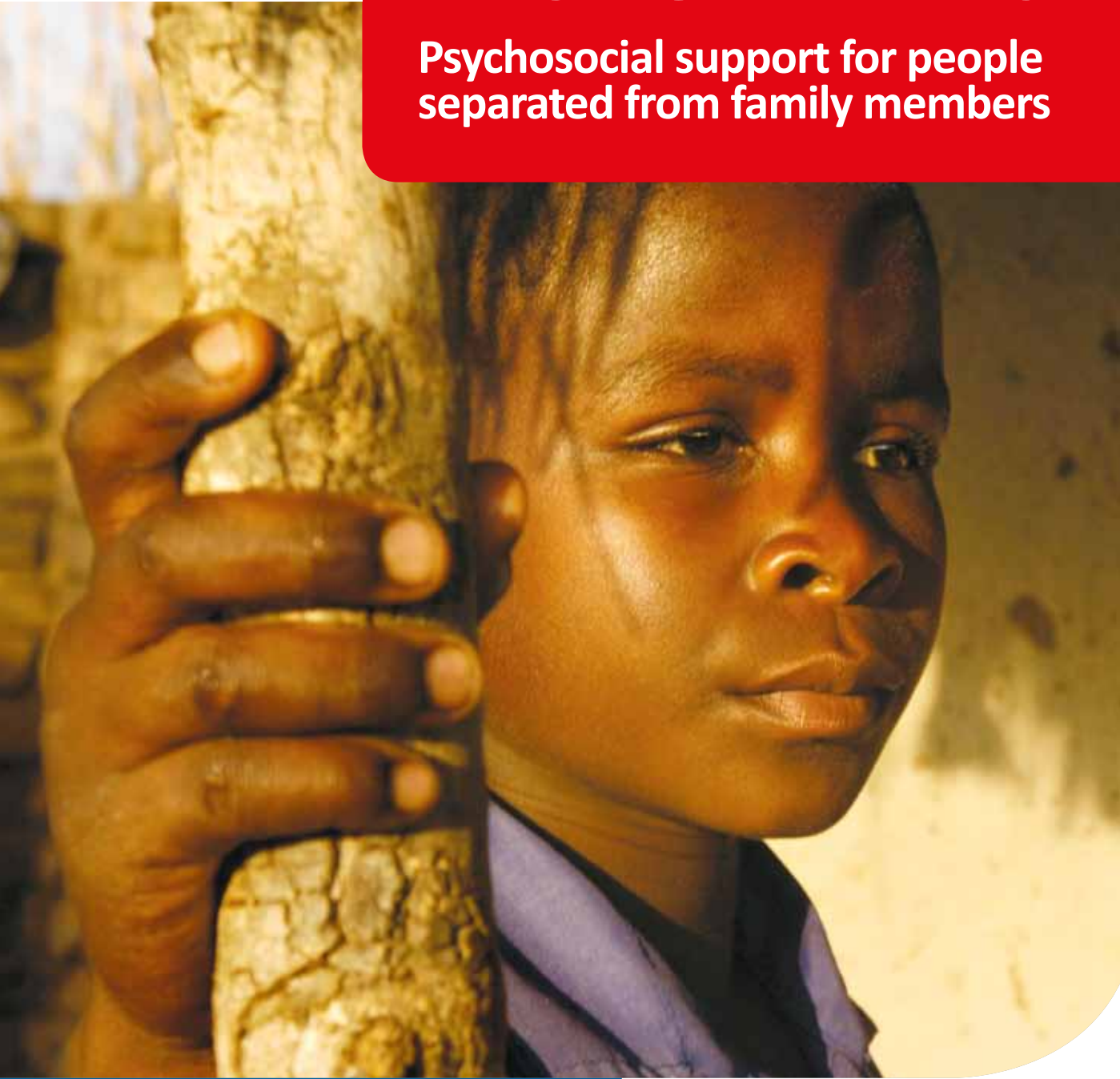


Broken Links

Psychosocial support for people separated from family members



A field guide

Psychosocial Centre



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Broken Links: Psychosocial support for people separated from family members (A field guide)

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support
Blegdamsvej 27
DK-2100 Copenhagen
Denmark
Phone: +45 35 25 92 00
E-mail: psychosocial.centre@ifrc.org
Web: www.pscentre.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/Psychosocial.Center
Twitter: @IFRC_PS_Centre

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Editor-in-chief: Nana Wiedemann
Author: Wendy Ager
Editors and peer reviewers: Louise Steen Kryger, Magda Milena Osorio Montealegre, Despoina Spanoudi, Ditte Bruun Eriksen, Anne Lomholt Lei Hansen and Simone von Burgwald
Coordination: Anne Lomholt Lei Hansen

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Please contact the PS Centre if you wish to translate or adapt any part of *Broken Links: Psychosocial support for people separated from family members (A field guide)*. We welcome your comments, feedback and questions at psychosocial.centre@ifrc.org.

Please see the full list of materials available from the PS Centre at www.pscentre.org.
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Foreword

Circumstances surrounding conflict, crisis or disaster can cause families to become separated from their loved ones. Experience has shown that beneficiaries who approach the Red Cross Red Crescent looking for family members are often in need of psychosocial support; likewise, those seeking psychosocial support may also have tracing needs.

For such situations, Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers are trained in implementing Restoring Family Links (RFL). RFL refers to a broad range of activities aimed at preventing separation and disappearance, restoring and maintaining contact between family members, reuniting families, and clarifying what happened to persons reported missing.

Broken Links: Psychosocial support for people separated from family members (A field guide) and the corresponding *Broken Links* training module are designed to support staff and volunteers in a wide range of settings where they may be in contact with families who have been separated from their loved ones. The field guide and the training module outline the causes and consequences of being separated from family members, as well as the types of contact staff and volunteers might have with families affected by separation.

The International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (the PS Centre) focusses on capacity building in National Societies and on spreading knowledge about psychosocial support. The PS Centre's primary aim is to integrate psychosocial support into humanitarian interventions and to ensure the psychosocial well-being of staff and volunteers.

Psychosocial support, specifically for people separated from family members, was identified as a gap area following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. For this reason, the International Federation Indian Ocean Tsunami Operation has supported the PS Centre in capacity building and knowledge dissemination within the Movement.

Broken Links field guide and training module were developed as a result of that collaboration. Both books offer resources for providing psychosocial support to families and individuals affected by separation, and can be downloaded from www.pscentre.org.

We hope that staff and volunteers supporting families who have been separated from their loved ones will find these resources useful.

Nana Wiedemann

Nana Wiedemann

Head of IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support

Content

Introduction	5
Causes of separation	7
The psychosocial impact of being separated	10
Experiencing loss	10
External factors	12
Psychological factors	13
Reactions to loss	14
Grief	17
What is RFL?	19
Supporting people who have been separated	22
Basic helping skills	22
Initial interviews	25
Delivering news	29
On-going support and referrals	31
Reunification	33
Self-care	37
Resources	39

Introduction



Ibrahim Mallah/FRC

When a family member or loved one has gone missing, the resulting uncertainty is one of the most difficult conditions to cope with: not being able to contact the person who has disappeared, not knowing their whereabouts, how they are faring, or if they are even alive. Whether resulting from armed conflict, disaster, migration or other types of crisis, sudden separation from family members can lead to feelings of despair, fear and guilt in those who have gone missing, as well as in those who have been left behind. These feelings often intensify with time, as worry deepens and hopelessness may set in. For those who have been separated from family members, there is no foreseeable outcome and often little comfort or resolution at hand.



People who have been separated

When referring to “people who have been separated from family members,” it is meant individuals who have, often under violent circumstances, been unwillingly separated from their families or loved ones, as well as families who have no knowledge of a family member’s whereabouts or well-being. For the purposes of this guide, when discussing people who have been separated, the terms “separated,” “missing” or “gone missing,” and “disappeared” are used interchangeably.

