstances, keeping the interests of the missing person and their loved ones at the centre of your approach.

**Ideally you will receive support and guidance from a Police Search Advisor (PoISA) and/or local Search and Rescue (SAR) specialists and you can request to be put in contact with them.** If this is not the case, this section of the guide should tell you what you need to know. Even if it is the case, you may wish to use these tactics as a checklist to make sure that everything that can be done is being done.

- Have the missing persons flyer on hand and speak to people in the street. Give them a flyer so that they can familiarise themselves with the photo.
- Collate a list of the person's favourite places, including bars, pubs, cinemas and parks. Volunteers can target these spots when searching. Be sure to speak to people in these places and/or leave flyers. People who go there regularly might see or recognise the missing person.
- Keep track of all activity and document the time, date and location of all searches. This information will be vital for you and potentially the police, too.
- If you think the person could be on the move, search places more than once.
- Target transport links, local stations and bus stops in the area. This can be crucial in the first couple of days if the missing person is likely to have travelled outside of the immediate area.

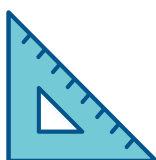
Once momentum is building and you have more volunteers you can expand your search and cover more ground. Here are some ways you can expand.

## TRANSPORT SEARCH

1. List all stations in the area you want to search



2. Order them by distance and divide them into groups



3. Split your volunteers in to groups and give them locations to go to

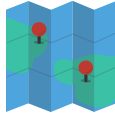


4. Once there, the volunteers can hand out flyers and spark conversations with people who live, work or happen to be in those areas.



## DOOR TO DOOR SEARCHES

1. Print off one master map (the map that covers the whole area you want to search.)



2. Mark the areas on the master and split them into sections that each group will use. Number each section so it corresponds to a group (that way you know who is searching where.)



3. Create information pages for people to make notes with. (There's a template in the resources section.)



4. Identify all the streets you can search in each area and put them in a single page list for each group.



5. Label the information pages by street e.g. Bell Street should have 10 sheets that are dedicated only to Bell Street, that way it's very easy to access more specific information.



6. Order the pages by street, take a look at the map and think about the most logical route people will take, so if you are dealing with 3 streets, try and order them as if you personally were walking those roads and think about what order you would start on each one.



7. In groups of 4-10, volunteers can each take an area. Where possible they should have flyers of the missing person, a clipboard, the map and a pen.



8. Each group goes to an area (this should be assigned or chosen by someone coordinating the search so you know what areas have been covered and by who.) Starting from one end, with two people on either side of the road, the group can make its way down the streets knocking on each door.



9. With each person the volunteers speak to they should ask

- Are they aware of the missing person
- Do they have a shed, garage or outhouse?
- Have they checked it?
- If not, could they check it now?
- Do they have CCTV around the house? (This could be vital information for the police as CCTV might have recorded the missing person passing the house.)
- Notes should then be made alongside the address of the house.



## CCTV

CCTV is an incredibly powerful resource but the problem is that finding and viewing it takes a lot of person power and both the police and the owner of the camera can restrict who's able to view it. Some police forces have special schemes enabling people to volunteer to view CCTV, so ask about this if you have volunteers able to do this. If there is no scheme or the police won't let you join it for the search, there are other things you can do:



- While searching, have volunteers record where in the area there are CCTV cameras provide this information to the police and make sure you're kept updated about whether and to what extent police are checking the footage.
- Ask local residents and businesses with CCTV to check their own cameras and report anything suspicious. If you know where cameras are, you know who to ask!
- Put the same request to drivers with dash cams (including driving schools), especially if there's a specific vehicle you think you're looking for.
- If your local police force doesn't have a volunteer scheme, ask if volunteers can be borrowed from similar schemes in neighbouring counties.

## KEEPING TRACK



It's really important to keep track of all comings and goings when it comes to the search of a missing person for many reasons. The first is to do with the short term, being clear about what happened each day or where information is kept means that volunteer handovers and coordination will be easier. It can be difficult to know what exactly you should be keeping track of. Below is a list of things that is useful to note.

