

When to Worry About Having a Stalker

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In honor of this month, we wanted to take the opportunity to discuss stalking, and its implications in both domestic and public life.

Stalker Definition: A person who engages in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for his or her safety or the safety of others or suffer substantial emotional distress. ([Department of Justice](#))

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According to [Dr. Park Dietz](#), a stalking consultant, one out of eight American women will have a stalker at one point in her life. For men, the numbers are still high, though not as threatening — one out of fifty. Stalking is an unnatural obsession that one person has with another. Every year, 6.6 million people are victims of stalking. Out of those 6.6 million, three out of ten report experiencing physical or emotional harm as a result. According to the CDC, 15 percent of women and six percent of men in the United States will have a stalker.

Stalking causes physiological, emotional, and sometimes physical harm to victims. If you believe that you are a victim of stalking, please contact the National Center for Victims of Crime at 1-855-4-VICTIM (1-855-484-2846). Your safety is a priority.

Why is Stalking a Serious Crime?

Stalking is a serious crime that affects millions of people every year. A victim of stalking can live with the fear and anxiety for years after the behavior was exhibited. They might struggle with the fear of death, violence, and pain, and live through years of PTSD. Cyberstalking laws do their best to protect male and female victims by submitting an actual notice of a criminal record to the law enforcement agency. Stalkers will be convicted and put through therapy to hopefully stop the stalker from feeling stalkerish tendencies again. Many stalkers struggle with a personality disorder and should be referred to meet with mental health professionals.

To understand why people can turn to stalkerish tendencies, we must first take a look at stalking statistics from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:

- 61% of female victims are stalked by a former intimate partner.
- 44% of male victims are stalked by a former intimate partner.
- 15% of women are chosen as the victims of stalkers.

- 6% of men are chosen as the victims of stalkers.
- 52% of stalking victims are between the ages of 18 and 29.
- 13% of college women reported being stalked during their first year of college.
- 3 out of 4 stalking victims know their stalker.
- 1 out of 4 stalkers is a predatory stalker.
- 31% of stalked females were sexually assaulted by the stalker.
- 76% of women murdered by an intimate partner were stalked first.
- 54% of victims reported stalking to the police before they were killed by their stalkers.
- 1 out of 7 stalking victims moved because of their victimization.
- 1 out of 4 stalking victims contemplated suicide.
- 1 out of 4 stalkers is a female stalker.

Stalking is not something that should be taken lightly. Stalking can lead to homicide, suicide, and emotional trauma.

What is a Stalker?

Stalking has been portrayed in the media as dangerous, abusive, and evil. Although those things can be true, stalking can also be benign. It is the effects that stalking has on the victims that makes it worrisome. Victims of stalkers often feel robbed of privacy, and they begin to feel suspicious of the people around them. They feel harassed, anxious, and frightened. Regardless of whether the stalker is dangerous like the character Joe Goldberg from the Netflix original *You*, or whether the stalker is an obsessive high-school friend, the feeling of being watched can scar the victim for years after the event.

What Does Stalk Mean?

Stalking is the unwanted pursuit of one person by another person. In state law, the legal definition of stalking is defined as the purposeful (sometimes malicious) act of repeated following. This includes harassment on social media, even if the harassment is well-intended in the stalker's point of view. Another definition of a stalker is a

person (the stalker) who's conduct has caused fear, anxiety, or emotional distress to another person (the victim of stalking).

All 50 states in the United States have laws against stalking behaviors. Although each state will define stalking differently, stalking laws are meant to protect the victim from harm. Stalking laws allow the victims to quickly request a restraining order from the court. This protective order will be modified by the court as the court sees fit. Law enforcement will do their best to enforce any stalking cases, and the violation of a restraining order could result in jail time for the offender. Depending on the state where you live, the law revolving around stalking will vary. Some states give varying consequences to stalker behavior, depending on the emotional or physical damage done to the victim and the defendant. If the victim has a bodily injury of any kind, the crime is a felony. If the offender is convicted of felony stalking, the prosecution will always result in jail time for the criminal offense.

