



## MISSING NO MORE AND THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN

Social media is a valuable information resource in spreading awareness and appealing for help in locating missing persons. Photos and descriptive information can be shared publicly, easily, and across the province or country. Since the digital footprint can live for a very long time, special care must be taken to make sure that a previously missing person is free to resume life without continually experiencing problems from having gone missing.

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### IS THERE A RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN IN CANADA?

To date (May 2023), the 'Right to be Forgotten' legislation does not exist in Canada. It does exist in the European Union and in the United Kingdom.

The 'Right to be Forgotten' has become more common in the media recently, at least across Ontario. The result is a new police practice of only providing a person's first name, rather than a full name when publicizing information about a missing individual. The thinking is that continued media attention may have negative consequences for the recently returned person. For example, finding a job may be difficult if a person's name appears in an Internet search as an open missing person case. It may cause potential employers to mistakenly believe the person is still missing, hiding, or is less reliable.

Although the legislation does not exist in Canada, there is a lot that can be done to allow a previously missing person to resume life without constantly being viewed negatively. It involves removing information about their disappearance from websites and social media.

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### ONCE A MISSING PERSON HAS BEEN LOCATED

Generally, people who share or post information about missing persons do so with the goal of raising awareness and inviting the public to help find the missing person. Once found, it is important to remove images and information about them. Then, once search engines update their indices, the information is de-indexed and no longer available.

Although it is not mandated, police services share a responsibility in helping the public by issuing a news release once the missing person is located. It is one of the best ways to close the cycle and to update the status of the missing person case.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THOSE POSTING INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING PERSONS ON THE INTERNET

To support the missing person's efforts to re-establish their privacy, we recommend the following:

1. Once located, share the information with your visitors or audience. Include the missing person's name, date and location of disappearance in your message/post. Ask that anyone who may have shared this information remove the previously missing person's profile.
2. Remove the person's image, or images, from your postings/profile as soon as possible.
3. Remove all posts of the once missing person within a set time frame. The time frame should be kept to a reasonable length as it will take search engines some time to de-index these posts. Although there are no hard rules, a time frame ranging from two weeks to one month is suggested.

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## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE THE RETURNED MISSING PERSON?

If you are the returned person and find that some websites or groups are still identifying you as missing, you have the right to contact the administrators and have your information removed. Most websites have a 'Contact Us' section for you to reach them.

In the case where your information continues to be posted on several websites or social media, it may be that a follow-up news release has not been issued. If you suspect this describes your situation, a quick conversation with the investigating officer or the police's media department can be had to confirm whether a news release has been issued.

**Attention can then be dedicated to those who are still *actively* missing.**

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