Family members and loved ones

For the purposes of this field guide, the terms “family member” or “loved one” are used interchangeably to define a very close friend or member of the family who has gone missing, and whose presence is sorely missed by those left behind.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plays the leading role within the Movement in helping people who have been separated from or lost contact with their families due to conflict, disaster, or migration. ICRC works together with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and coordinates their international work in this field. This work is referred to as Restoring Family Links (RFL).



Saying goodbye

Isha Munya fled war-torn Somalia in 1990 with her husband and five children. They were forced to leave their eldest daughter, eight-year-old Faduma, in Somalia with Isha's mother, Akrabo. "Saying goodbye felt like my stomach was torn out," remembers Isha.

[AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS, MESSAGES OF HOPE.](#)

Whether in disaster response or in National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies' core activities (including ambulance service, social and development programmes, support groups, counselling, tracing, etc.), Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers often come in contact with people who have been separated from their loved ones.

This field guide presents psychosocial support resources for those working in the field, and has been developed particularly for staff and volunteers with no specialised training in RFL or in accompanying relatives of missing persons. The guide sets forth the types of contact staff and volunteers might have with families affected by separation, and gives resources for providing psychosocial support at each point of contact.

It also provides guidance to staff and volunteers about self-care. This is especially important for people working in the field, who may be susceptible to stress when supporting others. Listening to others' stories of loss, pain and grief may trigger an individual's memory of personal loss or pain, as well as elicit a fear of death or separation. This in turn may increase stress levels, making it difficult for the staff or volunteer to approach families and deal with the demands of the job.

The materials provided here will need to be adapted to suit local contexts. The aim of this field guide is to build both confidence and skills in responding to disaster and crisis situations, and to raise awareness of the broader goals of the Movement's work in supporting families separated from their loved ones.

Causes of separation



Patrick Fuller/IFRC

There are innumerable situations that can cause people to become separated from their families and loved ones. Migration, whether international or internal, for social, economic or environmental reasons, disrupts life's routines, creating circumstances where people can more easily lose contact. Disasters – natural or man-made – can be utterly devastating, causing breakdowns in infrastructure and means of communication. Pandemics and epidemics can cut people off from one another, causing isolation and dislocation. Armed conflict and other situations of violence, like terror attacks or mass shootings, may lead to uncertainty as to the fate of people caught up in these incidents. Individuals who have been imprisoned or detained may have no way of informing their relatives of where they are or how they are doing.

The death of a parent or close relative can cause the rest of the family to disperse, losing contact with one another. In other cases, a family member may have been forced to flee because of persecution, death threats related to discrimination, or because of forced marriage. Refugee families are particularly vulnerable and may be brutally separated by human trafficking, which is believed to be one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in the world.



“You can hide in the shelter to escape artillery shells, but how can you avoid suffering when you have no idea what has happened to your son?”

Mirvat, 65, Lebanon
 ICRC, *THE NEED TO KNOW: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS TO DISPERSED FAMILY MEMBERS*, 2010 (P. 2).

Women seeking jobs as domestic or factory workers, as well as victims of sex trafficking, represent a significant percentage of those disconnected from their community. They risk finding themselves cut off from their families and unable to communicate with the outside world. These women are sadly stigmatized, often haunted by guilt and shame, feeling the situation is their own fault and fearful that their families will find out what has happened to them.



Whether as soldiers or civilians, men are more likely to go missing than women. As the man is often the family's main provider, his disappearance can leave dependents financially destitute. Families' needs will differ depending on their education, economic situation and other circumstances. However, most families will agree on their priorities: they want an answer regarding the fate of the missing, and they need economic support in the absence of a breadwinner. Some families also mention justice as a priority.

ICRC, *THE NEED TO KNOW: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS TO DISPERSED FAMILY MEMBERS*, 2010 (P. 6).

Unaccompanied minors are another group of special concern. Without adult or parental protection and often in a foreign country, these children are dependent on external assistance with regard to their human rights. They may also be at risk of sexual violence, abuse, exploitation or recruitment into armed forces.

There may be protection concerns too. For example, women left alone may be especially vulnerable to violence. An individual's safety and security can be greatly undermined by abuse, exploitation, harassment, discrimination or rejection, either from others in the same situation or from members of the community or family who are normally expected to help. Staff and volunteers need to know where and how to locate functioning, trusted support systems and how to make referrals when necessary.



JEIC QUAYE

Occasionally, medical evacuations and transfers in emergencies lead to “secondary separations.” In such situations, children are especially at risk. In Haiti this proved to be a significant challenge due to the great number of injured children being evacuated for medical treatment abroad. Families could not find out where their children were after they had been sent overseas for treatment. This type of situation can cause great distress for parents and children, triggering emotions, thoughts and physical reactions connected to the original emergency.

All these situations hold potential for significantly impacting an individual's mental health and psychosocial well-being. For the majority of people affected by separation, family is the major source of strength and support, and reuniting and linking people with their families is generally one of the most important psychosocial support activities. However, caution is needed: there are situations where reunification is not the best option. (The section on page 22 on supporting families goes into more detail about this.)



Preventing secondary separation: accurate records are crucial

Alert health staff to the risks of secondary separation for people receiving medical treatment. Having accurate records enables RFL teams to locate people who have been separated from their families.

1. Take accurate records of all patients on arrival, as far as the situation allows.
2. Record all transfers, including departure and arrival points, as well as the details on individuals transferred and the team performing the transfer.
3. Record all deaths, including unidentified persons who have died in medical facilities, making sure to note their place of burial.

Nichola Jones/IFRC



The psychosocial impact of being separated from family members



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As mentioned, in the course of their activities Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers are likely to come into contact with people who have experienced some kind of personal separation. It is important to enable staff and volunteers to provide assistance without causing unintentional harm. Sensitizing staff and volunteers to psychosocial needs will allow them to be well-prepared when assisting people in need.

Experiencing loss

It is natural for people to experience a sense of loss when they are separated from family members. Feelings of uncertainty, guilt, self-accusation, anger and fear are likely to accompany the sense of loss. Everyone will be impacted. For example, not being able to protect and take care of one's children, or not knowing if they are unharmed, may leave parents in profound despair, feeling helpless and guilty. For children too, a sudden separation from their parents causes profound loss and upsets their sense of security. There can also often be dire legal, social and financial troubles for families in the aftermath of separation.

Loss or separation is generally traumatic, not least due to the factors of uncertainty and powerlessness. Families may live in constant dread of what might have happened to their loved one but are unable to change the situation or keep their loved ones out of harm's way. Here it is important to recognise that the ambiguity of the situation may be the most dif-

difficult for families to cope with. Uncertainty about a loved one can be even more stressful than news of a confirmed death in the family, where family members have the opportunity to mourn and move on with their lives.

The missing individuals themselves will most likely experience moments of despair, fear, hopelessness, guilt and shame, as well as loss and grief. In the case of sudden separation, such as a kidnapping, there will have been no time for preparation or goodbyes. The sudden

loss of one's family, familiar surroundings and routines comes as a complete shock, and coupled with the impact of the violence of being kidnapped, can be difficult to overcome. For those who are out of touch with their families because they are undocumented in a foreign country, there may be multiple losses in their everyday lives. For example, a person whose legal status is unclear may experience fear, uncertainty and a lack of acceptance over a longer period of time.

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Effects of separation in the UK

People using the International Tracing Message Service said that they found themselves in a foreign country without friends or family and no support system, which increased their sense of loneliness. The loss of certain social roles (for example, father or husband), social status and recognition, led to distress and may have exacerbated feelings of loss of identity.