Other states require that the offender must have made a direct threat to the victim before the behavior is considered a threat. Victims of crime may experience harassing behavior and distress, but until the perpetrator makes a threat, the crime can't be taken seriously by the police. The crimes that will be taken seriously are, but are not limited to, sexual harassment, unwanted intimate relationships, domestic violence, cyberstalking, harassment in the workplace, violence of any kind, and [criminal trespassing](#). If you feel like you are in an unsafe situation, please call the police to report your situation. Stalking victims should find comfort in knowing that the law is on their side.



Inside the Mind of a Stalker

Why does a person choose to stalk a past lover? What happens in their minds that makes them become violent? Who is at risk of becoming a target for a stalker? Knowing why people do what they do can help us to better understand a stalker's tendencies. If we understand the thought process, we can understand why a person stalks another person and hopefully prevent stalking behaviors from occurring (or at least catch the person before it becomes serious or dangerous).

When a stalker picks their target, it is often someone who was in a past intimate relationship with the person. At first, their conduct will seem normal. The stalker might reach out several times and give unwanted attention to the victim. But, other than that, the stalker will seem completely normal. Stalker behavior will often escalate one degree at a time. Sometimes, their conduct might even seem pleasant, like leaving notes and flowers on the person's car. A majority of stalkers will spend several months online, looking up any and all information there is to be found on their person of interest. After that, the stalker will move to electronic communication.

The electronic communication might include emails, Facebook messages, commenting on Instagram photos, unwanted phone calls, and interacting with you over social media. They might create several social media accounts to stay in contact with the victim. At this point, the stalker is no more than online stalking and presents little threat (although it might be unsettling). Most people don't find this initial interest to be frightening, and most people don't report this type of interaction. Cyber stalking is common and hard to report since the person might be genuinely trying to reach out.

However, as the stalking behavior intensifies, the stalker will reach out to family members, friends, family friends, and colleagues. The stalker will look for ways to get information that can't be found online. The person might fake having a relationship with their victim and tell friends and family that the relationship is serious. At this point, the safety of the victim is compromised.

As the stalker begins to create new images and new memories, reality ceases to exist. In the stalker's mind, the victim is invested in their relationship, and it transforms into one of many delusional disorders. The stalker is no longer considered "safe" since any action on their part will be justified irrationally. Hopefully, this is the state of mind where local law enforcement should work to catch stalkers and help the victim find appropriate victim services for their mental health. If you or a loved member of your family feel like you could be in this situation, please contact [criminal justice services](#) and use one of the many resource centers available for victims of stalking.

If the situation is not resolved, the actions of the stalker will continue to escalate, and the safety of the victim will be at risk. After contacting the victim's family, the stalker will begin showing up "coincidentally" at the same locations as the victim. The victim will see the stalker in other situations like outside work, outside the home, and at all other locations where the victim frequently visits. At this point, the victim becomes frightened by the constant presence of the stalker. In the stalker's mind, the relationship is strong between the stalker and the victim.

Because the victim is frightened, the victim will usually start to push the stalker away by avoiding the stalker, ignoring phone calls and text messages, and verbally commanding the stalker to stay away. Very few people turn to the police at this point since they believe that the situation is a personal concern. However, the stalker will see the distance as a breakup. Now, the stalker bridges into a category of stalkers called "resentful stalkers." Resentful stalkers are prone to violence and cruelty.

Rather than following you and leaving notes and flowers, the stalker will vandalize property, send threatening messages, and break into the victim's home while the victim is away. In this situation, the stalker believes that

they have been wronged, and the stalker sees himself or herself as the victim. To the stalker, everything has turned against him or her, and the relationship has fallen apart. The stalker is angry and feels deceived. If this continues to escalate, the stalker might leave dead animals in the victim's car, on the porch, or inside the home. After that, the stalker is likely to physically attack, rape, or kill the victim. For the stalker who has fallen this far, any form of violence has been rationalized.

