



Stalking & Cyberstalking

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The Prevention of Stalking

In recent years, the problem of stalking has become more pronounced. In most cases, it involves an unwanted romantic interest, such as an estranged husband or boyfriend. Stalking, however, may involve persons who are barely, if at all, acquainted as well as people who are known to each other.

What Is Stalking?

Stalking is the act of a person who, on more than one occasion, follows, pursues or harasses another person, and by actively engaging in a pattern of conduct, causes the victim to believe the offender will cause physical harm or mental distress to them.

Pattern of conduct means two or more actions or incidents closely related in time, whether or not there has been a prior conviction based on any of those actions or incidents.

Mental distress means any mental illness or condition that involves some temporary substantial incapacity or condition that would normally require psychiatric treatment.



Who Do Stalkers Target?

Anyone can be targeted by a stalker. Often, stalkers are former spouses or partners. A stalker may target a public figure or celebrity, a child, a casual acquaintance or a complete stranger.

Victims have said that stalking has changed the way they live their lives. A stalker may intrude by following a victim to and from home, work or social activities. A stalker sometimes intrudes by watching the victim's home, making harassing telephone calls, or sending threatening mail.

What Are the Criminal Offenses Involved?

The specific criminal offenses involved in stalking obviously vary from state to state. Some states have passed criminal statutes specifically prohibiting "menacing by stalking." In most states, these laws have escalating penalties for repeat offenses.

In addition to stalking, other crimes involved may include domestic violence, harassment by telephone, menacing, assault, criminal trespass and burglary.

What Should the Victim Do?

- **Notify the Police.** This is the first thing victims of stalking incidents should do. They should

notify the police department of jurisdiction where they live and where they work, if they work outside the home.

- **Maintain a Record.** The victim should maintain a detailed record of each encounter with the stalker. Included in this record of incidents should be dates, times, locations, complete description of the offender, words spoken, actions taken during the incident, actions taken afterward and names of witnesses. The victim may also wish to tape record threats made over the telephone or in direct encounters.
- Maintaining a record will allow the victim to refresh their memory about the incidents should they need to provide information to the police or testify in court.
- **Seek A Protection Order.** Temporary, emergency or civil protection orders (the terminology may differ between jurisdiction) are court orders intended to keep the stalker away from the victim by making it illegal for the stalker to have contact with the victim. In most jurisdictions, a person who violates a protection order can be found in contempt of court and jailed or fined. A person who violates a protection order is guilty of a criminal offense, usually a misdemeanor, but sometimes a felony, and is subject to criminal prosecution.

Prevention Techniques

It is difficult to prevent stalking, particularly if the offender is determined. The following are among the precautions or prevention techniques that can be adopted.

- If the victim works outside the home, the victim's supervisor should, in most cases, also be advised of the stalking incidents. They can lend support or possibly intervention.
- The victim should ideally have a portable cellular telephone. Some crime prevention programs have been initiated to lend cellular telephones (programmed to call 911) to victims of stalking.
- Either a temporary or permanent duress alarm system can possibly be installed at the victim's workplace.
- The victim should be very careful about locking their motor vehicle and be sure no one has hidden in the vehicle before entering it.
- If the victim works outside the home, the victim may want to have someone escort them to and from their motor vehicle.
- The victim should avoid walking alone in dark areas at night or in isolated areas any time of the day.
- The victim may carry a high decibel personal battery powered alarm device.
- The victim may want to change the locks on their home or apartment.

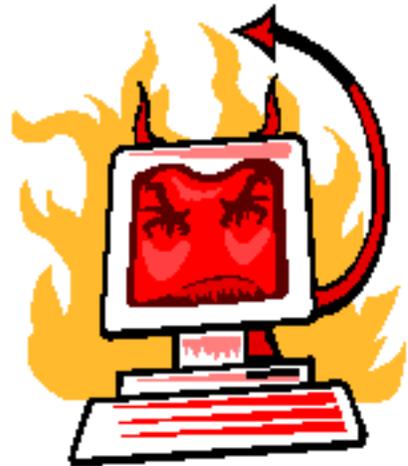
Cyberstalking

Every day millions of kids spend time in Internet chat rooms, talking to strangers. But what many children don't realize is that some of the surfers chatting with them may be sexual predators. More than 15 million children currently go online-more than 10 million of them in America. Are they safe? For that matter, are adults safe when they go online? The Internet has become a favorite place for pedophiles to select potential victims while hiding under the anonymous cloak of a chat name.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of cyberstalking, the term can be used to refer to the use of the Internet, email, or other electronic communications devices to stalk another person.

Stalking generally involves harassing or threatening behavior that an individual engages in repeatedly, such as following a person, appearing at a person's home or place of business, making harassing telephone calls, leaving written messages or objects, or vandalizing a person's property.

Most stalking laws require that the perpetrator make a credible threat of violence against the victim; other's include threats against the victim's immediate family' and still others require only that the alleged stalker's course of conduct constitute an implied threat.