- Make detailed notes of what happened each day, what you/the team did, which media you spoke to and any interactions with the police or government bodies, this may be useful later. Email them to yourself so that they are time stamped each day.
- Create a timeline of the missing person's whereabouts.
- Don't be afraid to keep asking the police what they are doing and where they have looked. Also, keep them updated about your plans and activities.
- Keep track of everything that is spent, how much and when.
- Keep track of all potential sightings, who they were made by, where and when.



## THE MEDIA

Talking to the media is a great way to raise awareness and the more people who know what's happening, the more people can help. Media coverage also plays an important role in helping to make sure loved ones' voices are heard and that agencies like the police are held accountable and doing everything in their power to help.



### DEALING WITH THE PRESS

The press will always want to speak to the family and it's important that they are supported to make the choice that's right for them when it comes to who speaks to the media and what is said.

Unfortunately **some journalists are only focused on selling a story** and this is one reason that dealing with them directly or viewing media coverage can be extremely distressing. Ideally **a trusted relative or friend should be appointed** to support and advocate for them and liaise with journalists on their behalf. This person must be well organised and contactable during work hours. Here are some important ways they can help:

- Provide a reliable channel of communication between loved ones and the media to discourage them from calling relatives directly or showing up at their home.
- Support loved ones to identify key messages and to make the media work for them, not the other way around.
- Keep everyone focused on your key messages. Make sure no relative is pressured to give interviews when they don't feel able or speak about things they don't want to
- Help loved ones decide what they do - and do not - want to talk about and agree key information that should be included in all media coverage, such as the person's description and how members of the public can help. You should also help them choose some recent photographs to release.
- Provide support through interviews and review the finished coverage to make sure key information is getting out there and identify which journalists are giving the best coverage - these are the ones you'll want to make an effort to keep talking to.

### STRATEGY

Depending on the story you might be able to get the story covered by national outlets but start by focusing on **local newspapers and radio stations**.

Regional BBC coverage should be a priority too because other journalists look to the BBC for new stories to cover and it has higher standards of ethics and reporting than many tabloid newspapers. There's a useful directory of BBC contacts available at [www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/contacts](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/contacts)

### Potential Key Messages

- Name and description of the missing person.
- What you should do if you've seen them.
- Other ways you can help i.e. donating, volunteering, sharing on social media.
- The name of your social media campaign so people know what to search to learn more.
- Message from the family/loved ones.

## HOW TO MAKE A PRESS RELEASE



If you want media coverage the first thing you need to do is make a press release and email it to as many local and regional newspapers, radio stations and other outlets as you can find. Contact details will be available on their websites. You should **follow your press release with a phone call** to make sure it's been seen and you can issue a new press release daily or whenever there is new information to share. Your press release should fit on a single page of A4 using Arial font size 11. There's an easy to use template in our 'resources' section.

### MEDIA INTERVIEWS

When it comes to interviews, you want to **maximise impact while minimising stress for loved ones**. Here's how.



- Discuss with the interviewee in advance whether there's anything they really do or do not want to speak about and speak to the journalist about this in advance.
- Ask the journalist in advance what questions they'll be asking so you can help the interviewee prepare.
- If the interview is for radio or television, find out if it's pre-recorded. You may wish to request pre-record only as these are much less stressful as interviewees can take breaks more easily or start again from the top of an answer if they want to. (If you're giving an answer and you realise you need to do this, just stop talking straight away and ask to do this.)
- Share the load by supporting more than one loved one to speak to the press as well as one or two volunteers, too. But make sure everyone gets support to prepare and is familiar with your key messages.

At the beginning you may want to take any and every opportunity you have to speak. But if you find at any point you have too many invitations, start to prioritise the outlets the biggest and most influential media outlets who want to speak to you and the journalists you feel like you can trust. These relationships can be really important in ways you might not even imagine yet.

### THE POLICE + THE PRESS

If the police are treating the search as high priority they'll probably start issuing their own press releases and appoint a police press officer to do a lot of the work outlined here. You should aim for maximum communication and cooperation with the police as it's much better if everyone's on the same page and issuing the same advice. But if possible **families should have their own independent voice** because:

- No one will work as hard for the missing person than the people who love them.
- If you don't the story will die as soon as the police stop talking about it.
- If issues arise with the police, having an independent relationship with the media will enable you to have your say, apply public pressure and make sure those in charge are held accountable.