[BRITISH RED CROSS, SERVICE USER EXPERIENCE OF USING THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING AND MESSAGE SERVICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY, 2012.](#)

Hope and despair

Not knowing whether a loved one is alive or dead is both distressing and exhausting. Periods of chaos and confusion, of searching, of swinging between hope and despair may follow. For people accustomed to being in control, not knowing is one of the most difficult factors, and can result in a loss of self-efficacy or a loss of faith and meaning in life. Shock, denial, anger, guilt, depression, despair, fear, numbness and hopelessness are common reactions to an unexpected death; the same reactions may surface when someone goes missing.

However, some families may deal with the situation by choosing hope over despair and clinging to the best possible scenario. A number of elements will influence a family's adherence to hope, including external factors, cultural background, religious beliefs and psychological factors.



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External factors

External factors encouraging a sense of hope could include the absence of proof of death (i.e. a body), reliable information about the case, or ambiguous official statements. In this case, families might base their adherence to hope on their country's history and communication practices, where having no news of detained relatives may be commonplace.

Stories of positive outcomes – the case of a missing soldier's return after many years or of a prisoner's release after a long detainment, for example – will likely inspire hope in family members. Other unofficial sources of information from witnesses (real or false), rumours, go-betweens and fortune tellers can also bolster hope.

Friends and neighbours will also likely encourage the family in their hope, because they think it helpful and because they do not want to impose negative thoughts on an already-suffering family.

Cultural background

Belief in dreams and portents in certain cultures might mean that when a relative sees the missing person in a dream or "feels" his or her presence, it may be interpreted as a sign of life. Some families might also feel that losing hope would cause bad luck for the missing person and that the only way to influence his or her fate is to adamantly believe that he or she is still alive and will return.

Religious beliefs

In some religions, hope is an essential part of keeping the faith. Prayers for the missing may be a way for individuals or families to maintain connections to their religious community and to sustain thoughts of a positive outcome.

Psychological factors

Psychological factors such as fear play an important role in how families cling to hope. A fear of changing the family dynamic, or a fear that chaos will result if the missing person does not return to the family may mean that relatives hold onto the belief that their loved one is still alive. Fear of madness may also be experienced, as well as extreme sadness and depression. In times of intense loss, individuals have their own coping mechanisms, which may include protecting oneself from emotions that may be overwhelming, even debilitating. When a loved one has gone missing, it is nearly impossible to emotionally detach oneself from the situation.

Factors such as a belief in the innocence of those who have gone missing, and an intense desire to see the person again will also engender a sense of hope in those left behind.

ICRC, *ACCOMPANYING THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK*, 2013, PP. 44-45.

The cost of hope, however, is very high, both in terms of energy and resources. Unfortunately, hope can also immobilize people by fixing them in a certain state of mind, which restricts their social and emotional development. This happens when an inability to accept the loss of a loved one causes a person to dwell on the best possible outcome to the point where it consumes their everyday life. Under these circumstances, while physically absent, the missing person may be understood to still be psychologically present. People who

have gone missing due to armed conflict, natural disaster, or because of migration, for example, are all physically absent. The family cannot see them or touch them; they are not physically present but they are psychologically present because their family members think about them, actively seek them, and keep their memory alive – in the hope that they will come back and things will return to how they used to be.



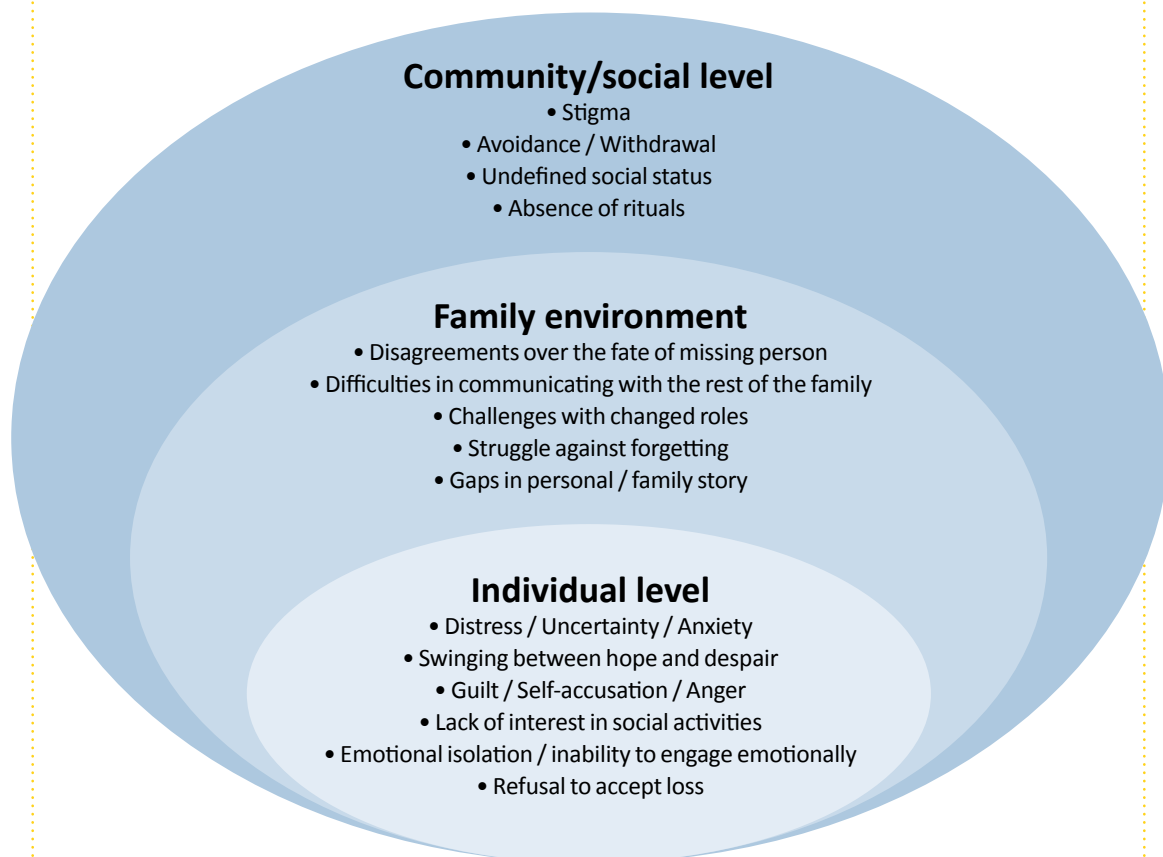
If family members are physically absent but psychologically present, we label the situation as one of ambiguous loss—the most stressful kind of loss due to the ambiguity.

BOSS, P., *LOSS, TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE: THERAPEUTIC WORK WITH AMBIGUOUS LOSS*, W.W. NORTON, 2006. ICRC, *THE NEED TO KNOW: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS TO DISPERSED FAMILY MEMBERS*, 2010 (P. 6).



Reactions to loss

Reactions to loss and separation vary for individuals, families and communities, depending on personal resilience, social support and cultural values. The diagram below shows some of the possible reactions.



Individual level

At an individual level, the uncertainty of a missing relative's well-being is a major source of ongoing stress which may be traumatic and which can lead to physical and mental exhaustion.

Feelings of guilt and self-accusation often arise from not having prevented the missing person's disappearance, or from not having been able to protect or find them. When the search proves fruitless or is called off, there is a sense of having abandoned the person. The desire to move on and to lead a normal life can compound feelings of guilt.

Anger may be directed toward those responsible for the person's disappearance or toward the missing person themselves. Such emotions are not always expressed openly, but can express themselves, for example, in dreams.

Uncertainty can be all-consuming, draining a person of energy and reducing their capacity to seek out pleasurable activities or positive relationships. Undertaking any activities which are positive or uplifting can be felt to be a betrayal of the missing person.

The distress experienced by individuals can also develop into emotional and mental difficulties including anxiety and depression.