How to Deal With a Stalker

Stalkerish behavior, once it begins, can escalate quickly. However, stalkers are also difficult to predict since they will each have a different reason for their behavior. For some stalkers, they admit that the reason was infatuation with their victim. For others, it was anger that their romantic relationship with the victim had ended. Since a majority of victims report having known the stalker, victims might benefit from hiring a private investigator to look into the situation. The signs of stalking begin early and won't be taken seriously by the local law enforcement agency until a serious threat has been made. However, waiting until a serious threat is made can be dangerous for the victim and may scare the victim's mental health. Early signs will help you determine what to do if you have a stalker.

Victims should feel comfortable to reach out to friends and family to make them aware of the situation for the personal safety of everyone the victim is close to. Sometimes, if the stalker is unable to contact the victim, the stalker may turn to the family and friends of the victim. If you suspect that you may have a stalker, change your privacy settings on your social media profiles since your social networking sites will be the first place the stalker will be. If needed, change your cell phone number and carry pepper spray in your bag.

The best time to take action is at the beginning phases of stalking. If you learn how to handle a stalker before the situation becomes dangerous, you will avoid possible danger. Just because you know the person who may be stalking you, does not mean that the situation won't become dangerous.

The first sign that you may have a stalker is that you receive odd and seemingly obsessive voicemail messages. Constant messages paired with texts, emails, and a feeling of obsession could indicate that the person is falling into stalkerish behavior. If incidents like that are common, it's a sign that the person is a stalker. If you know the person, speak with them in a very public place and treat them like a reasonable person. You should recommend that they seek professional help and warn them against contacting you in the future.

If the stalker was in a past romantic relationship with you and you experienced domestic violence of any kind, do not meet with the person one on one. Stalking is common after intimate partner violence since it suggests an unhealthy relationship to begin with. Instead of meeting or talking with the person, contact your police station and alert them of the past history between you and the stalker. Then, create a safety plan and move to be in a safe place where the stalker will not be able to find you. Across the country, there are hundreds and thousands of domestic violence shelters that will take you in and protect you. You can also call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), and they will provide advice and help. If you need to leave the shelter, carry a personal attack alarm that will alert police if you are kidnapped by the stalker.

Stalking that is a result of domestic violence or an abusive relationship is the most dangerous type of stalking. Perpetrators of violence are dangerous and irrational. If you think you are in danger, alert the police. If you feel unsafe in your home, installing a [home security system](#) will help to secure the boundaries of your home.

What Do Stalkers Want From Their Victims?

The behavior of stalkers is often referred to as relentless, neurotic, and obsessive. Before stalking their victims, stalkers will show other signs of obsessive behavior in their lives. When they target a person, their obsessive mind fixates on that person, and they are unable to think of anything other than seeing that person. When the stalker's irrational advances are met with disdain, the stalker becomes angry and may seek violence as a form of revenge against the victim. Understanding what stalkers want from their victims may help victims learn how to get rid of a stalker.

Brook Zitek, DO, a forensic psychiatrist at Temple University School of Medicine in Philadelphia, says, “Stalking is much more than about inducing fear.” In some cases, stalking isn’t meant to induce fear in the victim, even though it will. Stalking is repetitive phone calls, unwanted gifts, and unsolicited attention. According to psychologists, there are five main types of stalkers. Their specific tendencies answer the question of “Why do people stalk?” Each type of stalker seeks something specific from their victims.

