

## Stalking: Facts and Resources

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Stalking is a serious problem, and entails a deliberate pattern of threatening or annoying behaviour in the form of following you, threats, phone calls, letters, emails, sending "gifts" ("nice" gifts like flowers, or macabre items like dismembered animal parts), driving by your home, approaching you or your property, or surveillance - watching you, or tapping your phone.

A few facts:

- Stalking is overwhelmingly committed after the end of a relationship; most particularly one in which there was violence. Approximately 90% of women murdered by ex-spouses were stalked prior to the killing.
- Children may be stalked by sexual offenders for a considerable time before being assaulted.
- Teenagers often face stalking from spurned, or otherwise obsessed schoolmates.
- It may be committed by anyone - a complete stranger, or somebody you met just once.
- It may be short term, or in some cases span many years - stalkers have gone to great lengths to discover towns or even countries that their victims flee to, and follow them there.
- Stalking may appear to cease for a period of time, only to begin again just as the victim starts to feel safer.
- A victim may not even know who his/her stalker is, and they can be notoriously hard to apprehend.

- Cyberstalking has grown to worrying proportions in recent years, and causes considerable fear and distress.

Common causes of stalking are:

- Erotomania -a psychosis in which the stalker is deluded into thinking that the victim loves him or her. He/she thinks that the victim will appreciate his/her attempts to make contact. He/she lives in an alternate reality in which it is believed that the stalker and the victim 'belong together'.
- A desire to pursue and reclaim - particularly true post a relationship, and also often contains elements of alternate reality. Ex-partners often feel that they have a right to pursue, reclaim and dominate their ex-partner.
- Power - the stalker feels powerful by frightening and intimidating somebody.
- Malice - The stalker bears a grudge against the victim, and enjoys causing distress.
- Obsession with the victim. The stalker is preoccupied continually with the victim

If you have been stalked, or are being stalked:

- It is not your fault. Anyone can be selected by a stalker. In some cases they are truly dangerous, and mean harm - they may intend to commit rape or even homicide. But even if physical violence is not their intention, stalking is still a frightening invasion of your life and safety.
- Never think that your fear or anguish means you are overreacting. You're not - the repeated exposure to the fear and unsafety caused by stalking has been known to cause PTSD. Experts have identified a condition they call 'Inescapable Shock Trauma" - IST - Which is similar to PTSD (i.e. nightmares, poor sleep, depression, anxiety) and manifests in stalking victims. It may be especially severe in those who have attempted unsuccessfully to stop the stalking, or who have been 'played' with i.e. it stops and starts.
- Prolonged exposure to the unsafety of stalking is a real wound. People have been inclined to think that if they ignore it, will go away. If you are lucky, this may be true. But where a stalker is operating from obsession, no amount of ignoring them is likely to end the problem.

- It is common for people close to the victim to minimize the fear i.e. they 'he hasn't really done anything so don't worry'; 'shouldn't you be flattered by the attention?'. Alternately, they may face blame i.e. 'what did you do to attract his attention?' Try not to take any notice of such statements. Stalking is a very real violation. Stalking is a Crime. Your fear is perfectly justified
- You can take police action, and seek a restraining order. If the police won't act, ask to see somebody higher
- Like perpetrators of sexual violence, stalkers often thrive on secrecy. Break the silence. Get support. Many rape crisis counsellors are aware of the terror stalking causes, and will respond helpfully and empathically.
- If you are taking police action, evidence is important. Always record dates and times of incidents. Preserve emails and letters, or gifts. Keep telephone messages.
- Never attempt to apprehend your stalker. This may be extremely dangerous. Correspondence with them may be tendered in court as proof that you were doing the harassing!
- Stay safe - how is your home security? Can a colleague walk you to your car after work? Dogs may be useful, as may be a course in self-defense.

You deserve to be safe from stalkng. There is help for you. Please click [here](#) to browse helpful links about stalking, cyberstalking and harassment, and don't be afraid to ask for support from the board.

**Source acknowledgment: Melita Schaum and Karen Parrish, *Stalked: Breaking the Silence on the Crime of Stalking in America*, Pocket Books, New York, 1995.**

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