Family level

The family is an important source of support, both economically and emotionally. However, at the same time it can also be a source of stress and frustration. There may be disagreements among family members about the fate of the missing person or about how to handle the situation collectively. Misunderstandings may arise when family members have difficulties in communicating with or understanding one another. Communication can be very complicated because of the desire to shield one another from further distress, and not knowing how best to comfort one another.

There are generally no rules or norms to guide families in this situation. Rather, families have to find their own way of managing collective decisions in terms of guardianship of the children, remarriage, division of benefits, etc. There may be clashes among family members in assuming new roles and responsibilities, for example, as the head of the family or as the principal breadwinner.

Adults often think that they are protecting children by not telling them the facts of the disappearance. However, this interferes with children's need to understand what is happening around them and, for older children, to feel a part of the family experience.

Things may be even more challenging when another family member was present at the time of the disappearance, or when more than one family member has gone missing.



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Community level

When someone goes missing it may change the way the community perceives those left behind. A wife left alone as a result of her husband's disappearance, for example, may be suspected of being associated with rebel groups. A woman may also be believed to have brought bad luck to her husband. In some circumstances, entire families can be stigmatised in this way.

Instead of finding support and solidarity within their community, families risk becoming emotionally isolated. They may be unable to share personal distress with others for fear of not being understood, of being confronted with the idea of death, or of being considered weak or burdensome.

There are also often difficulties in defining one's own status and sense of place within existing social and religious groups. It can be that there are no rituals or customs to ease the family's suffering by sharing it with others and paying tribute to their loved one. Finding ways of preserving the memory of someone who is missing is much harder than commemorating a death, which in most cultures is associated with traditional, pre-defined customs and practices.

ICRC, ACCOMPANYING THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, 2013, PP. 40-41.



It's a void that can never be filled

Some people never receive answers about their missing loved ones, and they suffer greatly from this. Cruz del Carmen lost her two sons during the 1996–97 conflict in Colombia. "My eldest son was 22 years old when they took him away, and my other son was only three months from his 18th birthday. It's so hard. It's a very difficult experience you never get over," she says.

Cruz del Carmen sold everything she owned to try and find her children. She made many inquiries but never received concrete answers. Some people told her they were dead, that an armed group had tried to recruit them and they were killed because they didn't want to go. "I can't quite believe it, simply because I have no definite proof. I didn't see it happen. I can't say for sure whether they're alive or dead. I can't even say that I know where they are. No one has ever called me to say I saw your son in such and such a place – nothing. It's a void that can never be filled. It's very painful."

ICRC, THE NEED TO KNOW: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS TO DISPERSED FAMILY MEMBERS, 2010 (P. 7).



Thomas Bartelsen

Staff and volunteers have an important task in supporting people in coping with their loss by recognizing and legitimizing their reactions. It is crucial to reassure people that their reactions are normal under the circumstances. (For more on this, see the section on supporting families.)

Studies have shown that, especially for unaccompanied minors in the absence of parental guidance and in unfamiliar surroundings, guidance from another adult source is desperately needed. Checking whether people have access to the appropriate religious or spiritual networks is also very important at a time of loss. For many people in crisis, religion plays a central role in coping, creating meaning in a world of chaos.

Grief

Grief is a normal psychological reaction to loss of any kind. Grieving is a natural but painful process that is intended to release the affected person from the pain associated with what has been lost. It involves a process of acceptance and adjustment, leading to a stabilization of emotion and routine, and a turning toward the future and moving on. It is important to keep in mind that the objective of the grieving process is not to forget the deceased or disappeared person, but to remember him or her in a way that causes less pain.

Ibrahim Malla/IFRC



Within families, the grieving process does not always happen in the same way or within the same time frame. Each person will respond in their own way. Supporting people in their grief therefore needs to be adapted to each individual situation and to the specific cultural frame of reference. It is crucial to allow people to react in their own way to what they have lost. Their reactions will be influenced by a number of factors including the relationship with the lost person, the circumstances of the loss, their own character traits, as well as the social and cultural environment.

In the case of a death, social customs generally dictate that the family arrange a funeral ceremony to say goodbye to the deceased; family and friends mourn the loss and begin the process of grieving. The wider community understands what is going on and participates according to social and religious norms.

But when someone is missing, uncertainty reigns; as long as there is no body or proof of death, the family cannot begin the grieving process. *“We haven’t seen their bodies, but they haven’t come home. Some say they’re still alive, but nothing is clear.”* The fact that the missing person might still be alive makes grieving seem inappropriate. The uncertainty is exhausting. There is no ‘right’ emotional response, no clear outcome, and therefore little comfort or meaning ascribed to what has happened. In such situations the grieving process is often described as ‘frozen,’ meaning that people are stuck in their grief. This can potentially result in problems with coping with everyday tasks and with decision-making, and puts individuals at longer-term risk of depression, anger issues, anxiety, substance abuse and other behavioural problems.

The difference between death and disappearance

Death	Disappearance
Evidence	No evidence of death or life
Social and religious norms	No social or religious norms
Rituals (e.g. funeral, witnesses of loss)	No rituals
Clear outcome / ending of a relationship	Uncertainty of outcome (i.e. do I grieve or hope?)
Clear start to grieving process	Only open questions with no answers
New social role	Ambiguous situation (search/wait or move on?)
No stigma – death is natural part of life	Unclear social role (i.e. wife or widow?)
	Possibility of social stigmatization, isolation and vulnerability to violence

Every society has ways of helping people take the first steps towards accepting loss and draw meaning from their experience. However, even if families have accepted the likelihood that their loved one is dead, grieving in the absence of a body feels inappropriate. Families may not be able to honour the memory of the loved one properly or carry out the appropriate burial rituals. Due to this and to their religious beliefs, they may fear that their loved one will never rest in peace.

In many religions death is a stage before the afterlife, rebirth or reincarnation. Depending on the belief system, a person's destiny after death depends on the life he or she led, the way he or she died, and the rituals, ceremonies and prayers the relatives consequently carried out. Although funerary customs vary depending on culture, their underlying purpose is universal. Funeral rites are not only a ceremony to discharge the body, but mark the passage of the dead from one world to another – a clear sign of separation. They allow people to mourn and be recognized as mourners by their community, creating social unity. It is important that Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers and staff recognize the place of rituals and understand how these support the grieving process.



Nigel Dickinson/Red Cross

What is RFL?



