ABORIGINAL ALERT
CANADA'S INDIGENOUS AWARENESS NETWORK

Introduction:

A Beginner's Guide to Joining Search Parties for Missing Indigenous People



THANK YOU

For stepping forward to join the search for missing Indigenous people.

Your willingness to help in such a critical and sensitive situation is deeply valued.



This guide is designed to support you as you prepare to participate in your first search effort, offering practical advice and insights to ensure your contribution is effective and respectful.

As a volunteer, your role is not just crucial, **but also invaluable.**

Helping locate those missing and standing in solidarity with the community during a time of profound need.

This guide will walk you through what to expect, how to prepare, and the best ways to approach this work with the sensitivity and respect it requires.

Whether you're new to search efforts or Indigenous communities, entering this experience with an open heart, a willingness to listen, and a focus on the task at hand is key.

Every action you take, no matter how small it may seem, has the potential to make a significant difference and could contribute to saving a life.



By following the guidance suggested here, you'll be better equipped to support the search efforts in a way that honors the families, respects the community, and maximizes the chances of bringing loved ones home.

We deeply appreciate your commitment and compassion, and we encourage you to approach this work with the humility and dedication it deserves.

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Understanding Your Role

As a volunteer, your role is to support the search efforts in a way that helps the community and respects the process. **Here's what that means:**

Supporting the Search Effort:

Your main job is to assist the organized search under the direction of experienced leaders. They will guide you on where to go, what to do, and how you can best help.

It's essential to follow their instructions closely to work together effectively.



Leave Family Interaction to Professionals:

Searching for a missing loved one is a very emotional time for families. Communicating with them should be left to trained professionals who handle these sensitive situations.

As a volunteer, **you should focus on the search rather than speaking with the family.**

Focus on the Task:

During the search, staying focused on your assigned tasks is vital and could mean avoiding unnecessary conversations or distractions.



Remember, every minute counts, and your attention should be on helping to find the missing person.

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Preparing for the Search

Be prepared before you join a search, both physically and emotionally. **Here are some suggestions:**

What to Expect:

Participating in a search can be challenging. You might spend hours walking through rugged terrain, like forests, fields, or rough ground. The weather could be hot, cold, or rainy, so be ready for anything.

Emotionally, the search can be challenging, too. You may face complex scenes, and the atmosphere can be intense as the focus is on finding the missing person.



What to Bring

Make sure you come prepared with the right gear. **Here's a list of essentials:**

Appropriate Clothing

Dress in layers and wear sturdy shoes or boots. Be ready for all kinds of weather.

Water and Food

Bring enough water to stay hydrated and pack snacks to keep your energy up.

Flashlight

Even if the search is during the day, a flashlight can be helpful, especially if it gets dark or you need to look into shaded areas.

Personal Items

Sunscreen, insect repellent, and a hat can be helpful depending on the conditions.

Being fully prepared ensures you can actively contribute to the search without being hindered by discomfort or lack of resources.

Mental and Emotional Preparation

Searches can be emotionally challenging.
You might see upsetting things.
It’s essential to take care of yourself:



Be Ready for Anything:

Understand what might be difficult to handle, and prepare yourself mentally for this possibility.

Practice Self-Care:

Give yourself time to process what you’ve experienced after the search. Talk to someone you trust if you need support, and take breaks if you feel overwhelmed.



Remember, it's okay to ask for help.

Taking care of your mental and emotional well-being is as important as your physical safety during the search.

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Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

When entering Indigenous communities, it's essential to approach the search with respect and understanding. **Here's how you can do that:**

Entering Indigenous Communities:

When you step onto Indigenous lands, do so with respect and an open heart. This is a time to listen and learn. Saving questions or seeking an understanding of their culture can be a better conversation.

Remember, your presence is about helping with the search rather than exploring the community or its traditions.



Following Cultural Protocols:

Indigenous communities may have specific cultural practices or restrictions. It's essential to follow the lead of the community members. If they ask you to do something or avoid specific actions, respect their wishes without question.

Your cooperation helps build trust and ensures that the interactions honor their traditions.

Staying Focused on the Search:

While it's natural to be curious or want to connect, staying focused on the task at hand is crucial. The primary goal is to find the missing person.

Avoid engaging in unrelated conversations or activities that could distract from the search effort.

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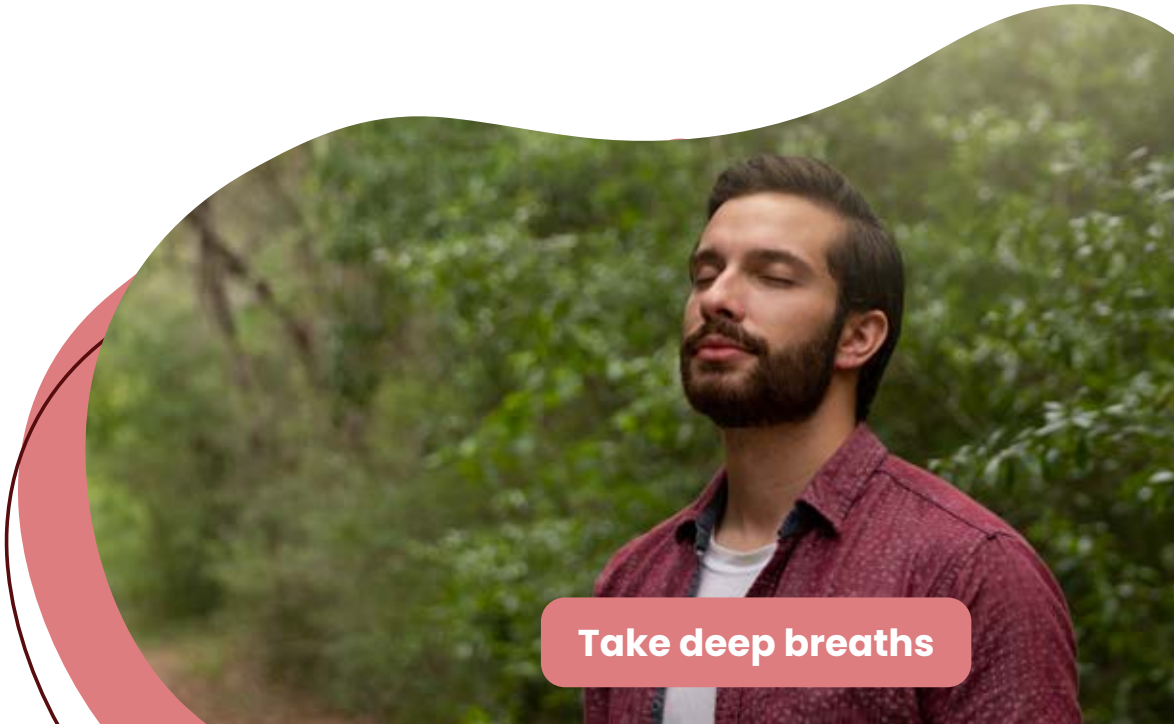
Coping with Difficult Scenes

