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Learning Opportunities, Instruments and Investigation Techniques
to fight the growing phenomenon of MISSING PEOPLE in Europe

Title: HELP MANUAL FOR FAMILIES OF DISAPPEARED PEOPLE

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Prologue

Every day we hear and see news about the thousands of people who disappear in Europe but behind these chilling figures are the FAMILIES, real victims who must learn to survive from the first minute, face the questions How, when, where?
and the impossibility of knowing the truth.

It is true that most of the disappearances are resolved in the first weeks, whether they are located in good condition or deceased, but day by day we increase the number of those who **DO NOT APPEAR**.

It is very important to help and monitor the family members in the first moments of total bewilderment, advising them, often accompanying them in police or judicial proceedings and especially giving them emotional support because in the Associations many of us are relatives of the disappeared.
But we have to face the harsh reality of **those who** spend time, months and months without news of the disappeared and the family becomes increasingly alone, more cornered and with more deficiencies of all kinds. We see with frustration and helplessness as time goes by, and at the same time we are eyewitnesses of the emotional and social deterioration suffered by the relatives without a light at the end of the tunnel.

The disappearance of a person is a tragedy not only for the person who disappears, but also for their family and friends, who remain in a situation of uncertainty.

For all this, we have to take a step further in favor of families and create a:

HELP MANUAL FOR FAMILIES OF DISAPPEARED PERSONS.

That it will have as sole purpose the attention to the families of missing persons of short and long duration by placing at their disposal professionals at the forefront of the **criminological, psychological, social and legal areas**, understanding that these are the main needs that the families need:

3 -Definition Of A Missing Person

Missing People are those whose relatives have no news from and ***who is missing, without knowing whether he/she lives.***

In our opinion, the definition of a missing family member must at least include: children born either within a marriage or out of wedlock, adopted children or children of the spouse; the spouse, regardless of being legally married or not; parents (including father-in-law, mother-in-law, adoptive parents); siblings, the sisters and brothers, including those born from the same parents, or from different or adopted parents.

1. A person is considered missing, no matter the age

A male or female person **of legal age** is a disappeared person when his whereabouts are unknown and the family does not know whether he is alive or dead. So this is the other comments that have to endure many families when they intend to make the complaint for disappearance, and tell them to wait a few days because he is of age.

2. A person is considered missing, no matter the sex, race, nationality

The concept of a disappeared person is clearly universal, it is the same in any other place in the world, regardless of whether it is a woman or a man, the common denominator is the same for everyone: a person, whereabouts unknown, that is not known to be dead or alive.

3. A disappeared person is no matter their social life

No matter who he/she is, whatever, the successes or mistakes in their social life, family etc. Often, families that file a police report are judged for their family roles, gossip and other rumours. We get these judgements a lot: "He was leading a bad life", "He socialized with bad people!", "We could see this coming", "She was looking for trouble"... To be considered missing, you don't need to be chaste, pure and immaculate, have a good reputation, be idolized or be liked by everyone.

A disappeared person stops being missing only when he is located



4 - Circumstances and Types Of Disappearances

-Voluntary Disappearance of an Adult/Minor

The person who disappears does so voluntarily, does not want to be found, either for economic, personal, work, sentimental, family, etc. reasons. This type of disappearance includes the leakage carried out by minors who voluntarily leave their home, the institution where they are staying or the company of the people who are responsible for their care.

-Involuntary Disappearance. Adult.

The person who disappears does so for reasons unrelated to him/her, whether it's due to a mental disorder, dementia, Alzheimer's, mental illness, disorientation, etc.

-Forced or Disquieting Disappearance. Adult / Minor

The person has been the object of some crime, such as kidnapping, parental kidnapping, murder, homicide, extortion, etc. They are cases in which voluntary or involuntary escape is ruled out and not even the closest people can find an explanation, as the disappearance contradicts the missing person's habits and behavior.

-Accidental Disappearance. Adult / Minor

The person who disappears has gone missing on excursions, sporting activities, hiking, etc. and suffers an accident.

-Disappearance of unaccompanied migrant minors

When a minor, from a country with no agreement for the free movement of its citizens, disappears from this country, separated from their parents, and lacking the care of legally responsible adults.