Jarkko Mikkonen/ Finnish Red Cross IFRC

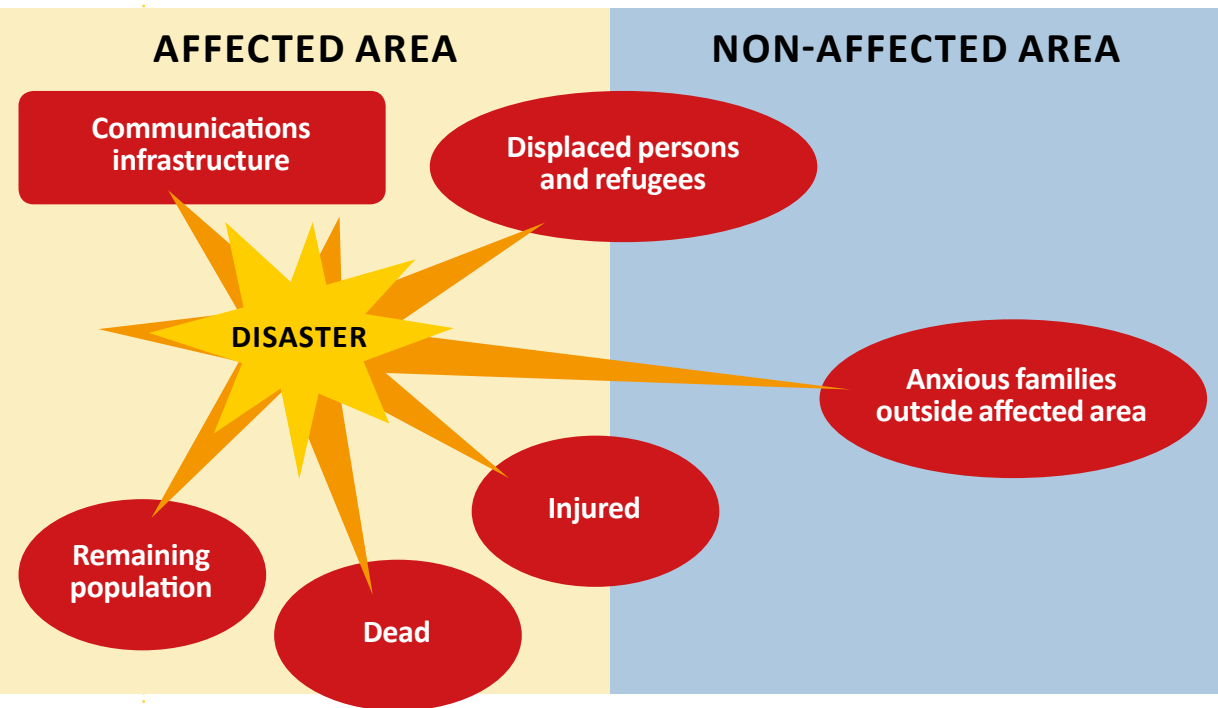
Restoring Family Links (RFL) is the process of reuniting families with lost loved ones. It involves searching for lost family members and restoring contact, reuniting families, and seeking to clarify the fate of those who remain missing. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies work together around the world to locate people and put them back into contact with their relatives, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols.



In 2010, the ICRC:

- handled more than 305,000 Red Cross messages enabling family members to exchange news
- facilitated 21,000 phone calls between family members
- registered over 2,000 unaccompanied / separated children, including 627 former child soldiers
- reunited more than 1,600 children with their families
- published the names of more than 64,000 people on www.familylinks.icrc.org who were either trying to contact relatives and friends or were being sought by relatives.

Impact of a disaster showing RFL consequences



ICRC, RESTORING FAMILY LINKS IN DISASTERS FIELD MANUAL, 2009, P. 26.

Restoring Family Links is a term that covers a wide range of activities designed to reduce the pain of separation among loved ones. RFL activities include:

- registering and keeping track of individuals – identification and accurate documentation help prevent separation
- organizing the exchange of family news
- tracing lost individuals
- reuniting and repatriating families
- supporting the authorities in managing dead bodies and tracing family members to inform them of the death
- establishing mechanisms to clarify the fate those who are missing.

RFL activities are carried out by the Family Links Network consisting of 186 tracing services of National Societies and ICRC delegations, with technical support and coordination by the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency based in Geneva.

RFL is a vital component for the restoration of psychosocial well-being. It is a matter of urgency to organize the exchange of news and to trace people who are missing or dead. As uncertainty causes enormous stress, providing people with as much information as possible will greatly alleviate distress and reinforce resilience within families and their community.



The Family Links website after the earthquake in Haiti

The website was launched in English and French the day after the earthquake in January 2010. After two weeks, 24,000 persons had registered themselves as missing or as searching for someone. (Over 82 percent of registrations were made in these first two weeks.) By 1 April 2010, there were 29,000 registrations. 6400 registered themselves as, "I am alive." 22,700 people registered a missing person.

THE FAMILY LINKS WEBSITE IS AT WWW.FAMILYLINKS.ICRC.ORG.

The Movement recognizes that certain groups of people are particularly vulnerable; therefore, the ICRC, in its leading role in RFL, created a mandate to provide specialised, holistic programmes with wide-ranging activities to accompany the families of missing persons. (For more information, please see ICRC, *Accompanying the Families of Missing Persons: A practical handbook*, 2013.)

Ibrahim Malla/IFRC



Supporting people who have been separated



Juozas Cernius/IFRC

There are several key ways in which staff and volunteers can support families who have become separated from their loved ones. Being a good listener and enabling people to feel safe are fundamental helping skills in all core activities. This section begins with a brief summary of these helping skills and then goes on to look at how to support families at key stages of the RFL process in connection with:

- the initial interview
- delivering news
- on-going support and referrals
- reunification.

Basic helping skills

It can be difficult to know how best to support people in distress, what to do and what to say. Staff and volunteers are sometimes concerned about re-awakening feelings of grief, sadness and desperation by asking questions about the circumstances of their loved one's disappearance.



Factors that seem to be helpful to long-term recovery include feeling safe, calm and hopeful, being connected to others and having access to support, as well as a sense of 'self-efficacy' (i.e. people being able to help themselves).
[HOBFOLL, S. ET AL., FIVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF IMMEDIATE AND MID-TERM MASS TRAUMA INTERVENTION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE, PSYCHIATRY 70 \(4\) WINTER 2007 \(PP. 283–315\).](#)

Being a good listener

For staff or volunteers, being a good listener is part of using supportive communication consistently and well. Being listened to can help individuals and families feel more secure, understood and cared for, thereby minimizing risk of harm. For the family or individual, being able to talk to someone is often an important part of the coping process, may have a healing quality, and generally be a positive experience.

Timothy Lam/Hong Kong Red Cross



Supportive communication involves communicating empathy, respect, concern and confidence to those being helped, and includes non-verbal communication and active listening. (See the box at left for more details about supportive communication with children.)

**Supportive communication with children****Give clear and positive instructions**

Use “do” rather than “do not,” and explain things simply and carefully so that you and the child have realistic expectations. Don’t expect children to know how to do things on their own.

Be positive

Use positive, supportive phrasing such as:
 “You are good at lots of different things...”
 “I can see you have done your best...”

Instead of:

“You are no good at...”
 “You always fail at...”

Show respect

- Encourage and support a child’s efforts.
- Speak respectfully as you do to others – say “please” and “thank you.”
- Listen to the child attentively, look at the child when he or she is talking and pay attention to what is being said.
- Don’t put a child down verbally, shout or verbally abuse a child.
- Don’t assume you know a child’s opinion.
- Don’t underestimate a child’s intelligence.

Supportive communication can be equally effective with teenagers and younger children as it is with adults. Children usually cope best with stressful events when they are given information about the event. Make sure, however, to give them only as much information as they ask for, and make it clear and understandable for their age and developmental stage. Where appropriate, connecting children with spiritual and religious networks and coping mechanisms is also an essential part of psychosocial support. (See IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, 2007, Action Sheet 5.3, p. 106.)

Take time to establish contact with children, and proceed at their pace. If children are given age-appropriate information, they can start to make sense of the situa-



Ibrahim Malla/FRC

tion. They will need adult support as they do this – ideally from people they know and trust and who are coping sufficiently well. If they don't have someone in their life like this, then try to provide a contact person they can go to and connect with, if needed.

Enabling people to feel safe

Enabling people to feel safe is crucial. This is not only about finding a physically safe place, but also about establishing safety and trust in relationships with families. This can be accomplished through the following:

- treating people with respect and dignity
- providing a consistent member of staff or volunteer for contact with a family, if at all possible
- giving clear explanations of the process and possible outcomes
- keeping information confidential where appropriate
- keeping questions focused on what needs to be known
- reassuring families that their reactions are normal and understandable, given the circumstances
- providing options for participating in activities that can temporarily distract them from disturbing thoughts and feelings.

Children, as well as their caregivers, need to have a feeling of safety and trust restored after difficult events. This process includes understanding what happened and how it happened. During this stage of the process, children will benefit from receiving attention and affection from parents and friends. Observing daily routines that make life seem normal and predictable will also be of help. In the event the death of the missing person is confirmed, finding ways of remembering the deceased whilst forming new relationships with other significant people (for example, caregivers or other relatives) may help children through the grieving process.

