

8. FINDING MISSING PEOPLE (*US EDITION*)



Extract

OVERVIEW

In this module, we cover the following topics:

- Types of missing people
- Voluntary missing people, recent disappearance and long-term disappearance
- Displaced missing people
- Involuntary missing people
- Preliminary interview
- Taking subtle control
- Confidentiality
- Establishing motive
- Properly identifying the missing person
 - Getting a photograph
 - Basic identifiers
 - Physical description
- Examining personal possessions
- Conducting interviews
- Checking records
- Other sources
- Other tips
- Young teenagers as missing people
 - Establishing motive and background
 - Investigative steps to take
- Indigent or homeless missing persons
- Other types of missing persons
- Reconciliation
- Conclusion
- Tutor-marked assignment

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous reasons why people become missing persons. Similarly, the reasons why other persons want to find missing persons are varied, ranging from locating runaway teenagers, missing heirs, to skip locates on people who have defaulted on credit payments.

Missing person investigations can be a very awarding and lucrative function for a private investigator to have in their investigative repertoire. The process of locating missing persons can be as simple as a few phone calls or performing a basic record check. It can also be extremely complicated and involved, entail-

ing many fruitless hours of chasing down dead ends. It may involve you pounding the pavements, as in the case of a runaway who has been dragged into the nasty world of drug addiction and prostitution.

Some people try to change identities to achieve a successful departure into a new life, but total success is more limited than you might imagine.

The majority of people who go missing voluntarily usually end up maintaining some contact with their former life, or continue employing old habits. There is invariably something which will lead you to them if the client wants them found bad enough and can afford to pay for a lengthy investigation.

Locating missing persons entails methodical and detailed procedures. In the ever-expanding world of electronic data bases, more and more information is being compiled on people, and this information is being offered for sale which makes the investigator's job easier.

Make no mistake though, when a person has a real or a perceived need to disappear, they can lay undetected for quite a long time simply by using different first names, slightly altering personal data such as inverting a couple numbers on a Social Security number, or changing a birth date by adding on a year, or changing the month or date of birth.

Such slight alterations can greatly challenge an investigator's skills. Indigent or homeless people can literally appear to fall off the face of the earth. Accidents and foul play can also be unforeseen factors. The private investigator must be extremely methodical and adaptable to changing circumstances.

IS THE CLIENT PART OF THE PROBLEM?

There will be situations you will come across where the client could be the cause or motive why a person has gone missing. An abusive relationship or hostile environment created by the client or their spouse / siblings could be the motive why the person ran away in the first place.

So, you must always be open minded to the reality that anything and everything is possible in a missing person's investigation, as surface appearances can be deceptive and misleading.

Good preparation, detailed interviews and descriptions, establishing motives in conjunction with leads, and being methodical – these are the key factors in resolving missing person investigations.

TYPES OF MISSING PERSONS

There are several types of missing persons. Classifying the type you are investigating will be the first thing to establish. Having determined the type, you can then look to the motive or reason why the person is missing. The following is a general description of types:

1. Voluntarily Missing Persons

This situation is when a person decides to disappear deliberately and willfully. The reasons are numerous and can range from bad relationships, family or stress at home, problems at school, disruption in personal lives, pressing credit reasons, or just to make a break with it all. Determining motive is extremely key in establishing a strategic investigative plan for people who go missing voluntarily.

Voluntarily missing persons can be broken down further into types:

A) Recent Disappearance

This means that the person has only recently gone missing. There may be only limited or no indication that it was deliberately planned, or that the person intends on a long or permanent disappearance. Sometimes though, a person who disappears may abandon almost everything relating to the life they wish to leave behind.

Recent disappearance investigations will center around establishing a clear motive for the departure and will largely be focused on the physical evidence of the subject's personal possessions, and your interviews with friends, family, acquaintances, and co-workers in finding clues as to their whereabouts and the possible cause of their disappearance.

One of the first things to establish is whether there is an existing pattern or history of similar type disappearances, especially with teenagers or adolescents. Often, the investigator will be called in when it is the first occasion the person has gone missing. This sort of disappearance may also occur when an adult simply has a desperate need to temporarily or permanently escape their life situation which they have found to become too stressful or overwhelming.