5 -The Police Report

What to do when facing the disappearance of a family member?

The first 72 hours are important because they allow for extreme measures to find the missing person. Among other things, because it is possible that he/she is still close to home or place of disappearance, especially in cases of children and elderly people. At the same time it will be easier to secure evidence, obtain recent testimonies, etc.

To whom should I report?

As soon as you have completed all the procedures that you consider appropriate at that moment and by which you are certain that your relative has disappeared, you must immediately go to the Police to imminently file a Missing Person Report

Highlight that **"There is no need to wait for 24 or 48 hours"**. In the event that the police officer insists on the need to wait for that period of time, file a formal complaint. The wait only hinders the investigation and is no longer encouraged from law enforcement-

The police report will collect all the necessary information to locate the missing person in the shortest possible time.

What to have on hand

To save time when filing the report, you should provide: a recent picture; a detailed description with all the physical characteristics (weight, height, color of eyes and hair) and differentiating features (accent, gait, tattoos or birthmarks); clothes worn at the time of disappearing; government issued identity card number; any relevant information of both the circumstances of the disappearance and the disappeared person.

Although all the disappearances are worrisome and need an early action, the first hours are fundamental, more so in the case of minors and elderly people with diseases or physical or mental disabilities. These high-risk disappearances are considered to require more urgent measures.



6- Important Tips

- It is very important that you request a copy of the report
- Keep the hair comb and toothbrush of the missing person for DNA testing
- Ask the Police when the complaint will be sent to the Court and which Court it will be sent to, so that the family of the disappeared person can be involved in the case





7. Facing a Disappearance

1. Do not just idly stand by

You do not have to sit back and do nothing, waiting for the investigation to be resolved. Try to find out in what circumstances the disappearance occurred and talk to the friends of the disappeared person so that they provide you with information and details that you may not be aware of:

- Contact associations of missing persons
- Make posters to put up near the place of disappearance, bus stations, airports, ports and other places that gather crowds
- Use Social Networks to spread the news. We recommend that it be carried out by the associations or by a trusted spokesperson since they will have control over the content and comments.
- Contact the media
- If the disappeared person has bank accounts in his/her name and you can access them, review the latest activity, in case that data could offer some clue as to where the missing person is located. If you cannot access these bank accounts, request it from the Court
- Likewise, if a missing minor has a mobile phone owned by either of his parents, it is a good idea to contact the service provider and have them send us the call logs for the last month.



8. Important Tips

It is very important not to display the family's private phone number on the missing posters (always use the Law Enforcement or Associations as a contact) in order to avoid receiving false clues or prank calls in bad taste.

We advise to delegate the Social Networking to associations or someone you trust who will have a control of the content and of the comments and information.



9. help -Legal Assistance to Families

Once the complaint has been sent to the Court of Guardia, we will go to said Court and we will make an appearance to appear in the case.

Highlight that "It is not necessary to appear with a lawyer and attorney

At the same appearance, and in the case that we have not had access to the movements of bank accounts and phone calls, we will request that they be sent to the Court as soon as possible, movements in the bank accounts owned by the disappeared person, as well as outgoing calls made from the mobile phone of which the disappeared owner is.

In the event that the disappeared person is a minor or a person considered to have been a victim of gender violence, it would be advisable to request the registration of incoming calls to the mobile phone.

When we have some information that we consider relevant (manifestation of any witness, telephone call, etc.), we will immediately inform the State Security Bodies where the complaint was filed and also the Court where the procedure is processed. Weekly, we will go to the State Security Bodies and the Court to inform us of the news of the case.

Important advice:

In case the disappeared person is found dead and there are suspicions that the cause was not due to natural death, it is advisable that the body is not incinerated. The Association of Missing Persons has a Legal Advice service for families of missing persons, so if you have any doubt, you can contact us at the telephone number on the website and you will be assisted by the legal department.



10. Computer equipment / phone / tablet, of the missing person:

-Don't turn devices on to access information. (Valuable information can be lost just by turning a device on that will be impossible to fully recover later on)

-Pay special attention to the environment where the device is located (Notes with passwords, CDs, pen drives...). It is vital to get all of this to the investigators.