As a Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer or staff, it is important to remember that your role as helper might be to help the person to endure the uncertainty, rather than being able to do something to alleviate the situation. This subject is explored further in the section about on-going support on pages 20-22.

Initial interviews

The purpose of conducting an initial interview is for the staff member or volunteer to collect basic information in order to understand the individual's or family's situation. This information and the way the person responds to the interview can then be used to determine how the individual's or family's level of distress, how they are coping, and if they require additional support.

The interview in itself can also serve as a form of support by allowing people to talk about their experience and feelings. This may provide them with some comfort and allow them to feel that they are being listened to, that their concerns are being addressed, and that there is help available to them.

Interviewing people can be challenging. However there are ways of carrying out interviews which will make people feel safe, respected and heard, and which will minimize harm. The best tool here is Psychological First Aid (PFA). It is about offering basic human support to someone in distress.



Psychological First Aid

- Stay close.
- Listen attentively.
- Accept feelings.
- Provide general care and practical help.

PS CENTRE, COMMUNITY-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TRAINING KIT, 2009.



Help responsibly

Act in the best interests of the people you encounter. Know your role and the limits of your role, and take care that your actions do not cause further harm. Even though it may be with the best of intentions, overstepping your capabilities may cause more harm than good.

Treat people with respect; be sure to take their age, gender and culture into account.

Make sure that people can access help fairly and without discrimination.

ADAPTED FROM WHO, PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID, 2011 (PP. 8-9).



IFRC

Good preparation is essential before the interview. Be clear about who is going to be involved in the interview, and the role and aim of the person(s) interviewing the family. Consider what information, resources and support might be needed to do the interview, as well as the risks involved, and what reactions might arise.

When interviewing someone, after introductions are made, find a quiet and private place to talk. This could be an office or in a family's home. Wherever it is, be aware that things will be more complicated where there are other people around as conversations may be interrupted. Try to make people comfortable and consider having water and tissues available. Check ahead of time if an interpreter is needed.



Benoit Maisha-Carpentier/IFRC

Explain the reason for the interview, the nature of the service being offered and the type of questions that will be covered. This helps to establish boundaries for everyone concerned. Check whether the family has previously been interviewed about the missing person. Pay attention to body language – both of the family being interviewed and the interviewer(s). Remaining calm, talking slowly, making time for silence, allowing yourself to breathe and showing understanding are all things you can do to help people feel more safe and secure.

Try not to ask people to analyse what happened to them or discuss in great detail the event that caused the separation. Be careful not to pressure people to tell you how they feel. Too many questions can feel intrusive, so it is best to keep ‘why’ questions to a minimum. For example, it is best to avoid asking, “Why didn’t you bring your papers with you?” This type of question can be difficult for families to answer as they may feel guilty about their actions or not prepared to share details.

It is a good idea to begin an interview with a few general questions:

- How are you?
- How is your family?
- How are you feeling?
- I realize that X is missing. What are your concerns related to that?

Sometimes questions give rise to strong emotions. Be aware of this and try to prepare for how you will handle this. Take care not to ask too much or probe too deeply. Try to let the person guide you as to what they wish to tell you by letting them take the lead. Below is a list of questions which may be appropriate to ask in a given situation:

1. What do you think happened to X (missing relative’s name or title, ie: your father, your husband, etc.)?
2. How has X’s disappearance affected the family? How often do you find yourself thinking about X?

3. What do you feel, when you think about X? How do you express these feelings? (For example: by crying, screaming, yelling at others, hitting things or others, falling asleep, busying yourself with tasks, etc.)
4. How do you sleep? Are you able to concentrate on things? How do you get on with everyday tasks?
5. Do your family share the information you get about X?
6. Do members of the family talk to one another about their feelings, experiences or difficulties? If not, what could help them to communicate better with one another?
7. Do members of the family share their memories of X? Do they talk openly about him or her? Or is the topic avoided?
8. Are the children and young people in the family aware of the situation? What have they been told? How were they told?
9. Has your family done something special to commemorate X? For example, have you held some kind of special ceremony? If so, who took part?
10. Is there anybody you can talk to about your feelings and/or problems?
11. Have there been any changes in friendships? Are you still in contact with old friends or have some ties been cut?
12. How have people around you reacted to your loss?
13. Do you know other families or people in the same situation? Do you meet with them? How often? What do you talk about?
14. How would you feel about meeting with other families in the same situation?
15. Have you ever taken part in any events related to the issue of missing persons? For example, demonstrations, commemorations or other social gatherings? If not, can you say why not? Do you think that these types of events are helpful?

ADAPTED FROM ICRC, ACCOMPANYING THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK, 2013.

Take your time and offer support. If someone is getting distressed, acknowledge their reactions. If it seems the person needs additional support, be prepared to refer them and give information about other services, for example, support groups, information on managing stress or dealing with loss. Make every effort to bring the interview to a close when the family is in a balanced emotional state.



At the end of the interview, it is good practice to provide informational materials about the service being offered together with a record of the visit. This provides the family with the opportunity to read details of the service and their interview later, when they might be calmer and more able to focus.

Unaccompanied children should of course be given particular attention due to their vulnerability. The RFL teams give priority to these cases and also liaise with child protection agencies that provide other services for children (regarding psychosocial support, education, etc.). For children who are separated from loved ones or otherwise affected by separation, special attention is needed in:

- providing protection from harm, showing empathy and support (but being careful not overwhelm with attention or affection)
- being clear and calm
- being sensitive to children's reactions and responding where needed
- encouraging children to express themselves without interrogating them
- asking indirect questions (for example, asking generally about issues affecting children in their community) and using drawings and games.



Do's and Don'ts in interviewing

DO:

- Find a safe place to conduct the interview, away from physical danger, onlookers, media, etc.
- Listen to people who share their stories, as many times as necessary.
- Be patient, compassionate and caring, even if people are angry or demanding.
- Help people to contact others, either through the post or by making telephone calls on their behalf.
- Engage or assist people in meeting their own needs.
- Find out where government and non-governmental services are located and direct people to the appropriate services available in the area.
- Understand the emotions of people who have suffered great loss, and take them seriously.

DO NOT:

- Do not force people to share their stories with you, especially very personal details. If they don't want to talk, don't pressure them.
- Do not tell people what you think they should be feeling, thinking or doing.
- Do not give empty reassurances such as: "Everything will be ok," or "At least you survived," or "Others have suffered more than you."
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Do not tell people why you think they are suffering, and do not cite reasons related to their personal behaviours or beliefs.
- Do not tell people what you think they should have or could have done in the crisis situation – especially to save loved ones.
- Do not criticize existing services and activities being carried out in these areas, especially in front of people who are in need of these services. Instead, support the service-providers to make the services better.
- Do not separate surviving family members and relatives from one another, if at all possible. This is especially important when dealing with children.

DO NOT LABEL PEOPLE AS "TRAUMATIZED." INDIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILY NEWS SERVICE ACTIVITIES: GUIDELINES. 2010 (PP. 34-35).



Delivering news

Delivering news means informing someone of the outcome of a search. It might mean telling a family or individual that their loved one has died. It might mean letting someone know that someone has been found and that she or he is ready to come home. Or it might mean communicating to a family that someone has been found, but that after a very difficult experience does not want to come home. The search process might reveal all sorts of complications that can influence the outcome of the search.

Whatever the circumstances, use the same principles set out for conducting initial interviews in the section above. Use PFA to guide the contact made. It is best if news is given in person, if at all possible. As it says in the box below, preparation is vital. Determine the best place to give news, including asking the person where they would like to meet, e.g. in their home, a local office or church. Encourage them to bring a friend or family member if you are conveying news of a death. That person will be a significant source of support once the news has been delivered. Be aware that the news of a death may provoke a reaction of shock, and that shock sometimes means not hearing what is being said.