B) Long Term Disappearance

This is where a person has been missing several weeks or more. The client may have first turned to the police to locate the subject, but has become frustrated because of the lack of results.

Depending on the reason for the departure and the subject involved, record searches can uncover positive or promising leads.

The reason is that once the subject, especially if they are an adult, has established their new residence, they start to create a paper trail in the form of driver's licenses, bank accounts, bills, credit applications, credit search inquiries, and other promising leads.

2. Displaced Missing Persons

These type of individuals include those who have gone missing through circumstances, largely out of their control, or are people whom others have forgotten about over time. They can include the mentally ill who have fallen through the cracks of the social security net, alcoholics, and indigent street people for example.

Another type of displaced person includes the long lost relative whom the family wants to contact for personal reasons or because of some related family business. It could be an estate lawyer who hires you to locate a missing heir which might be either a near or distant relative of the deceased. It could be an adoptive child seeking their biological parents. Finally, it may entail finding an old acquaintance, friend, or class mate for some reason or other.

3. Involuntary Missing Person

Without a doubt the most challenging and difficult type of investigation. The reason for an involuntary missing person could be due to accident, forced confinement, suicide, death by misadventure or even foul play.

Successful investigations are often rare because of the lack of leads, and the lengthy time factor involved. There is also the likelihood of a police investigation involved at some point in these types of disappearances. Missing person investigations of this type are relatively infrequent.

THE PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW

This is the first and the most crucial phase of the pre-investigative steps in a missing person case. You should anticipate the possibility that the client who contacts you will be agitated, upset, emotional and even angry at the subject. The client, particularly a parent, sibling or other family member, will likely have been in state of emotional anxiety concerning the safety of the missing family member for some time.

You must approach all missing person cases with an open mind to all possibilities. And you will have to ask difficult and personal questions concerning the subject. These questions will entail such questions which include inter-personal relationships with other members of the family, possible involvement with illicit substances, alcohol problems, or disciplinary or dysfunctional features. Such questions can be taken as a personal affront and greatly upset the client.

To circumvent problems with the client, you must take care to prepare the client. Advise them that they you be asking questions which might be taken as an affront.

Explain that you, as the investigator, have no personal interest in the person you're investigating and attempting to locate. But in order to perform an adequate investigation, you will have to be thorough. Or you would be remiss in your performance by making assumptions or drawing unsubstantiated conclusions.

Sometimes, you will have to play your interaction with a distraught client by ear. This means that the level of emotional distress on their part might make it inadvisable not to press too hard into the more sordid possibilities.

The client might also be adamant about their own theory as to the cause of the missing person's disappearance, and will want you to investigate the disappearance on that basis alone.

It might be advisable to follow the investigation along the lines they outline. But you should also be discreetly listening, looking for, or asking questions about other possibilities.

Once you have thoroughly exhausted the client's theories, then you can diplomatically suggest to the client that they might want to consider expanding the depth of investigation.

Exercise 8.1

Look in your newspaper for information about missing people. Look also for missing people notices in local stores. Ask yourself what might have happened to this person, and what steps you would take to find them.

CONDUCTING A PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW

The following steps are a general guide to follow in conducting the preliminary interview.

1. Take Subtle Control

Make sure the atmosphere and conditions are conducive to conducting the interview.

A quiet place to talk will go a long way in establishing a level of calm composure. Too many people present at your preliminary interview will increase the level of excitability, anxiety, and verbal chaos. Subtly impress upon the client that you would like them to give you a brief general account of the situation. Tell them you will follow up with your own established methodology, consisting of a constructive logical procedure to establish the facts. In other words, you must take charge or control of the interview process.

2. Confidentiality

Assure the client that everything they tell you will be held in the strictest of confidence. Family members may be reticent or reluctant to expose the subject's personal problems, or family's interpersonal problems.

3. Establish a Motive

You should try to ascertain whether the missing person has ever done this before and ask the reason. Secondly, ask the client if they have any knowledge why the person might have disappeared.