## OTHER WAYS TO GET THE WORD OUT



The more people that know about your search means the more people can help. Here are some ideas for more ways to spread the word. Some of them are free and while others cost money, you may be able to raise this by appealing for donations.

- Ask local businesses if you can put up the missing persons poster.
- Make a list of local Facebook pages who have a large following, contact them and ask them to share your missing person page or flyer.
- Local media might be able to do more to help you reach more people. Talk to them, tell them about your search.
- Contact your local MP, they might be able to help you raise the profile of the search and might be useful when interacting with search agencies such as the police and/or coastguard.
- Contact Missing Persons UK. They have a big social media presence and are experienced. They can also provide mental health support for family and friends.
- Contact the Big Issue and ask if they can help by printing the missing persons poster in the next issue.
- Pay for adverts on social media for people in the area, this is a great way to ensure their picture is seen if larger media outlets still haven't picked the story up.
- Print large banners to display on intersections and roads that get a lot of traffic. They need to be big enough to be visible by moving traffic.

## How do police investigations work?

Police policy for Missing Persons investigations is a murky area. Procedure varies from one police force to another and much of it is not available to the public. This makes it much more difficult to issue guidance and complicated for volunteers trying to help without unintentionally undermining police efforts. It also makes it hard for families to hold the police accountable or understand what they have a right to expect.

The best approach is to try and build the most communicative and cooperative relationship possible, but remember that as long as the action you're taking is legal, ultimately you don't need permission from anyone to speak to the press or undertake search activities.





## KNOW THE PROCESS

When you report someone missing by calling 101 or 999 in emergencies, the police will carry out a risk assessment that will determine how they respond. Be clear on the phone that you need to make a missing persons report and get confirmation that this has been officially logged and completed.

The police risk assessment is based partly on information from loved ones so be sure to explain any factors which make the missing person especially vulnerable, such as physical or mental health conditions.

**You have a right to know the outcome of this assessment and to challenge it if you believe the police have made the wrong decision.**

- No Risk ● There is no apparent risk of harm to either the subject or the public.
- Low Risk ● The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.
- Medium Risk ● The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not serious.
- High Risk ● The risk of serious harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.



## WHAT TO EXPECT

Depending on the initial risk assessment, after you make an initial report a uniformed response officer should attend to make initial enquiries and report back to an investigation team. At this time you should be informed which officer is in charge of the enquiry.

Officers will likely search the home of the missing person and other residences they visited, perhaps multiple times, and may seize personal items, especially phones and other electronic devices. **This can be distressing but is procedure and does not mean that something bad has happened or you are suspected of committing a crime.** You have a right to have these items investigated and returned to you in a timely manner and should be given a reference number for any items seized.

**You should be put in touch with a police officer who'll act as your primary point of contact. Hopefully this will be a specialist FLO (Family Liaison Officer). Part of their role** is to support loved ones and act as a point of contact relaying and answering questions between you and the police. However, they are also there to observe and gather information from the family. They will do this by questions and observation and act as a link between the family and the investigation team. Their observations and findings will be fed back to the team and senior officers on a daily basis.

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

As a loved one of the missing person, you have the right to:

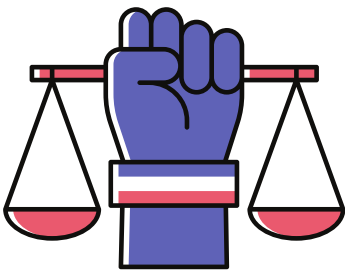
- Be kept informed about the investigation and search efforts.
- Be heard if you have information to share with the police.
- Speak directly to the public through the press and social media.
- Organise volunteer searches and receive advice and support in this effort directly from the Police Search Advisor (PoISA) if there is one.
- Ask for local MISPER (missing persons) policy to be shared with you. These vary from county to county and while precise procedure is kept confidential, policy is open to the public.
- Have your questions answered in an open and timely manner.
- A mobile contact number for your point of contact/FLO.
- Speak to the Officer in Charge if you need to.
- Request a new or specifically male/female point of contact if you prefer.



### POLICE INTERVIEWS

Initially you will provide a “first account” to the police. Later an officer may take a full and formal statement if appropriate. Should officers wish to record the statement, it becomes an interview under caution and you are entitled to legal representation. This can either be someone of your own choosing or a duty solicitor.