Distressing news

Distressing news may include information that:

- the person sought is (presumably or certainly) dead;
- the person sought is (presumably or certainly) severely injured;
- all avenues to clarify the whereabouts of the person sought have been explored without success;
- the person has been located but refuses to inform the enquirer of his location (see below).

ICRC, RESTORING FAMILY LINKS IN DISASTERS FIELD MANUAL, 2009 (p. 171).



There is no standard formula about how to give news. Being prepared to adapt and respond to the situation at hand is crucial. When news is distressing, it is important to say the name of the person who is dead or missing, and to acknowledge awareness of loss. Listen to the grieving person and be aware that this is the start of a grieving process.

Speak clearly and slowly, and use straightforward language that is easy to understand, avoiding clichés. It is often helpful to break the sentence up into segments, such as the following:

*“I am really sorry to tell you (first phrase)
that news has come back (second phrase)
that your brother has died.” (third phrase)*

Be prepared to answer questions but don't make reassuring promises, such as “Everything will be alright.” Take care to avoid physical contact with people without their permission; even a gentle and well-intentioned hand on arm may be unwelcome. When receiving news, many different emotions could surface in a person, including anger, laughter, relief, surprise, regret, or a combination. Numbness or a perceived lack of response in the person is also a possible reaction, as the individual processes the news. It is also not uncommon for people to react in denial, not believing that the news is true. It is possible that a person may distrust your word, or possibly direct anger toward you.



Quick tips for staff and volunteers about giving news

Preparation is vital.

Recognize that delivering news is stressful and may be difficult.

Don't try to predict or make assumptions about the person's reaction – even good news might be bad for the person on the receiving end, or bad news may come as a relief.

People have different experiences and reactions. Always prepare for the worst, even when giving good news.

BRITISH RED CROSS, GIVING NEWS WORKSHOP, 2013.



It is extremely important to be prepared to supply information about resources that might be helpful to the family once they know the fate of their loved one. Keep in mind that this means resources within your National Society as well as through other agencies, for example, immigration services or other tracing agencies, in addition to resources in the local community (including religious networks, support groups, etc.)



“I thought my little brother was dead, but thanks to the Red Cross, I can now embrace him.”

Adelina, Guatemala

ICRC, RFL: PRESENTING THE STRATEGY FOR A WORLDWIDE NETWORK, 2009.

On-going support and referrals

It is common for families to wait a long time before tracing a loved one. It is therefore helpful if each National Society sets guidelines for its staff and volunteers about the possible types of on-going support. This will depend on resources and capacity.

Not everyone will want help. It is important not to force help on people who do not want it. Instead, focus energy and resources on being available for those who do want help. Remember that in the long term, helping people to help themselves is the best strategy. This might mean linking family members with support groups or other community-based psychosocial activities that are set up for people in the same situation. For example, ICRC may have specialised psychosocial support programmes for relatives of missing persons in the vicinity. It could also mean referring families or individuals at particular risk of, for example, human trafficking, to other services such as legal advice.

Listen to the family’s needs and help them to prioritize the kind of support they need most. Support families in thinking through and discussing what options may be available to them at this point, being honest and open about the information at hand. Decisions people make themselves are the most valuable, but as is always recommended in PFA, discourage them from making any long-term decisions at this point.

Be aware of particularly vulnerable groups – children, specifically unaccompanied minors, people with disabilities, elderly people, detainees, and people who have been left destitute or who have been left alone due to separation from a family member.

In the Hateymalo programme in Nepal, vulnerable families provide support to one another through their participation in group meetings.

Ibrahim Maïta/IFRC



“If we stay at home, we feel bad and it’s nice to come together -- we can share our problems with one another in the meeting. We are getting a chance to learn more things about the programme and ourselves. We feel lighter in the meeting.”

ICRC, Hateymalo Psychosocial Programme, 2011.

One of the core principles for the work that staff and volunteers do with families experiencing loss is not to make assumptions about the situation a family may be in. It is important not to assume anything about a family's experience of the loss they have suffered. For example, don't assume the loss of an older person will be easier to accept than the death of a child. Don't assume the return of a family member will necessarily be welcomed. In the period of time when families are waiting for news, their common experience is likely to be one of great uncertainty. The missing person is physically absent but psychologically may still be part of the family in their thoughts, plans and dreams.

As noted earlier, this kind of ambiguous loss is very stressful and can be disruptive to family life because it has no clear resolution. Decisions are put on hold, household chores are left undone. If, for example, a child has been abducted, the parents may not be able to function well in relation to their other children. Family members may swing between hope and despair or become depressed.

The healing process begins when families learn to accept two conflicting realities at the same time. "I must move on and organize life without Jamal, but at the same time, I can keep hoping for the future and remember him." Staff and volunteers can support families by:

- naming the situation as ambiguous loss
- normalizing the stress, confusion and sense of hopelessness
- creating opportunities for families to talk about the missing person
- looking for ways of rebuilding roles in the family and creating rituals to commemorate the missing person.

Rituals, ceremonies and memorials can be tremendously helpful when there is ambiguous loss. For families left in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on New York in 2001, for example, some religious leaders gave permission for funerals to take place without a body. Through this process, families were able to begin grieving the loved one who remained missing but was presumed dead.

Sometimes groups affected by the same disaster choose to make a memorial to those who are missing. In the ICRC programme from Nepal, for example, support groups chose to make memorials in different parts of their community -- for example, at a well, in a tree plantation and in a waiting area. Such memorials help to recognize those who have been lost and give public permission to the families and the communities to mourn their loss.

The long-term goal is for families to come to terms with their loss and to find meaning in the situation, rather than blaming themselves. Achieving 'closure' is not to be expected. Gradually families may find themselves being able to move on, simultaneously keeping hope alive for their missing loved one, while still able to make plans for the future.

As in all psychosocial support activities, there will be situations when people might need more specialised help, for example, Individuals who may be at risk of harming themselves or others. Staff and volunteers should be able to recognise signs of extreme distress and know how to make referrals.



Ways of supporting someone you are concerned about

If you are concerned about someone's ability to cope or are worried that they may be suicidal or in a position to seriously harm themselves, consider contacting people close to the person, such as those in their support network (family and friends) and/or professionals (e.g. a doctor, health centre or a hospital accident and emergency department).

If someone expresses suicidal thoughts to you, first acknowledge the depth of their unhappiness and how overwhelming the current situation is. Explore with them who from their support network could be helpful to them at this point. Let the person know that you want to get them further help, and ask if you can contact someone on their behalf. They might need to get to a safe place where they are not alone. Talk to the person about where such a place might be for them, and involve others in the conversation where possible.

If you are worried about someone, speak to your manager (or equivalent) as soon as possible to ensure you have considered all possible resources. Before you leave the person, offer to contact them to follow up, either by phone or a visit. In some areas, it is possible to make referrals to other agencies, such as the Samaritans, who can also contact the person.

BRITISH RED CROSS, CALMER FOR DELIVERING NEWS, 2010 (P. 7).

Ibrahim Malik/FRC



Reunification

The ICRC is responsible for the area of reunification. Reunification is a complex task, and should only be undertaken by those trained in it. The box below shows the process, highlighting the key psychosocial support elements involved:



Seven steps of reunification

- 1. Re-establishment of contact:** A family reunification can be organized only after the relatives have been located and contact has been restored between them, either by telephone or through the exchange of family news. (The exchange of family news organized by the Movement enables family members to make an informed decision. It also enables the Movement to confirm that the family and individuals are related and wish to be reunited, as well as helping to identify possible obstacles).
- 2. Identity and kinship** have both been verified.
- 3. Mutual consent.** The formal consent of both sides is prerequisite for a family reunification. Young children should also be involved in the decision.
- 4. Assessment of best interests.** It may be necessary to assess what is in the best interest of children and other vulnerable persons who have been separated from their families for a long time or whose primary caregiver has died, before reuniting them with their families.
- 5. Primacy of safety.** A family reunification can be carried out only after the safety of the beneficiaries during the journey and the security of the reunification site have been properly assessed and confirmed.
- 6. Logistical support.** A family reunification requires safe Movement access to the areas where the relatives are and safe and reliable transportation.
- 7. Authorization of the authorities.** In most cases, the authorities should, in principle, be notified beforehand and their approval obtained.