Then, ask about possible destinations. It could be a place that they have previously lived, or a place they always wanted to visit or live.

The following is a list of general questions the investigator should consider when trying to establish an undetermined or uncertain motive about the reason or cause of the subject's disappearance;

- i) Ask about the subject's emotional state prior to the disappearance, their behavior, stress factors and probable causes.
- ii) Ascertain whether there had been any recent traumatic episodes. It could be a divorce, a broken relationship, peer difficulties, business set backs, a death of

someone close, or health problems for example. You should explore this area by asking separate questions about the subject's personal, academic, professional, business or financial aspects of their life.

iii) Ask whether there had been any changes in the person's lifestyle. This could be anything from becoming withdrawn, excessively thrifty, exhibiting strong emotions, gambling, unusual or excessive alcohol consumption, or any other untoward or unusual activity.

iv) Ask about their financial situation if applicable. Were there problems with debt, foreclosure, a pending bankruptcy, a failing business, difficulties with payments resulting from a divorce or maintenance payments. Ask anything relevant about their business and professional associations and affairs.

v) If the subject is an adolescent, ask specific questions about the subject's interactions with their peer group. Had they developed any special interests in some pop culture phenomenon, or had they changed peer groups.

Find out how they were getting on at school. Were there any changes in their marks, or in their school attendance? Were there any change in personal habits?

As adolescents and teenagers do not confide very easily with parents, ask whether the relationship between parents and their child had altered or become estranged. If there are other siblings in the household, you should try to speak with them separately and alone. However, as these other siblings may be under legal age, do not press that issue too hard. If the parents insist on being present, you must accede to that request.

Also, get as much information that you can about the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the subject's friends. Any personal data which is pertinent to your investigation could be helpful.

vi) Ask whether the subject had been spending a lot of money lately or whether they seemed strapped for money. If spending a lot of money, ascertain what on, or on whom.

vii) The topic of the subject's health could be raised diplomatically as to whether there could be any health related matter which had recently arisen.

viii) Ask whether the subject was having any legal difficulties; lawsuits; pending actions of any kind in either civil or criminal matters.

ix) Ascertain whether the subject had any enemies, gambling debts, drug or alcohol related problems, or a prior history of these habits.

You should develop a checklist which you can use as a guideline while examining the various possibilities of a person's disappearance. The best approach is to start with what might seem as the least offensive and determine what results they produce.

Before commencing questions with respect to more difficult issues or possibilities, it is best that you explain to the client that you are now going to be asking questions of a more sensitive nature. Explain why you are doing so. Tell them you're not making assumptions, but you need to explore all possibilities in order to be thorough.

Exercise 8.2

Draft a checklist, as described above

You may have to pursue your line of questioning by ear. You will have to gauge the emotional responses of the person you are speaking with at the time. Some of the more sensitive questions may have to be deliberately left for another occasion or best addressed with some other family member.

There is no hard and fast rule, but you must strive to get the most accurate and detailed information you can. Taking the time and preparing the client for your line of questions beforehand can make the process easier.

4. Properly Identifying The Missing Person:

Although, the client will have a photograph of the subject available in most instances, there is a great deal of additional information you may require in order to facilitate your investigation.

After the exercise, we outline a step-by-step procedure to get a thorough and detailed description of the subject.

Exercise 8.3

What four steps should an investigator follow at the beginning stage of a missing person's case?

You will find the answers at the end of this module.

1) Get a photograph

First, it is recommended that you try and obtain several of the most recent photographs of the subject which might be available. Photos should be more than just a flattering head shot which is usually a frontal shot.

You must confirm how recent the photo is, and whether there are any changes from when the photo was taken and when the subject disappeared, i.e. change in hair color, hair length, addition or removal of facial hair, weight gain or loss for example. It would be helpful to get other photographs with a profile and a full body shot as well.

2) Basic Identifiers

Next, get the basic identifiers on the subject. You need the full complete name, date of birth, and the Social Security Number.

