

Risk identification, assessment and management

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Gathering information for risk assessment

Throughout a missing person case, officers and staff should continue to gather information to support an accurate assessment of risk. Risk should be reviewed continually at every stage of the case. This should take into account information from all relevant sources and should be updated as new details emerge.

This may include:

- the informant
- family members
- carers
- associates
- previous missing person reports
- police systems, such as Police National Computer (PNC), Police National Database (PND) and local intelligence databases

If there is uncertainty over the level of risk, officers and staff should conduct initial enquiries to obtain further information in order to confirm the risk assessment.

Officers and staff should consider involving **other agencies** in the process. This may include social services and health or mental health professionals, particularly when assessing risk for children in local authority care.

All information used to inform a risk assessment should be recorded. This includes:

- the information provided
- the name and contact details of the person supplying the information
- the time this information was obtained

Risk factors

Missing people may face harm from a range of factors. Officers and staff should consider whether any of the following indicators are present, as they may increase the risk of harm or suggest that the person is unable to keep themselves safe:

- exposure to adverse weather conditions
- failure to take prescribed medication or medical dependency on medication
- disability or illness that affects safety, mobility, communication or decision-making
- environmental or mental health factors that may impair judgement or increase vulnerability
- suicidal thoughts, intent or self-harm
- misuse of intoxicating substances
- becoming a victim of violent crime
- risks linked to non-physical harm, including the people they are with or the circumstances they are in
- grooming, exploitation, control or coercion (including sexual and criminal exploitation)
- abuse or other safeguarding concerns that may affect the person's ability to protect themselves
- being a looked-after child or having care-related vulnerabilities
- protected characteristics under the [Equality Act 2010](#)

Further guidance is available in the [Vulnerability assessment framework](#) and [Vulnerability-related risk guidelines](#).

Assessing risk

Officers and staff should assess all reports of missing people within a continuum of risk, ranging from very low-risk cases through to high-risk cases that require immediate and intensive action. Risk assessment should not be treated as a mechanical process. Officers should recognise that assessments are subjective and that a single factor may justify an urgent response. For this reason, numerical scoring systems are not recommended for identifying or communicating risk.

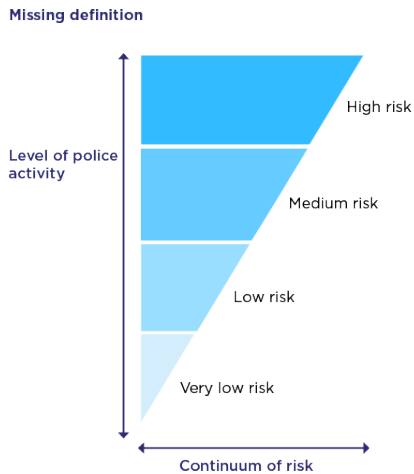
Levels of police involvement should be determined by the risks identified and the context of the missing report. In some cases, this may involve limited police action, such as an initial investigation to inform the risk assessment, followed by advice to the reporting person and setting a review time. In other cases, immediate police deployment and urgent safeguarding measures will be required.

Officers and staff should ensure they carefully detail all information and intelligence when carrying out a risk assessment. Risk assessment requires investigation of circumstances, review of intelligence and information and the use of professional judgement to determine the level of risk posed.

Officers and staff should use precise language to record what information and intelligence has been used, as well as how it has been assessed by the risk assessor. Imprecise terms (such as 'chaotic lifestyle') need further explanation, as they can refer to a multitude of different kinds of behaviour. While 'out of character' behaviour can be a strong indicator that something adverse may have happened to the missing person, it requires a detailed explanation as to what behaviour is out of character and why it is out of character. Officers and staff should also avoid terms such as 'streetwise', as it can imply that the missing person is able to keep themselves safe. In reality, they may be at increased risk because of the situations they are exposed to. Precise language allows those using or reviewing the assessment later to fully understand their meanings and the weight placed on them by the assessor.