### MINORS & VULNERABLE ADULTS



Children under 17 and any adult classed as vulnerable, for example due to a physical or mental health condition, autism or learning disability are entitled to special protections when dealing with the police. You have a right to ask questions about this and to insist that those rights are respected. For example, in the case of police interviews...

- They should be conducted by specially trained officers and recorded.
- An appropriate adult should be permitted to watch the interview, as long as the adult is not also a witness. The adult can be a family friend/relative or you can ask the police to appoint someone.
- They should take place in a designated interview suite.
- The interviewee should be allowed to see the room prior to the interview.
- The interviewee should be offered regular breaks.
- If the interviewee has mental health issues and there are concerns about the psychological impact of the interview, a mental health assessment should be carried out prior to the interview.
- Any other special needs or requirements should be taken into consideration and all officers involved in the enquiry should be made aware of them. This is one of the responsibilities of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO).

## GET SUPPORT

Like dealing with the press, dealing with the police can be extremely distressing and it's difficult to absorb information when you're traumatised. Below are some contacts that can help but if possible, **choose one or two trusted friends or relatives who can physically accompany you to meetings with the police.** This person can help by:

- Keeping notes during conversations so important information isn't lost.
- Making sure that all loved ones' questions and concerns are being addressed.
- Familiarising themselves with police MISPER (Missing Persons) policy so they know what responsibilities and obligations the police have. Start here: [app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons](http://app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons)
- Helping you to access specialist advice and support from Missing People.

## EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW?

For anyone, dealing with the police during a traumatic experience can be difficult and even frightening. Some people might be more anxious than others. This doesn't mean they've done something wrong and may be due to negative past experience that some people are more likely to have than others.

- **Racism:** The Metropolitan Police is 4 times more likely to use force against black people than white people. (3) Those from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds are also twice as likely to die in custody. (4)
- **Sexism:** Survivors of domestic abuse may have traumatic memories of being disbelieved or mistreated when turning to the police for protection. (5)
- **Mental health discrimination:** For example, sexual abuse survivors with mental health issues are 40% less likely to have their case referred for prosecution by police. (6) Those with learning difficulties see their chances reduced by 67%. (7)

## Help dealing with the police

If you run into problems with the police, Missing People may be able to offer independent advice, help you work out the best approach or advocate on your behalf. Their website also has further information on how to report to the police and what you can expect. To find out more, call **116 000** or visit [www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help/help-services/how-police-search/how-to-report-someone-missing](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help/help-services/how-police-search/how-to-report-someone-missing)

You may also wish to consider making a formal complaint. Find out how to do this at: [www.policeconduct.gov.uk/complaints-reviews-and-appeals/make-complaint](http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/complaints-reviews-and-appeals/make-complaint)



## A LIGHT TO GUIDE US

Gaia was bright, brave, kind, creative and fiercely loyal to those she loved: her family, her friends and her rescue cat, Bella. The challenges she faced as a young woman living with epilepsy and as a survivor of sexual violence inspired her to pursue a career in health and social care. She wanted to dedicate her life to others and help transform a healthcare system she felt forgotten and neglected by.

At 16 Gaia's life was transformed by worsening epilepsy and post-traumatic stress following an experience of sexual violence. When she went missing on 7 November 2017 without her coat, phone, medication or her keys, we knew something was wrong and immediately reported her missing to the police.

The vast majority of those reported missing are found safe but our story didn't end that way. After eleven days, Gaia's body was found on a coastal path she used to love, less than a mile from where she disappeared. She was 19 years old.

We are determined to do all in our power to make sure your family never has to be where we are, mourning the loss of someone precious beyond words and who can never be replaced. That's why we made this guide.



During the eleven days Gaia was missing, our local community in Purbeck mounted an incredible effort to find her. Hundreds joined the search and Gaia's disappearance became a national story. We received support from people across the country and donations from around the world. It was a member of the public who found the first clue, without which we might still be searching today.

Friends and family organised and led this effort by following the steps outlined in this guide and everything discussed here is based on our our experience. The world is a darker place without Gaia but she is still a light in all our lives which we hope can help guide others home safely.