(Remember that the Social Security Number can be gleaned from bank statements, credit card receipts, passports, U.S. Revenue tax receipts, or from a credit report.)

3) Physical Description

It may be necessary to get a much more accurate description of the person, particularly in relation to particular or unusual physical characteristics. These additional characteristics can assist you more readily in locating the missing person. The following will give some guidelines in what to ask in obtaining a more specific description of the person.

A) Gender

B) Height.

C) Weight.

D) Skin tone color.

E) Color and shape of eyes

(Describe as wide, close set, narrow, protruding, defects such as lazy eye, or cross eyed), and eyebrows, (shaped, crescent, thick, narrow, plucked, wavy, offset.)

F) Eye Wear

Corrective lenses (plastic, silver or gold rimmed, aviator style, tinted, and is the person near or far sighted, reading glasses, bifocals, contact lenses (color), or a preference for sunglasses for example.

G) Hair color.

Is the hair color light, medium, dark, mixed? Is it tinted or dyed? Is there any gray and if so, where and how much such as in the temple area; salt and pepper; streaked?

H) Hair style.

Describe whether short, long, shoulder length, wavy, permed, curly, straight, forelock), and if receding (Frontal receding, back receding, thinning, totally bald). Are there side burns?

Determine if the subject is shaved, has a brush cut, or are there unusual styles, cuts, or other features.

I) Facial Features:

Determine the facial contours. Is the face oval, tapering, broad, chunky, round?

Does the person have any prominent features such as are the ears prominent, delicate, large, for example? Does the chin have a cleft or is it narrow, strong, jutting, recessive, square, rounded?

Are the lips thin, full, compressed, or wide? Does one lip jut out. Are the corners of the mouth upturned, or down turned?

Describe the condition of the teeth. Are there teeth missing, braces, prominent teeth, or is there an over bite? Are they dulled or stained from smoking, or unnaturally white? What kind of smile does the subject make, such as a broad open smile, or lips compressed? Are there dimples?

Are there any facial blemishes such as acne scarring, scars of any kind, moles? Is the skin smooth, wrinkled at the eyes, or do they have frown lines or furrows about the cheeks? Is the facial skin taught, loose, smooth, pale, or sun-tanned?

Is the head large or small or proportionate in relation to the subject's body? Is the bearing proud, such as head held high, or does the subject keep their head downcast or tilted?

Is the nose narrow, broad, bulbous, nostrils flared, hooked, Romanesque, but-

ton shaped? Was it ever broken?

J) Body Shape:

Determine the posture of the subject such as erect, round shouldered, hunched over, lanky, or stooped. Does the subject slouch or sit erect? Is the subject lean, pot bellied, obese, thin, pear shaped, muscled, broad of hip? What is the chest size. Is the body shape tapered, hour glass shaped, rectangle, squat, or stocky?

Is the neck thin, long, muscled, corded/ Is the neck floppy or does the person have what is sometimes called a turkey neck? Does the subject have a prominent Adam's apple? Are the shoulders broad, thin, muscled, bony, stooped?

Is the subject long or short legged? Are they bow legged, or pigeon towed? Is there one leg shorter, a limp, or do they have artificial limbs? Are the legs thin, thick thighs, muscled? Do they shuffle when they walk, or do they stroll, walk fast, bounce, walk with long strides, or walk with mincing steps?

Are the arms thin, muscled, short, long, gawky, bulky, loose? Do they walk with their hands in pocket, or do they swing their arms unusually?

Are the fingers thin, thick, slender, knob like? Do they favor jewelry on fingers, wrists, and what kind? Are the finger nails long, short, chewed? Do they paint them and are there any preferred colors?

K) Voice:

Is their voice loud, deep, shrill, quiet, throaty, low pitched, high pitched, or does the person lisp, or sound froggy or raspy? Is there an accent, or a stutter? Do they mumble or use unusual phrases or mispronounce certain words?

Do they swear a lot? Are they quiet, polite, rude, obnoxious? Do they laugh out loud and what kind of laugh do they have such as a titter, snicker, chuckle, bawdy, or laugh in an unusual or noticeable manner?