1. **The Rejected Stalker.** After a relationship has ended, the offender feels hurt, lost, and betrayed. The person might experience high levels of jealousy, narcissism, and may have been physically or emotionally abusive while in the relationship. The person wants to rekindle the relationship and follows the victim closely. The offender watches for signs of infidelity and tries to make sense of the breakup. Often, the stalker attempts to reinsert themselves into the life of the victim. The stalker will show up at work, at the victim’s home, and call excessively on the victim’s cell phone. The rejected stalker wants to make things work again. However, other times the rejected stalker is looking for revenge because they feel wronged.
2. **The Resentful Stalker.** This category of stalker wants to frighten and intimidate their victim. They often feel like the victim has severely wronged them and deserves to be punished. The resentful stalker has likely been hurt in the past and carries the mentality of “this was the last time.” Because of this, the resentful stalker can be incredibly dangerous. They are paranoid, obsessive, and only want to hurt their victim. This stalker is the most likely to be overly obsessive and will threaten to hurt the victim. Studies show that this type of stalker can be controlled if legal actions are taken early on into the behavior. However, if the behavior is not controlled early, the situation is likely to become dangerous.
3. **The Predatory Stalker.** This type of stalker does not usually know the victim. The predatory stalker follows with the intent to physically and sexually abuse the victim. They are motivated by sexual desires and often find gratification in raping their victims. When this type of stalker is following a victim, they will not make themselves known. They will not call excessively or leave notes. This makes them incredibly dangerous and extremely likely to be violent. Because they do not contact the victim before

the crime, it's hard to know when to alert the police. To keep yourself safe from a predatory stalker, always carry pepper spray, a rape whistle, and do not travel alone at night.

4. The Intimacy Seeker. This type of stalker may know their victim personally or stalk a complete stranger. The intimacy stalker believes that he or she has developed a deep and personal relationship with the victim and believes to be in love with the victim. The intimacy stalker also believes that the victim expresses love in return (whether or not that is the case). This stalker sees the victim as their ideal partner and obsesses over the relationship. He or she will interpret any interaction with the victim as positive affirmation, even if the victim is yelling, "Stop stalking me!" The stalker is resilient and unlikely to change his or her beliefs about the relationship. If the stalker realizes that he or she is being rejected, the stalker may become violent.
5. The Incompetent Suitor. This stalker is not violent and is unlikely to become violent. The incompetent suitor simply wants to have a relationship with the victim. The stalker believes that the victim should have feelings for them and may not understand why the feelings are not being reciprocated. The stalker will leave notes, flowers, and cards for the victim and call excessively. If the stalker is met with legal repercussions, the stalker is likely to give up.

How to Prove You Are Being Stalked

If you are seeing the same man or women following you, you might start to wonder, "Am I being stalked?" If you're suspecting that you have a stalker, it's probable that you have a reason to think that. Another word for stalker is "hunter" or "pursuer," meaning that the situation can be dangerous if it is not handled immediately. A stalker's behavior may change from situation to situation; although, the patterns roughly stay the same. If your question turns into the statement that "someone is stalking me" it is time to seek immediate help.

If you believe that you are being stalked, first determine what to do if someone is stalking you. Many sites, including this article, will provide insight and assistance to help you decide what to do if you are being stalked. Some sites that may offer relief are:

- <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/stalking>
- <https://www.stalkingawareness.org/what-to-do-if-you-are-being-stalked/>
- https://victimsofcrime.org/docs/src/aybs_english_color.pdf?sfvrsn=4

These websites offer phone numbers and helplines for victims of stalkers. They will also help you with how to report a stalker and how to know if someone is stalking you. Stalking and harassment should not be taken lightly. These sites will balance the legal definition of stalking with your experience and help you to know how to proceed. Often, a private investigator can be hired to help you prove that someone is stalking you. Once you have proof (most states will need a small amount of proof), you can sign for a restraining order.

How to Feel Safe at Home

Your home is meant to be your sanctuary. It is where you can escape from the world and relax. If you have been a victim of stalking, you may feel vulnerable in your home. To begin reestablishing trust in the walls of your home, you should consider installing [security cameras](#), [door alarms](#), purchase a [panic button](#) and other home security devices that will help you to feel safe in your home.

Many victims of stalking find comfort in using home security systems. The systems help to secure every door, window, and garage, to prevent strangers from getting inside. Security cameras installed inside the house allow you to watch over your home when you're away, ensuring that you will know exactly when a person enters your home. Each feature included in a home security system is created in order to protect, secure, and defend.

Cove Security offers home security systems to help families and individuals feel more safe and secure in their homes. With motion detection, remote monitoring, and professional monitoring, your home will be completely secured against every threat.

For more information or to set up a home security system, contact [Cove Security](#) today.