As noted above, where children are involved, it must first be established that the reunification is in their best interest. Where unaccompanied minors are concerned and no family can be located, the ICRC together with the National Society and other agencies should look for alternative solutions for their care.

The decision to proceed with reunification rests with family members. Once located, both parties will be asked about what has happened since they were last together, and will be invited to consider what it will be like to be together again. Being reunited might not work out as everyone imagines, so great care has to be taken.

Many factors have potential to hinder the success of a family reunification. Major changes in the living situation, for example a lack of income, may make it difficult to accommodate the return of the lost person into the home. A family member who returns with severe injuries or who has, for example, lost a limb, eyesight, or other capacity, may create new demands on the family. A young woman returning with a baby or an adolescent returning after involvement in combat or with armed groups could be rejected or harshly treated by neighbours or others in the community.

The provision of support to families or individuals may provoke envy in others in the community who are not receiving help, thereby putting the individuals at risk of rejection by their community. The Red Cross Red Crescent must be sensitive to such potential problems and consider if there is anything they can do through mediation, sensitization campaigns, etc.



Reunited after 19 years

In 2006, Isha Munya contacted the Red Cross in Adelaide and a case was opened to trace her missing daughter and mother. Through the Red Cross Tracing service, she was able to locate them both, and they were able to send each other messages. Eventually in 2009, Isha's daughter, Faduma, went to Australia and was reunited with her mother, 19 years after they were separated in Somalia.

[AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS. MESSAGES OF HOPE.](#)



Heikin Rene Diaz / IRC



Benefits of re-establishing contact

Research done on behalf of British Red Cross found that re-establishing contact with lost loved ones helped to “maintain closeness and reduce anxiety levels (...) Re-establishing contact with family members had a positive impact on individuals’ well-being. It enabled families to resume their roles and responsibilities and receive news about the fate of other family members. Some difficulties maintaining communication were discussed. Supporting service users once contact has been established may therefore be equally as important for their well-being (as other activities).”

BRITISH RED CROSS, SERVICE USER EXPERIENCE OF USING THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING AND MESSAGE SERVICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY, 2012 (P. 4).



“I lost my wife and my two sons long ago. My whole existence has been filled with sadness, but today I have been brought back to life...I am not alone anymore. I am with my brother at last. This is a dream come true.”

Salih Ashgar, Darfur, Sudan

ICRC, RFL: PRESENTING THE STRATEGY FOR A WORLDWIDE NETWORK, 2009.

Self-care



Juozas Cernius, IFRC

The psychosocial well-being of staff and volunteers and the quality of their work can be affected when stress from work is not addressed. It is therefore very important for National Societies to create a framework that is supportive and protective, where everyone understands the risks of the job and actively supports resilience and well-being, both in beneficiaries and in fellow staff and volunteers.

How each person responds to stress – whether they develop psychological problems or show resilience – is influenced by many factors, including the nature and severity of the crisis event, personality and personal history, and available support systems. However, emotional stress among volunteers and staff should never be an individual responsibility. National Societies can create conditions that foster resilience in individuals and teams by:

- encouraging reasonable working conditions through policies and strategies
- providing accessible guidance and support from managers and peers, and normalizing responses
- providing psycho-education regarding emotionally stressful work
- creating an organizational culture where people can talk openly and share problems while respecting the principle of confidentiality
- arranging regular meetings which bring all staff and/or volunteers together and foster a feeling of belonging to a team
- creating a work culture where getting together after a critical event is the norm, e.g. a peer support system.

PS CENTRE, CARING FOR VOLUNTEERS, 2012.



Naoki Shiratuchi/Japanese Red Cross

One of the most important support measures that managers can put in place is a supportive and open atmosphere for their teams. Staff and volunteers will then feel more comfortable in asking for support when they need it. Talking openly about stress (without forcing anyone to talk), allowing for individual ways of coping, being available for supervision and creating a safe environment by respecting confidentiality are all practices that will go a long way towards creating a culture of mutual support.

It is important that staff and volunteers use good self-care strategies while working in stressful situations. Being aware of signs of stress and being proactive about self-care will help staff and volunteers to endure the challenges in their work, enabling them to more effectively help families affected by separation.



Self-care reminders

If you feel overwhelmed by the situation or your duties, try focusing for a while on simple and routine tasks. Let peers and supervisors know how you feel and be patient with yourself.

If you experience a critical event, talking with someone about your thoughts and feelings may help you to process and come to peace with any unpleasant experiences.

Some reactions are normal and unavoidable when working in difficult circumstances.

Take care of your own body and mind.

Get enough rest and sleep. If you have sleep difficulties or feel anxious, avoid caffeine, especially before bedtime.

Limit your intake of alcohol and tobacco.

Exercise to relieve tension.

Eat healthy foods and keep regular meal times.

Keep in touch with loved ones.

Talk about your experiences and feelings (even those that seem frightening or strange) with colleagues or a trusted person.

Listen to what others say about how the event has affected them and how they cope. They may share useful insights.

Express your feelings through creative activities, like drawing, painting, writing, or playing music.

Play and take time for fun.

Consciously try to relax by practising meditation or yoga.

PS CENTRE, CARING FOR VOLUNTEERS, 2012.

Resources

Australian Red Cross, *Messages of hope*. www.redcross.org.au/messages-of-hope.aspx

Boss, P., *Loss, Trauma and Resilience: Therapeutic Work with Ambiguous Loss*, W.W. Norton, 2006.

Canadian Red Cross, *Predictable, Preventable. Best Practices for Addressing Interpersonal and Self-Directed Violence during and after Disasters*, 2012.

IFRC learning platform: Restoring Family Links (RFL) & Psychosocial Support (PSS)
– Module 1: in emergencies, 2013.

IFRC learning platform: Restoring Family Links (RFL) & Psychosocial Support (PSS)
– Module 2: working with children, 2013.

Family Links website at <http://familylinks.icrc.org/en/Pages/home.aspx>

Hobfoll, S et al., Five Essential Elements of Immediate and Mid-Term Mass Trauma Intervention: Empirical Evidence, *Psychiatry*, 70(4), Winter 2007, (pp. 283-315).

IASC, *Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC Tracing Agency and Protection Division, Geneva, 2004.

ICRC, *Accompanying the families of missing persons: A practical handbook*, 2013.

ICRC, *Restoring Family Links in Disasters Field Manual*, 2009.

ICRC, *The need to know: Restoring family links to dispersed family members*, 2010.

Indian Red Cross Society, *Psychosocial Support for Family News Service Activities: Guidelines*, 2010.

Nepal Red Cross, Hateymalo Psychosocial Support Programme, 2012.

WHO, *Psychological First Aid: Guide for field workers*, 2011.

Broken Links

Psychosocial support for people separated from family members

A field guide

Broken Links: Psychosocial support for people separated from family members (A field guide) was developed to support staff and volunteers in a wide range of settings where they may come in contact with families who have been separated from their loved ones. The material focuses on the causes and consequences of being separated from family members, the psychosocial impacts of separation, how staff and volunteers can support people in this situation, as well as self-care for staff and volunteers.

For training purposes, a training module including a set of PowerPoint slides and trainer's notes can be downloaded from www.pscentre.org.

Psychosocial Centre



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies