



SAFEGUARDING, DISCLOSURE & PERSONAL SAFETY

The Herbert Protocol

Preparing information to help if a vulnerable person goes missing.

The key idea

The Herbert Protocol helps families and carers record useful information in advance about a person who may be at risk of going missing. If they do go missing, the information can be given quickly to police to support the search.

What is the Herbert Protocol?

The **Herbert Protocol** is a practical safeguarding initiative used by police forces across the UK. It encourages families, carers and professionals to record important information about a person who may be at increased risk of going missing, so that it can be shared quickly with police if a disappearance occurs.

Preparation, not registration

Completing a Herbert Protocol form does **not** usually mean registering a person as missing in advance. The form is kept somewhere safe and accessible so it can be provided to police if it is ever needed.

Who can it help?

It is most commonly associated with people living with **dementia**, but local police forces may also recommend it for other people who are vulnerable to going missing because of memory difficulties, learning disabilities, autism, mental-health needs or other circumstances.

Local forms can differ

There is no single UK-wide form used identically everywhere. Police forces may use different versions and may describe eligibility slightly differently. Where possible, use the current Herbert Protocol form provided by your local police force.

Why prepare information in advance?

When somebody is missing, families and carers may be frightened, distressed or trying to remember many details at once. Recording information beforehand can reduce the amount that has to be gathered during an emergency and can give police useful starting points for their search.

It does not replace calling police

If somebody is missing and you are concerned for their safety, contact police. You do **not** need to wait a set amount of time before reporting a person missing.

What information is useful?

Local Herbert Protocol forms vary, but they commonly ask for information that can help police understand the person, identify them and consider where they may have gone.

Identification

A recent photograph, full name, preferred name, date of birth, physical description and identifying features such as scars, tattoos, glasses or mobility aids.

Communication & support

How the person communicates, words or phrases they use, sensory needs, hearing or visual needs, how they may respond to strangers or police, and approaches that may help them feel safe.

Health & vulnerability

Relevant health conditions, medication, mobility, memory or orientation difficulties and anything that could increase risk while the person is away from support.

Places & routines

Previous addresses, former workplaces, favourite places, walking routes, shops, parks, transport routes, places connected with family and other locations the person may try to reach.

People & interests

Important family members, friends, significant past relationships, hobbies, routines, former occupations and other personal history that might provide clues about where the person would go.

Making the information genuinely useful

The most useful Herbert Protocol information is specific, current and practical. It should help somebody who does not know the person understand what may matter during a search.

Think beyond basic details

A place may be important because of the person's **past**, not only their current routine. Someone living with dementia, for example, may try to return to an old home or workplace. An autistic person may move towards a familiar, quiet or highly preferred location. Individual patterns matter more than assumptions about a diagnosis.

Describe the person, not just the condition

Instead of writing only "autistic" or "has dementia", include practical information: *may not answer their name; uses a communication device; dislikes physical touch; may hide when frightened; walks towards the former family home.*

Include a recent photograph

Choose a clear and reasonably recent photograph showing the person's face. If their appearance changes significantly, replace it. Some local forms also provide space for photographs of distinguishing features.

Keep the form updated

Review the information periodically and whenever something important changes - for example a new address, medication, mobility need, communication method, regular destination or recent photograph.

Where should it be kept?

Keep the completed form somewhere trusted carers can access quickly. Depending on the local scheme, it may be kept as a paper copy, digitally, or both. Follow your police force's instructions about whether they want information submitted in advance.

If the person goes missing

Contact police

If you are concerned that a vulnerable person is missing, report it to police. Call **999** where there is an immediate risk to life or serious harm; otherwise use the appropriate local police reporting route, such as **101** or online reporting.

Have the Herbert Protocol information ready

Tell police that a Herbert Protocol form has been completed and make it available. The information can help officers build a picture of the person's routines, vulnerabilities, likely destinations and communication needs.

Other details may still be needed

The form cannot capture everything that may matter on the day. Police may ask about what the person was wearing, when and where they were last seen, recent behaviour, whether anything unusual happened, access to money or transport, and places already checked.

Do not delay the report to finish the form

If the form is incomplete or out of date, report the person missing anyway. Give police the information you have and update them when further information becomes available.

What happens after the person is found?

Depending on the circumstances, police or other services may discuss what happened and whether anything could reduce future risk. This might include changes to support, routines, technology, the environment or the person's care plan.

The aim is not to remove independence

Managing missing-person risk should be proportionate and person-centred. Safety planning can sit alongside autonomy, dignity and ordinary life rather than automatically restricting someone's movement because they are considered vulnerable.

Person-centred safety planning

A Herbert Protocol form works best as one part of a wider conversation about the person's needs, preferences and safety.

Involve the person where possible

If the person can take part, include them in deciding what information is recorded, what helps when they are distressed or disoriented, and who should be contacted. Their preferences can make the information more accurate and useful.

Communication matters

Record how to approach the person respectfully. Useful details might include preferred language, processing time, communication aids, whether questions should be kept short, or whether touch and sirens may cause distress.

Consider patterns

If the person has gone missing before, note where they were found, the route they took, what appeared to prompt the episode and anything that helped locate or reassure them.

Related safeguarding considerations

Repeated missing episodes can sometimes indicate unmet needs, distress, environmental difficulties, exploitation, abuse or changes in health. The response should consider the individual circumstances rather than treating every incident as simply 'wandering'.

Related resources

For wider adult-safeguarding principles, see the upcoming **Making Safeguarding Personal** and **Care Act & Adult Safeguarding** resources in this collection.

Practical checklist

A Herbert Protocol record is most useful when the following information is easy to find and reasonably current:

- A clear, recent photograph.
- Full and preferred name, date of birth and physical description.
- Communication style, sensory needs and ways to offer reassurance.
- Health information and vulnerabilities relevant to being missing.
- Medication or equipment that may become important while away.
- Regular routines and places the person visits.
- Previous homes, workplaces and personally meaningful locations.
- Family, friends and other people or places they may seek out.
- Previous missing episodes and where the person was found.
- Up-to-date contact information for family, carers or services.

Review it

Set a reminder to review the form periodically. Updating one or two details when they change is much easier than rebuilding the information during a crisis.

About this resource

This PDF provides general educational information about the Herbert Protocol. Local police-force procedures and forms differ, so use the current guidance for the area where the person lives. It is not a substitute for contacting police when somebody is missing.

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References & further information

Police.uk. *Report a missing person.* National public guidance on reporting somebody missing and the principle that there is no requirement to wait 24 hours before making a report.

Metropolitan Police. *The Herbert Protocol.* Current local guidance and form for recording information that may help police find a vulnerable person who goes missing.

West Yorkshire Police. *Herbert Protocol.* Guidance on completing and storing information for people who may be at risk of going missing.

Avon and Somerset Police. *Herbert Protocol.* Public guidance describing use of the protocol for people with dementia and other vulnerabilities and the information that can assist a missing-person search.

Use your local version

Police forces may update their forms and processes independently. Search your local police force's official website for **Herbert Protocol** to obtain the current form and instructions for your area.