

Stalking

What Is It?

Stalking is a pattern of behavior that makes you feel afraid, nervous, harassed, or in danger. It is when someone repeatedly contacts you, follows you, sends you things, talks to you when you don't want them to, or threatens you. Stalking behaviors can include:

- Writing letters.
- Damaging your property.
- Knowing your schedule.
- Showing up at places you go.
- Sending mail, e-mail, and pictures.
- Creating a Web site about you.
- Sending gifts.
- Stealing things that belong to you.
- Calling you repeatedly.
- Any other actions that the stalker takes to contact, harass, track, or frighten you.

You can be stalked by someone you know casually, a current boyfriend or girlfriend, someone you dated in the past, or a stranger. Getting notes and gifts at your home, in your locker, or other places might seem sweet and harmless to other people, but if you don't want the gifts, phone calls, messages, letters, or e-mails, it doesn't feel sweet or harmless. It can be scary and frustrating.

Sometimes people stalk their boyfriends or girlfriends while they're dating. They check up on them, page or call them all the time and expect instant responses, follow them, and generally keep track of them even when they haven't made plans to be together. These stalking behaviors can be part of an abusive relationship. If this is happening to you or someone you know, you should talk to someone.

Stalking is a crime and can be dangerous. The legal definition of stalking and possible punishment for it is different in every state. Contact a victim service provider or your local police to learn about stalking laws in your state and how you can protect yourself.

If You Are Being Stalked, You Might:

- Feel helpless, anxious, fearful, angry or depressed.
- Feel like you can never get away from the stalker.
- Think the stalker is always watching you.
- Feel frustrated that the stalker won't leave you alone.
- Have difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Have nightmares.
- Lose or gain weight.
- Not know what might happen next.

You're Not Alone

- 1,006,970 women and 370,990 men are stalked annually in the United States.¹
- 77 percent of female and 64 percent of male victims know their stalker.²
- The average length of time victims are stalked is 1.3 years.³
- One study of stalker found that 82 percent of stalkers who pursued female victims followed them, spied on them, stood outside their home, workplace, or place of recreation; 61 percent of stalkers made unwanted phone calls; 33 percent sent or left unwanted letters or items; 29 percent vandalized property; and 9 percent killed or threatened to kill a family pet.⁴
- A survey of university undergraduates revealed that 20 percent had been stalked or harassed by a former dating partner; 8 percent had initiated stalking or harassment; and 1 percent had been both the target and the initiator.⁵

Get Help

If you are stalked, it is not your fault. Stalkers are responsible for their behavior, not the victims.

If you believe that someone is stalking you, you can:

- Contact the police.
- Tell your parent, friend, school principal, or another person you can trust.
- If you don't know where to go for help, contact the National Crime Victim Helpline at 1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255) or gethelp@nvcv.org.

Help Yourself

Think about ways you can be safer. This means thinking about what to do, where to go for help, and who to call ahead of time.

- Where can you go for help?
- Who can you call?
- Who will help you?
- How will you escape a violent situation?

Here are other things you can do:

- Let friends or family members know when you are afraid or need help.
- When you go out, tell someone where you are going and when you'll be back.
- In an emergency, call 911 or your local police department.
- Memorize the phone numbers of people to contact or places to go in an emergency.
- Keep spare change, calling cards, or a cell phone handy.
- Save notes, letters, or other items that the stalker sends to you and keep a record of all contact that the stalker has with you. These items will be very useful to the police.
- If you choose to tell someone, you should know that some adults are mandated reporters. This means they are legally required to report neglect or abuse to someone else, such as the police or child protective services. You can ask people if they are mandated reporters and then decide what you want to do. Some examples of mandated reporters are teachers, counselors, doctors, social workers, and in some cases, coaches or activity leaders.
- If you want help deciding whom to talk to, call the National Crime Victim Helpline at 1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255), or an anonymous crisis line in your area. You might also want to talk to a trusted family member, a friend's parent, an adult neighbor or friend, an older sibling or cousin, or another experienced person who you trust.

Help Someone Else

If you know someone who is being stalked, you can:

- Encourage your friend to seek help.
- Be a good listener.
- Offer your support.
- Ask how you can help.
- Educate yourself about stalking. Avoid any confrontations with the stalker. This could be dangerous for you and your friend.

If You Want to Read More...

- about stalking, protective orders, a stalking safety plan, and a stalking log, or
- about dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and teen dating violence,

...see our GET HELP series at www.ncvc.org/gethelp.

1 Tjaden and Thoennes, "Stalking in America," (Washington, DC: NIJ, 2006).

2 Ibid.

3 Kris Mohandie et al., "The RECON Typology of Stalking: Reliability and Validity Based upon a Large Sample of North American Stalkers," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51 (2006): 152.

4 Ibid.

5 Jeffrey J. Haugaard and Lisa G. Seri, "Stalking and Other Forms of Intrusive Contact after the Dissolution of Adolescent Dating or Romantic Relationships," *Violence and Victims* 18 (2004): 3.