

Domestic Violence Safety Plan for Stalking

WHAT IS STALKING?

Stalking is one person's obsessive behavior directed toward another person, behavior that causes the victim to fear for his/her safety. The stalker usually starts with annoying, obscene, or threatening phone calls or written communications within a short time after separation or divorce. The stalker may move from harassing communication to following the victim, and staking out workplaces and home. There may be acts of violence targeted at the victim's property, pets, and the victim herself/himself. But keep in mind that human behavior cannot be accurately predicted, so it is impossible to gauge when and if a stalker will become violent. However, remember that stalking is rooted in obsessive behavior, which in and of itself is dangerous.

WHAT SHOULD A STALKING VICTIM DO?

1. Do your best to safely avoid all contact with the stalker.
 2. Inform family, friends, and co-workers of what is going on regarding the stalking behavior.
 3. Report the stalking to the police and follow their advice.
 4. Keep a journal or log of all stalking incidents.
 5. Keep all letters, packages, e-mails messages, facsimiles, and taped telephone messages received from the stalker.
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WORKING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

The police or sheriff's department will actively investigate matters concerning _____ (depends on state statute).

Although it is their intention to provide you with a professional investigative service, please be advised that the police or sheriff's department cannot guarantee that your situation will be resolved, nor can they guarantee your safety. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict human behavior. Suspects may be mentally disordered or may be substance abusers. A lethality assessment is always situational, based upon an evolving and changing set of factors.

Based upon available information, the police or sheriff's department can provide you with security recommendations, which will help you make your own decisions on how to best secure your safety.

Should you feel that additional security measures are required, such as a domestic violence shelter, you are certainly entitled to avail yourself of these measures.

Your cooperation by working within the criminal justice system is necessary for the proper investigation of this matter and is greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact the police or sheriff's department should any questions or concerns arise.

RESIDENTIAL SECURITY

- All adults in the house should be trained in the use of any firearm kept for protection. The firearm should be stored safely and away from children.
- Household staff/employees should have a thorough background check before employment. Institute and strictly enforce a policy that prohibits the staff from discussing family matters.
- Be aware of any unusual packages, boxes, or devices found on the premises. Do not investigate strange objects; call the police or sheriff's department immediately.
- Install smoke detectors and maintain fire extinguishers on all levels of the residence.
- Tape emergency contact numbers on each phone in the residence.
- When leaving the residence for a period of time, have lights, television, and radio set on a timer.
- Have a thorough safety plan that incorporates an emergency evacuation plan.
- Purchase a dog; dogs are an inexpensive alarm system. Hint: Dogs purchased by or familiar with the stalker provide no protection!
- Know the daily schedule/whereabouts of all family members.
- Accompany children to school or bus stops.
- Vary daily routines, such as your route to work, etc.
- Require identification from all servicepeople and salespeople before permitting them to enter the residence.
- Try to park in a secured area such as a garage when possible. Inform a trusted neighbor of the situation and provide her or him with a vehicle and suspect description.

SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be alert at all times for suspicious persons.
- Positively identify persons before opening the door -- install wide-angle viewers in primary doors.
- Install a porch light at a height that discourages removal.
- Install dead-bolt locks on all outside doors. If keys are missing, replace all locks. You may want to replace all the locks regardless, assuming the stalker may have made a copy of the key(s).
- Keep the garage door locked at all times. Use an electric garage-door opener.
- Install floodlights around your residence that are on a timer or that have motion activation.
- Trim shrubbery, especially away from doors and windows.

- Keep your fuse box locked. Have flashlights, candles, and lanterns throughout the house.
- Install a loud exterior alarm that can be activated from several places within the residence.
- Maintain an unlisted phone number.
- Any written, e-mailed, or telephone threats should be treated as legitimate and the police or sheriff's department should be notified.
- Inform trusted neighbors of any anticipated vacation and/or business trips, and arrange for someone to pick up the mail, newspapers, etc.
- If residing in an apartment complex, provide the manager and security guard with a picture of the suspect.
- If you are considering purchasing a gun for your protection, weigh your decision based on these cautions:
 1. The offender may use it against you.
 2. Most people hesitate to shoot an intruder.
 3. There is potential for accidental injury, especially if you have children in the house.