## #JusticeForGaia

Like most missing people, Gaia was made more vulnerable by the trauma she experienced and her mental and physical health conditions. We believe that if she had received the right care and support before she disappeared, she would never have gone missing in the first place. As a family our search for answers continues and we are calling for improved support to save lives like Gaia's in the future. Please follow us on social media @JusticeForGaia or go to [www.justiceforgaia.com](http://www.justiceforgaia.com) to find out more about Gaia and how you can help.



## WHO ELSE CAN HELP?

### MISSING PEOPLE

Missing People is an independent charity funded by donations. They search for missing people on behalf of the friends and family left behind and provide specialised support to ease their heartache and confusion. Their free, confidential helpline is available 24 hours a day by phone, text and email to support missing children and adults, and their loved ones.

**24hr Freephone Helpline:** 116 000 (call or text) **Website:** [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

### MIND

Mind is a national mental health charity. Ask about mental health problems, treatment options, where to get help near you and advocacy services. 86463

**Helpline:** 0300 123 3393 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri) **Text:** 86463 **Website:** [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

### MIND LEGAL TEAM

Mind is a national mental health charity. Their legal line provides information and general advice on mental health related law. You can seek confidential advice about things like being detained under the Mental Health Act (sectioning), mental capacity, community care, discrimination and equality.

**Helpline:** 0300 466 6463 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri) **Website:** [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines)

### NATIONAL DOMESTIC ABUSE HELPLINE

You can speak to a member of the National Domestic Abuse Helpline team at any time, day or night. They offer confidential, non-judgmental information and expert support. They work with you to keep you safe and give you information so you can make informed choices. They can also help you to access refuge accommodation or other specialist and local support services.

**24hr Freephone Helpline:** 0808 2000 247 **Website:** [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

### CHILD LINE

If you're under 19, Childline is here to help with any issue you're going through.

**Freephone Helpline:** 0800 1111 (7.30-3.30am) **Website:** [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### REFERENCES

1. Inside Britain's escalating missing persons problem: [www.vice.com/en/article/yw8eey/inside-britains-escalating-missing-persons-problem](http://www.vice.com/en/article/yw8eey/inside-britains-escalating-missing-persons-problem)
2. Why are black people twice as likely to go missing? <https://archive.voice-online.co.uk/article/why-are-black-people-twice-more-likely-go-missing-part-1>
3. Missing People 2018 national statistics: [www.missingpeople.org.uk/latest-news/1018-missing-people-publishes-latest-uk-statistics.html](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/latest-news/1018-missing-people-publishes-latest-uk-statistics.html)
4. BBC News [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-44214748](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-44214748)
5. INQUEST [www.inquest.org.uk/bame-deaths-in-police-custody](http://www.inquest.org.uk/bame-deaths-in-police-custody)
6. Centre for Women's Justice [www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/why-we-exist](http://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/why-we-exist)
7. Bureau of Investigative Journalism: [www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2014-02-28/revealed-why-the-police-are-failing-most-rape-victims](http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2014-02-28/revealed-why-the-police-are-failing-most-rape-victims)

Date & time release was issued

INCLUDE A HIGH  
QUALITY, RECENT  
PHOTO

## Clear headline that grabs attention.

- Three or four bullet points that summarise key points from the rest of the press release.
- Focus here on information that is most important or new.
- Also include anything specifically relevant for journalists, like whether family members are available for interview or there's an event they might want to attend like a mass search or a press conference.

Further detail explaining more of the story can go here but it should focus on the key messages including the name and description of the person, any grounds there are to fear for their health or safety to show the urgency of the situation and what people should do if they think they have relevant information to share. You can't repeat that enough.

Next add a couple of short quotes. Words of family and loved ones are often most powerful and whatever feels right to them to say probably is. However, it can also be good to quote someone involved in organising the search, appealing for help from the public and focusing again on those key messages discussed earlier. For example:

**Jessica Mason, volunteer coordinator, says:** *"Dorothy suffers from dementia so she may be confused and disorientated. If anyone local to the Bournemouth area can volunteer to help us find her, please search 'Find Dorothy' and social media to find out more about how you can help."*

If you still have room on your single side of A4 you can include further details here, perhaps a summary of what's happened so far or more information about who the missing person is as this can help members of the public connect to the story.