L) Unusual Features:

Does the subject wear earrings, or are they into body piercing, sport tattoos, have missing or damaged appendages, wear certain types or colors of jewelry, have any birth marks, scars, blemishes, body discoloration, or any other unusual features?

M) Habits or Mannerisms:

Determine what the subject's habits are including, smoking, likes coffee, certain

kinds of food, drinker or non drinker, chews fingernails, likes to frequent certain kinds of places, sports venues.

Do they play pool, bowl, swim, play video games, or go to clubs? Do they like certain kinds of music, and what kinds?

Does the subject have any particular hobbies; do they collect things, play sports, camp, hunt, knit, play chess, foosball? Do they like to read, watch particular movies, ski, or anything along those lines which individual people like to do, especially if it's unusual or stands out, or something they like to do especially in place of ordinary everyday things?

N) Clothing:

Does the client know what the subject was wearing at the time of the disappearance? Have they checked the wardrobe to ascertain what other clothes were missing? What type of clothing does the subject usually prefer? Do they like certain colors, styles, lengths, brand names? Do they dress casual, hip, country, punk, wear suits, cowboy boots, spikes, pumps, army surplus, prefer loud colors or subdued colors?

O) Possessions:

Did the subject take any possessions with them when they left? Get a thorough description. Are there certain specific types of possessions which were left behind that the client believes the subject would want to replace?

You should ask the client whether the subject took their own vehicle with them and obtain all the particulars including model, make, color and any other identifying features. Establish whether the subject had a valid driver's license. Also, ask if the subject is interested in any other forms of transport such as motorcycles, skidoos, etc.

ISSUES SURROUNDING IDENTIFIERS

Should the client express concern or dismay about going into such a lengthy description, the investigator should take the time to explain that when people decide to go missing, they may go to some length to alter their appearance.

If the investigator has to make inquiries when a certain period of time has elapsed, it is likely only those unusual features or characteristics of the subject which might jog the memory of a clerk, gas attendant, motel room operator or street people for example. Anything which distinguishes the subject will aid in identifying the person, especially if they have gone to lengths to alter or change their physical identity.

A person normally cannot or won't change the inflection of their voice, or a limp, or big ears for example. They may however, cut or dye their hair, shave off facial hair, or change the style of clothes. Certain mannerisms or physical peculiarities will stand out in people's mind, so it is important you learn as much as possible about the subject. Photographs are both essential and extremely helpful, but only to a certain degree.

THAT'S ALL, FOLKS!

That's the end of the extract. If you want to know more, you'll have to enrol on the course! From what you've read, you can see from how detailed this course is. And there's a whole lot more in this module alone.

In the rest of this module, we go on to consider the following fascinating topics.

5) Examining Personal Possessions

Examining living quarters of the missing person. What to look for. How to conduct an examination. Where to look.

6) Conducting Interviews

Who you should conduct interviews with. What to ask them. How to ask the right questions.

7) Record Checks

What records to check, and why.

8) Other Sources

Other places to look, including hospitals, police stations, medical examiner, coroner. Benefits of checking these places.

9) Other Tips

Tips of how to search effectively.

Young Teenagers as Missing Persons:

A common problem. Issues on tracking missing young people. Where to look. Whose help to enlist.

Establishing Motive and Domestic Background

Understanding why someone might go missing. Common reasons why young people go missing.

Investigative Steps to take

How to go about locating a missing young person.

Indigent / Homeless Missing Persons

Where to find missing indigent or homeless persons.

Other types of Missing Persons

This includes former classmates, friends, biological parents or offspring, misplaced witnesses, or other relatives. These are mainly individuals with which people have lost touch.

Reconciliation

Mostly, it will be the investigator's job to simply locate a missing person and report their findings back to the client. However, there may be occasions when the client requests that you act as a go between to facilitate a reconciliation between the missing person and the client. We examine how you can achieve that.

And finally...

This module ends with a tutor-marked assignment for you to carry out. All the assignments are challenging and fun. They give you practice in the real-world activities of the PI. And completing your assignments earns you the Diploma in Private Investigation.