(You should consider taking handgun lessons to learn proper weapon handling, safety, and familiarity, as well as the legal aspects of deadly force. Some states may require this in order to purchase the handgun.)

WORKPLACE SECURITY

- If you have a security guard or agency, inform them of the situation and provide them with a photograph and a description of the suspect.
- Have a secretary or co-worker screen calls.
- Have a secretary or security screen all incoming mail and packages.
- Be aware of people following you to and from work.
- Do not accept any packages unless you personally ordered them.
- Central reception should handle all visitors and packages.
- Office staff should be aware of the situation so they are alert to suspicious people, parcels, or packages.
- Establish lock-and-key control: Change locks if the keys of terminated employees are unaccounted for.
- Park in a secured area if possible.
- Have your name removed from your reserved parking spot, if applicable.

PERSONAL SECURITY

- Obtain a mailbox address and file a change of address with the Post Office.
- Send a note to friends, businesses, etc., giving them your new address and requesting that they remove your old address from their files.
- All current creditors should be given the new address and remove the old from their system.
- Obtain a new driver's license and file a change of address with the motor vehicle department.
- Remove your home address from personal checks and business cards.
- Destroy discarded mail.
- Telephone lines can be installed in a location other than your residence and call forwarded to your home.
- Place residential agreements in a trusted friend's or relative's name.
- Your name should not appear on service or delivery orders to the residence.
- Record activities such as vandalism or property damage.
- Keep a log of the stalker's activities.
- Leaving a violent relationship is oftentimes dangerous and a safety plan is necessary.
- Discuss with the police or sheriff's department whether you qualify for a protection order.
(Protection orders, when properly enforced, enhance your safety and aid law enforcement in holding the offender accountable for his behavior.)

WHAT IS A PROTECTION ORDER? (CONSULT STATE STATUTE FOR SPECIFICS.)

- Contact a shelter or district attorney for details on protection orders, the application process, and related details.
- A protection order is a paper signed by a judge to protect a victim from certain people who have battered or threatened them. In some states, protection orders are available against stalkers as well. The protection order may be able to be obtained without having a lawyer.
- Persons abused by family or household members are eligible.
- All courts can issue orders of protection.
- Typical process of obtaining the order:
 - Victim files petition with clerk of the court
 - Clerk provides forms and assistance

- Emergency protection order is issued by judge at ex-parte hearing
- Full hearing is held within 30 days; if continuance is necessary, the emergency protection order is extended for 30 days
- Full order is issued after the hearing, is in place for one year, and can be renewed
- Possible terms of the order:
 - Enjoin from abuse, harassment, direct, or indirect contact
 - Stay away orders
 - Award possession of the residence
 - Temporary child custody and visitation arrangements
 - Payment of shelter costs
 - Awarding custody of property
 - Counseling
- The respondent (suspect) must be served before a full hearing can be held. Service is done by the sheriff or another law enforcement officer.
- Violation of the protection order is contempt of court, a Class B misdemeanor (depending on the state statute). Subsequent violations may induce felony charges.

NOTE: Please be aware that you are not necessarily safe because you have filed for a protective order. The suspect may choose to violate the order like s/he has the criminal statutes. Remain safety conscious.

RESOURCE NUMBERS

Emergency numbers:

Local police/911 _____

State police _____

Victim/witness services _____

Emergency shelter:

YWCA shelter _____

Local domestic violence shelter _____

Legal help:

Victim/witness services _____

Local domestic violence shelter _____

Lawyer referral services _____

Prosecutor's office _____

Court clerk (protection order) _____

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-799-SAFE (7233) • www.ndvh.org

1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

National Stalking Resource Center:

1-800-FYI-CALL (394-2255) • www.ncvc.org/src

(Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. EST)

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