Participating in a search can be emotionally challenging, especially if you encounter distressing scenes.
Here's how to prepare and where to find support:

Preparing for the Emotional Impact:

During a search, you might encounter situations that are hard to handle emotionally. It's important to acknowledge that this could happen and to prepare yourself as much as possible.

If you discover something upsetting, stay calm and focus on your role. Take deep breaths, remind yourself of the importance of what you're doing, and lean on the support of your fellow volunteers.



Resources for Emotional Support:

After the search, it's normal to feel a range of emotions, including sadness, anxiety, or even anger. **It's important to take care of yourself:**



Talk to Someone:

If you need to process what you've seen, reach out to a trusted friend, a family member, or another volunteer who understands what you've been through.



Seek Professional Help:

If your emotions feel too heavy to manage independently, speak with a counselor or therapist. Many communities have support services available for people involved in difficult situations.



Use Available Resources:

Check if the search organizers offer a debriefing session or access to mental health resources. These can be incredibly helpful in processing your experience.

Remember, it's okay to ask for help. Taking care of your mental and emotional well-being is as important as your physical safety during the search.

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After the Search

Once the search is over, taking steps to care for yourself and stay connected with the cause is essential. **Here's what to do:**

Debriefing:

After the search, the organizers may offer a debriefing session to talk about your experiences, share what you've learned, and connect with others involved. **Participating in this session can help you** process what happened and feel supported by the group.

Self-Care:

You are taking care of yourself after the search is crucial. Make time to rest and recover, both physically and emotionally. Engage in activities that help you relax, like spending time with loved ones, exercising, or enjoying quiet time.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't hesitate to ask for support—whether talking to someone you trust or seeking professional help.

Staying Involved:

Even after the search is over, there are many ways you can continue to support Indigenous communities and the efforts to find missing people:

Spread Awareness:

Share information about missing person cases on social media or in your community to help raise awareness.

Volunteer Again:

If you feel ready, consider joining future searches or supporting other community initiatives.

Support Indigenous Causes:

Educate yourself about the issues facing Indigenous communities and find ways to contribute, whether through donations, advocacy, or volunteering.

Your involvement doesn't have to end with one search. By staying engaged, you can continue to make a positive impact.

Appendix: Additional Resources

For those who want to learn more or need further support, here's a list of resources that can help you deepen your understanding and maintain your well-being.

1

Understanding Indigenous Issues:



National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report:

A comprehensive report that explores the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada.
Available online at: **MMIWG Final Report**



Indigenous Foundations:

An information resource on key topics relating to the histories, politics, and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Canada.
Visit: **Indigenous Foundations - UBC**



Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Reports:

The TRC's findings on the legacy of residential schools and recommendations for reconciliation.
Access the reports here: **TRC Reports**

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Search and Rescue Tips:

Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC):

Offers basic search and rescue information and guidelines for volunteers.
Learn more at: **SARVAC**

The Basics of Search and Rescue (PDF):

A beginner's guide to understanding the essentials of search and rescue operations.
Download the guide at: **Basic Search and Rescue Guide**

Outdoor Survival and Safety Tips:

Useful advice for staying safe during searches, especially in wilderness areas.
Visit: **Survival and Safety Tips**

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Mental Health Support:

Hope for Wellness Help Line:

Provides immediate mental health counseling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous peoples across Canada.
Call 1-855-242-3310 or chat online at: **Hope for Wellness**

Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC):

Offers resources and tools to support mental wellness.
Explore their services at: **MHCC Resources**

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA):

Provides mental health support and resources, including crisis intervention services.
Find more information at: **Survival and Safety Tips**

Hope for Wellness Helpline

Mental Health Commission of Canada | Commission de la santé mentale du Canada

Canadian Mental Health Association | Association canadienne pour la santé mentale
Mental health for all | La santé mentale pour tous

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Staying Involved:





Indigenous-led Organizations:

Consider supporting or volunteering with organizations focusing on Indigenous rights and issues, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) at **NWAC** or the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society at **Caring Society**

Local Indigenous Community Centers:

Contact local Indigenous community centers to learn about opportunities to get involved in ongoing efforts to support Indigenous peoples.

These resources provide a starting point for further learning, support, and involvement.

By staying informed and connected, you can continue contributing to the well-being of Indigenous communities and the ongoing efforts to find missing loved ones.