Officers and staff should consider both push and pull factors when assessing risk and planning enquiries. Push factors are influences that drive a person away, such as abuse, neglect, conflict or financial problems. Pull factors are influences that lure a person elsewhere, such as exploitation, grooming or coercion. Recognising these factors enables the police and partner agencies to address root causes, implement protective measures and reduce repeat incidents.

Some missing person cases involve additional considerations based on the individual's circumstances, background or known vulnerabilities. These factors may affect the assessment of risk, the investigative response and the safeguarding actions required.



The risk assessment table

Officers and staff may use the following table as a guide to an appropriate level of police response based on initial and ongoing risk assessment in each case. It provides a framework to assist officers in assessing risk and determining appropriate actions. It supports decision-making but does not replace professional judgement. Each case requires an individual assessment based on the circumstances.

They should also be guided by:

- [College of Policing risk principles](#)
- [National decision model \(NDM\)](#)
- [Code of Ethics](#)
- [Vulnerability-related risk guidelines](#)

Category

Response

<p>Very low risk – There is a very low risk of harm to either the subject or the public.</p>	<p>Immediate police intervention may not be required. It should be agreed with the informant what actions are required to locate the subject and who will complete those actions. In some cases, it may be appropriate to agree to wait a reasonable period to see if the person returns of their own accord. A latest review time should be set to reassess the risk.</p>
<p>Low risk – The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as possible but minimal.</p>	<p>Proportionate enquiries should be carried out to ensure that the individual has not, or is not likely to, come to significant harm.</p>
<p>Medium risk – The risk of harm to the subject or the public is assessed as likely but not significant.</p>	<p>This category requires an active and measured response by the police and other agencies to trace the missing person and support the person reporting.</p>

High risk – The risk of significant harm to the subject or the public is assessed as very likely.

This category almost always requires the immediate deployment of police resources.

If there is consideration of serious crime or exploitation, a detective inspector should be involved in the examination of initial lines of enquiry.

If there is consideration of significant self-harm or suicide, mental health services should be contacted to check whether they have had recent contact with the missing person.

If the incident is not quickly resolved, an investigating officer (IO) should be appointed and consideration should be given to involving a senior investigating officer (SIO).

A member of the senior management team should be notified to ensure that an appropriate person is:

- coordinating the response
- directing lines of enquiry
- ensuring that staffing levels are suitable for the level of risk

If area searches are considered appropriate, a police search adviser (PoISA) or initial missing person search adviser (IMPSA) should be consulted.

Risk management

Officers and staff should continue to assess and manage risk throughout the duration of a missing person report. Risk should be reviewed whenever new information becomes available, or when the passage of time changes the context of the incident. Each review should consider whether the existing assessment remains accurate and whether further actions are required to safeguard the individual.

Officers and staff should set the latest time to review the risk assessment and activity, based on the circumstances of the report. The reasoning for this timeframe should be clearly documented, and the informant should be advised. The review may take place before the latest time if new information comes to light.

Supervisors should ensure that reviews are recorded clearly and that the rationale for decisions is documented. Reviews should draw on all relevant information, including material held by partner agencies. For children and adults in care, information from multi-agency safeguarding partners should be sought to inform ongoing assessments and activity.

Supervisors should complete and record a handover process whenever responsibility for the incident changes. This should identify who holds responsibility for direction and control. It should also clearly name the officer in charge of the investigation or ongoing enquiries.

A supervisor or missing person specialist should provide independent oversight of risk management at force or local level. This does not remove responsibility from frontline officers, who remain accountable for completing enquiries and updating assessments as circumstances change. Missing person specialists may support the management of more complex cases, but routine risk assessment and review should remain embedded in frontline practice.

Supervisors should promote inter-agency working to support effective safeguarding and information sharing. Early assessments should explore potential indicators of harm, including both push and pull factors. These factors should be considered alongside the individual's vulnerabilities to inform proportionate, evidence-based decision making.

Tags

APP Missing persons