### For more information, contact

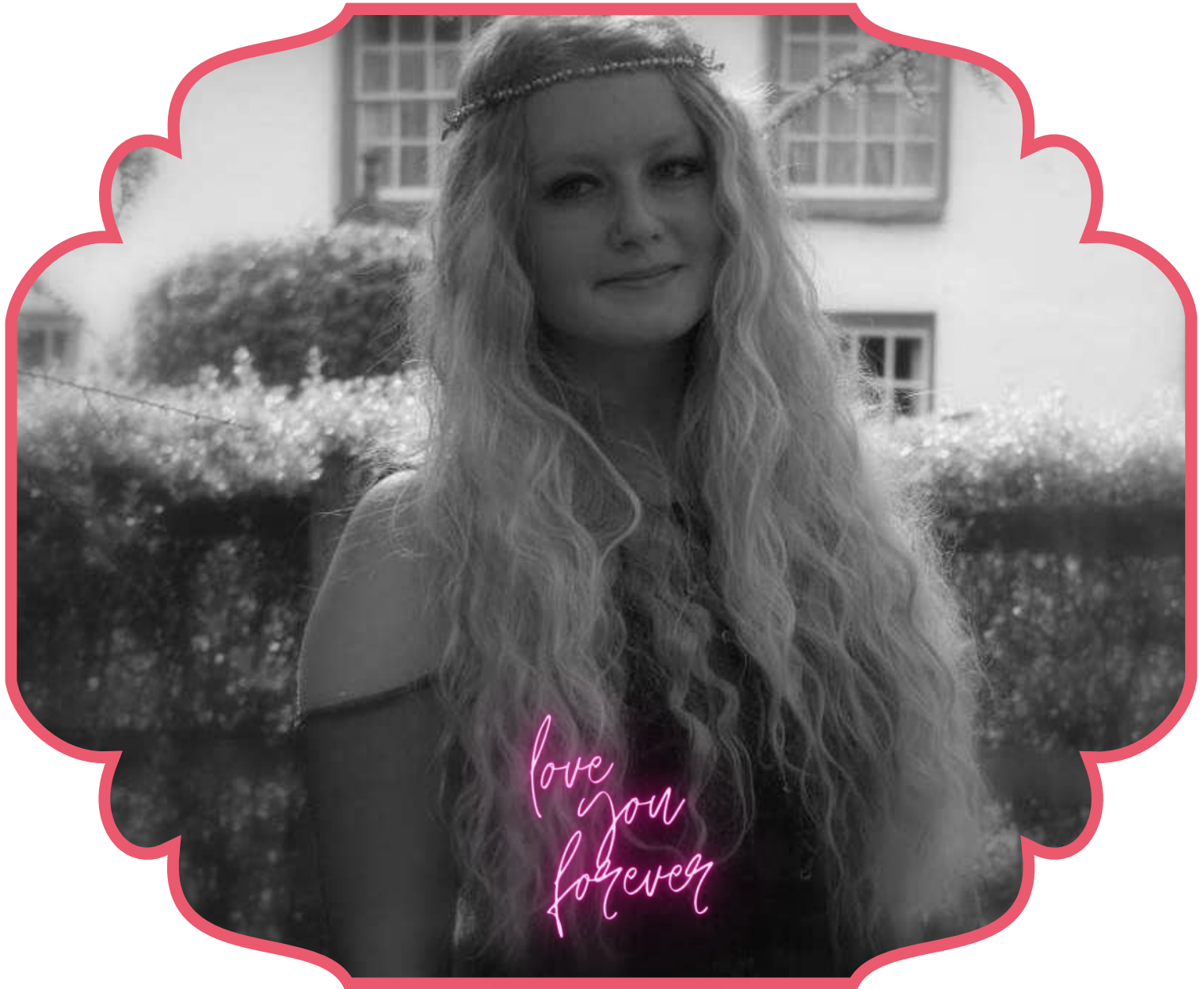
Include a name, mobile number and email address for one or two media contacts chosen by the family.

You can also include a request like "Please respect the privacy of Dorothy's family at this very difficult time and direct all media enquiries as directed above."

In loving memory of our girl

# Gaia Pope

1998-2017



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