-Don't try passwords or unlock patterns, as all the information on the device could be lost forever.

-Keep the SIM and SD cards.

-Never try to unlock the devices

-Don't try to access the device or retrieve information, as this can be very damaging and result in a complete inability to later recover any data, as files can be overwritten.



11. Mass Media

We always recommend getting in touch with the media because it is important for dissemination but we give a series of tips so that your case is informative and never sensationalist media.

-If you are not able to speak on a television set or deal directly with journalists, appoint a spokesperson, who may be a relative or a person you trust.

- Make a list with all the data you think is useful to find the missing person and classify them in '*confidential*' (if for example only the National Police agents know them), '*official*' (if they can be made public because they are objective and useful so that potential witnesses can provide information to the case)

- **Learn to say no**, because not all Media appearances will be helpful, and some may even be counterproductive to you, either because they ask you uncomfortable questions or because your pain becomes a television show

- **Contact an association or a professional who can help you** in your interventions in the media or in the dissemination of information about the disappeared person. Beware of those associations or people who ask for money in advance, and do not allow anyone to profit from their misfortune.

A criminologist or a specialized psychologist can help you in your case or accompany you to the television interventions, so that you are advised and protected against certain degrading treatment, especially during programs that are broadcast live.



12 . THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE DISAPPEARANCES AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS.

The relative of a disappeared person is subjected by the very of disappearance to a permanent state of stress, anguish, and anxiety for an indefinite time (directly related to how the disappearance of his loved one evolves).

The emotional stages that the relatives of the disappeared go through are practically the same to those that people go through when mourning.

Grief is a natural process that the psyche must go through to overcome the new emotional situation after any loss or separation. It happens at any significant loss in the life of the person who goes through it, such as a divorce, health related losses, work, friendship, death of a loved one, etc. and a disappearance is obviously a loss.

Normally any sort of mourning goes through different stages, the best known are:

- SHOCK & DENIAL**
- ANGER, PAIN & GUILT**
- BARGAINING**
- DEPRESSION**
- ACCEPTANCE & HOPE**

That is why the professionals that master the subject defend that ANY DISAPPEARANCE DRAGS (whoever is facing it) THROUGH THE FULL MOURNING PROCESS.

A disappearance is a loss in its own right, one that causes serious damage, pain, uncertainties, insecurity and emotional instability.

According to authors Ginna Pulido and Beatriz E. Encizo: "Within any forced disappearance, a loss that has no answer is reconstructed, a process of unfinished mourning, the inability to find out the truth of the facts, the way in which the final destiny of the victim took place: loneliness, anger, guilt,

uncertainty, despair, resentment, feeling persecuted, leaving serious consequences on a psychological level, as a result of the above, the family is destabilized, dismembered, it becomes disoriented, and then the only real and firm support they have is lost, time stagnates and the chances of overcoming the trauma are minimal because they do not even benefit from the rituals established for mourning in the cultural context that deal with the pain and allows for the loss to be accepted. "

In the DENIAL phase the family member is reluctant to accept that someone who until recently spoke to him, lived with him, shared intimate moments with him/her... simply NO longer is, has vanished into thin air, there is no longer a way to contact him/her, or to know how and where he is... The first emotional impact is not being able to believe it or accept it. A reality that has been so consistent and firm in their lives that suddenly "disappears", leaves the person with a deconstruction in his psyche. A part of himself can not assimilate the new situation. And his psyche simply denies it.

In the STAGE of ANGER the emotions begin to flow ... and they do it on par with the impotence that is felt: the anger arises when seeing that there are questions without answers, when seeing that the environment does not understand the gravity of what is being experienced, feeling alone in the struggle, seeing that the effort being put in daily, looking for the disappeared is not enough, that there is no social support for them... The anger is also directed at the one missing because he did not know how to appropriately report his activities, his whereabouts, when he would return, with whom he would be... At the time that the mystery becomes concrete around the disappearance the anger and impotence increase.

