OFFLINE RESILIENCE GUIDE // UK EDITION

Getting Found Outdoors : Location, 999 and Emergency Signals

How to make a rescue easier in the UK: give a useful location, call the right service, conserve the phone, stay put when instructed, and use simple light or whistle signals if communications fail.

7 MIN | UPDATED 25 SEP 2026 | UK FOCUS

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LAYER 1 // ACT

FIRST ACTIONS

Start here. Then read the conditions and exceptions below.

1. For mountain or cave rescue, dial 999 or 112, ask for Police, then Mountain Rescue or Cave Rescue.
2. Give your location, casualty details, nature of the emergency, party size and callback number.
3. A grid reference is especially useful in places without a street address.
4. After calling, stay where you are unless the rescue team or immediate danger requires movement.
5. A torch and whistle can signal for help when there is no usable phone connection.

> **IMPORTANT**
> This is preparedness information, not a substitute for emergency services, medical advice or instructions from responsible authorities. In immediate danger call 999 or 112.

Make the call simple

Mountain Rescue England and Wales says to dial 999 or 112, ask for Police, then Mountain Rescue. For cave rescue, ask for Police then Cave Rescue. Give the information you have; do not delay an emergency call because you cannot answer every question perfectly.

Before calling, if it is safe to do so, note your location, the nature of the emergency, the number of people involved, casualty details and your phone number. This reduces confusion if reception is poor.

Location beats a long description

A clear OS grid reference can place you far more accurately than “somewhere above the valley”. Ordnance Survey explains that a six-figure reference identifies a 100-metre square. Nearby landmarks, path names and coordinates can still help when a grid reference is unavailable.

Do not move away from a known safe location solely to search for a better phone signal unless the emergency service or immediate danger requires it. Moving can make you harder to find.

Stay contactable and conserve power

After the emergency call, keep the phone available. Reduce unnecessary screen use and calls. Rescue teams may call back or send a location link. If you must make another emergency call, repeat the essential information.

If you have hearing or speech difficulties, Mountain Rescue advises registering for the emergencySMS service before you need it.

Use simple signals when the phone cannot do the job

Mountain Rescue recommends six long whistle blasts or torch flashes over one minute, followed by a one-minute pause before repeating the signal. Continue until rescuers reach you; the signal can help them determine direction.

A whistle carries farther than shouting and uses less energy. A head torch also preserves the phone battery and makes a stationary group easier to identify after dark.

The objective is rescue, not proving self-reliance

Good fieldcraft reduces the chance of needing rescue, but once an injury, exposure problem or serious navigational failure exceeds your ability, asking for help early can prevent the situation becoming harder. The efficient decision is the one that reduces risk, not the one that looks most self-sufficient.

Useful kit for this plan

Equipment should support the plan, not replace judgement or skill. The commercial catalogue is kept on a separate page.

KIT IS KEPT SEPARATE
Named products and Amazon UK affiliate links are kept on the dedicated KIT page so this guide remains editorial. Use the kit only after the plan identifies a genuine equipment gap.

OPEN KIT →

Sources checked for this guide

We use public sources for the factual backbone and write the guide in our own words. Source pages can change, so the links below are the place to check current official advice.

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

Mountain Rescue England and Wales: In case of emergency

999/112 procedure, information to provide and staying in position.

https://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk/how-to-call-out-mr/

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

Mountain Rescue England and Wales: Stay safe

Whistle and torch distress signals, emergencySMS, essential kit and phone limitations.

https://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk/safety/

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

Ordnance Survey: Map-reading guide

Grid references and practical navigation preparation.

https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/documents/resources/map-reading.pdf

Editorial review date: 25 September 2026. If an official source conflicts with this page, follow the official source.

INFORMATION CHECK✓ **CURRENT REVIEW**

REVIEWED	NEXT REVIEW DUE	OFFICIAL REFERENCES
25 Sep 2026	23 Jan 2027	3 primary sources

If an official source conflicts with this guide, follow the current official source.

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