Cyberstalking Facts

- Cyberstalkers feel they are anonymous and can get away with anything
- When caught, most cyberstalkers say they didn't mean to do it, or for it to go so far
- Most instances are not related to romances gone sour; a majority of the cases are stranger-to-stranger
- Over 20,000 cases of cyberstalking are being reported each year
- Over 90% of victims are women
- It is estimated there may be as many as 500,000 online victims each year

Examples of Cyberstalking

- Threatening or harassing email
- "Flaming" - online verbal abuse
- Mass unsolicited email
- Identity Theft
- Leaving improper messages at guestbooks or newsgroups from the victim
- Initiating directed computer viruses
- Email forgery - sending false or damaging email from the victim - usually to people they know like co-workers, employees, neighbors, etc.

Cyberstalking is expected to increase as computers and the Internet become more popular. By 2003, it is estimated there will be 500 million people online.

In 1991, California became the first state to pass an anti-stalking statute. Since then, 35 of 50 states have passed similar statutes.

States With Cyberstalking Laws

www.haltabuse.org/laws.htm

Why Do Cyberstalkers Stalk?

- **Sexual Harassment** - By far, the most common type of harassment and stalking online is sexual harassment. Online sexual harassment affords a degree of anonymity. The online harasser has no fear of physical retaliation (slap in the face) and does not have to leave the comfort of his home to find, pursue and harass targets.
- **Love Obsession** - Love obsession stalkers often believe that the target of their desires is really in love with them, which means they cannot understand the word "NO." A love obsession can start from an online romance, where one person then halts the romance, and the rejected lover cannot accept the end of the relationship. (In this case, detailed personal information is often shared between the persons involved).
- **Hate/Revenge Vendettas** Hate vendettas may have nothing to do with sexual harassment at all. There are more male targets in this category. Hate vendettas may begin with an argument or disagreement that escalates out of control. A vendetta may also be waged against someone because of their beliefs.
- **Power Trips/Ego Trips** - The victim is usually selected as a random target by someone they do not know. The motivation of the harassers is to show off their skills to themselves and their friends. They do not have a personal grudge against the victim - they are using the victim to demonstrate their power among their own group.



Comparing Offline (“in real life”) and Online Stalking

- **Similarities**
 - √ The majority of cases involve stalking by former intimates, although stranger stalking occurs in the real world and in cyberspace
 - √ Most victims are women; most stalkers are men
 - √ Stalkers are generally motivated by the desire to control the victim

- **Differences**

- √ Offline stalking generally requires the perpetrator and the victim to be located in the same geographical area; cyberstalkers can be located anywhere.
- √ Electronic communication technologies make it much easier for a cyberstalker to encourage third parties to harass and/or threaten a victim (impersonating the victim and posting messages to bulletin boards and in chat rooms, causing viewers of that message to send threatening messages back to the victim).
- √ Electronic communications technologies also lowers the barriers to harassment and threats; a cyberstalker does not need to physically confront the victim.



Prevention Tips

- Do not share personal information (real name, address, phone number, school information, marital status, occupation, income or passwords) in public spaces anywhere online, nor give it to strangers, including in email or chat rooms. Do not use your real name or nickname as your screen name or user ID. Pick a name that is gender-and-age neutral. And do not post personal information as part of any user profiles.
- Some filtering software programs can prevent children from posting or emailing an address, telephone number, or credit card number.
- Be extremely cautious about meeting online acquaintances in person. If you choose to meet, do so in a public place and take along a friend.
- Make sure your ISP and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) network have an acceptable use policy that prohibits cyberstalking. If your network fails to respond to your complaints, consider switching to a provider that is more responsive to user complaints.
- If a situation online becomes hostile, log off or surf elsewhere. If a situation places you in fear, contact a local law enforcement agency.



What To Do If You Are Being Cyberstalked

If you are receiving unwanted contact, make clear to that person that you would like him or her not to contact you again. you would like him or her not to contact you again.

- Save all communications for evidence. Do not edit or alter them in any way. Also, keep a record of your contacts with Internet system administrators or law enforcement officials.
- You may want to consider blocking or filtering messages from the harasser. Many email programs such as Eudora and Microsoft Outlook have a filter feature, and software can be easily obtained that will automatically delete emails from a particular email address or contain offensive words. Chat room contact can be blocked as well.
- If harassment continues after you have asked the person to stop, contact the harasser's Internet Service Provider (ISP). Most ISP's have clear policies prohibiting the use of their services to abuse another person. Often, an ISP can try to stop the conduct by direct contact with the stalker or by closing their account. If you receive abusive emails, identify the domain (after the "@" sign) and contact that ISP. Most ISP's have an email address such as abuse@(domain name) or postmaster@(domain name) that can be used for complaints. Visit the ISP web site for information on how to file a complaint
- Contact your local police department and inform them of the situation in as much detail as possible. In appropriate cases, they may refer the matter to state or federal authorities.



Cyberstalking Resources Online

- **CyberAngels:**
Non-profit group devoted to assisting victims of online harassment and threats, including cyberstalking

www.cyberangels.org

- **1999 Report on Cyberstalking: A New Challenge for Law Enforcement and Industry**
A comprehensive 24-page Department of Justice Publication



www.usdoj.gov/criminal/cybercrime/cyberstalking.htm

- **WHOA (Women Halting Online Abuse):**
Founded by women to educate the Internet community about online harassment.

www.haltabuse.org

- **Get Net Wise:**
Online resource for families and caregivers to help children use the Internet in a safe and educational manner.

www.getnetwise.org

- **Safety Ed:**
An excellent web site with an extensive amount of cyberstalking information.

www.saftyed.org