In the next phase, the PAIN is the main figure, the suffering emerges with strength. Of all the stages of the MOURNING this is the one in which the most anguish is felt, after the understanding, now with less internal rebellion, that reality will no longer be the same. It is the beginning of the ACCEPTANCE of the new reality. And all that entails becoming aware of the events that have taken place without embellishments, the naked truth, the LOSS is perceived more intensely, this is when the relative of the disappeared person suffers and collapses. .. and it is through this stage of the pain that the final stage is reached:

In the phase of NEGOTIATION, the psyche (looking for answers) understands that there is no better way to survive the crisis generated by the disappearance than to look for effectiveness in the movements, to learn to face the new reality with the most appropriate tools, to stop wasting energy and pain that does not lead to any sort of advancement or relief. Solutions are sought to the new emotional situation. And agreements are reached with the immediate environment, family, friends, society, authorities ... focusing on a more tolerable lifestyle to continue the search without so many landslides.

In this stage the psyche asks for a rest, a truce.

In the ACCEPTANCE phase, while accepting does not mean forgetting, the missing person is positioned in a new place in their lives. At this very moment the struggle is taken as an objective, the internal reorganization aims only at one goal: to find him.

This is when it is firmly assumed that the affective bond with the disappeared is never broken but it is admitted that everyone needs to resume their own life, accepting that the constant search will be the new and main bond with the disappeared. The unfathomable damage caused by a disappearance requires support for emotional reconstruction. Another aspect to address and take into account at a professional level is the family breakdown that usually triggers a disappearance.

Each person, from his bond with the disappeared person, will go through a different path in his absence. Some will have better tools than others to deal with it.

Some will resist more than others to accept it. Some will have a weaker emotional fragility than others to assimilate this new reality, and they will fall apart more easily. Others, on the other hand, will have a greater strength to be able to act in a way that makes them feel part of the search, they will have a new rhythm of life in which to help searching, investigating, inquiring, making them feel effective and contributing with something, and that new way of living will give them at least one type of certainty (the only one they can have at the moment): I am acting, I do something, I face the new reality and I look for solutions, I do not get caught up in impotence, fear and anguish.

The traumatic experience of a disappearance generates a breaking point where different structures that until now were firm get fragmented. Not only the affective ones that around the missing one but also the social ones, labor, and of other commitments that are left with a new emptiness in their daily dynamics, and which the relatives will have to tend to and take charge. For this reason, the multidisciplinary involvement of professionals who can sustain, guide, and collaborate in all the necessary aspects of the family and social environment is so essential after a DISAPPEARANCE came to their lives and conditioned them to a new lifestyle they did not know before. We need to become aware of the multifaceted impact that a disappearance entails, by looking after them.



15. What can we do when friends or family members are facing the Disappearance of a loved one?

- String along with them at all times.
- If your family member is feeling blocked and has not yet taken the steps, help them make important decisions at this time. **REMEMBER:** The first hours are crucial in the disappearance of a Person. If you have to notify the police, help them take action and accompany them if necessary.
- Facilitate the expression of their worries and feelings so that they can let off steam (listen to them, do not interrupt them, attend to his emotions).
- Try to instill calm and serenity: looking into their eyes, dedicating them calming words ("we are all here, united"). Try to calm exaggerated emotional reactions with reassuring attitudes.
- Provide support and body contact (touching, hugging, holding a hand, caressing).
- Help them accept the facts as they happen without diminishing their importance.
- Do not judge any of the members, and avoid blaming them.
- Offer help for day-to-day demands ("How can we help?")



16. My relative is missing, what are my rights?

- For my loved one to be searched for

You have the right to seek or request that the authorities search for your missing loved one and actively participate in the entire process.

- To know what happened.

You have the right to ask questions: when, why and how your loved one disappeared, where he is and who is responsible. You also have the right to be given the answers.

- To be supported

You have the right to be assisted, guided and helped by the entities in charge of giving support and assistance. You also have the right to receive psychological support - whether it individually, or as a family or collective - and legal guidance, that is, to be legally recognized that your loved one is missing.

- To justice

You have the right to have the judicial authorities investigate the disappearance of my loved one and find those responsible. You also have the right to participate in the different stages of the investigation and the judicial process.

- To be treated with decency and to stay informed

You have the right to be treated in a respectful and dignified manner. You also have the right to be informed of the procedures performed or to be carried out in the future



Whatever you are feeling right now you are not alone. We are here to support you today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes, until your loved one has returned.