

Stalking

"Stalking is unwanted behaviour carried out by obsessive or fixated individuals whose actions disrupt their victim's life. Stalking results in alarm, distress or fear of violence in a victim. It may also escalate to other crimes".



Stalking: Is it happening?

Stalking means persistent and unwanted attention that makes you feel pestered, harassed and threatened. This can include a range of behaviour; the important thing is that you find it unwanted and unwelcome. Stalking can happen to anyone. Most people know their stalker in some way, but some people don't or may have only had a brief encounter with them.

Stalking can build up slowly over time, and it may be very subtle or even feel flattering at the beginning. This can make it hard to recognise. Stalking can also go on for a long time, which can make you feel overwhelmed and worried that it will never stop.

Is stalking happening?

- Repeated unwanted contact, by phone, text, in person or online
- Unwanted gifts, even if they seem like nice things such as flowers
- Gifts that might not seem strange to anyone else, but might have significant meaning to you which makes you feel threatened
- Persistently trying to get around any measures you may take to avoid contact, such as making fake online profiles to contact you if you block them
- Contacting friends and family in person, online or by phone, as a way of getting to you
- Always seeming to know where you are and what you are doing, making you feel like you are being watched
- Turning up at work or school
- Hanging around places you may be, even if they don't speak to you
- Damaging your property or property of your family and friends
- Using threats to coerce you into meeting them
- Spreading stories about you to other people
- Persistent breaching of orders that may have been put in place to protect you
- Making you fear that violence will be used against you. They may have been violent to you in the past, making this threat feel very real

These are just some of the ways a stalker may try to get to you, there may be others.

Who stalks?

When many people hear the word stalking they still think of a stranger lurking in the shadows or a delusional fan following a celebrity. Whilst these cover some stalking scenarios they are by no means the majority. About 45% of people who contact the National Stalking Helpline are being stalked by ex-intimates (i.e. ex-partners) and a further third have had some sort of prior acquaintance with their stalker; you may have dated, married or been a friend with your stalker. Just because you know/knew the stalker does not mean that the situation is your fault - it is still stalking and it is wrong.

However, stalking is a crime.

What does the law say?

Stalking became a criminal offence on 25 November 2012. Amendments were made to the Protection from Harassment Act were made that made stalking a specific offence in England and Wales for the first time.

Stalking itself is not legally defined, but the Act includes a list of intentional behaviours which together constitute stalking. This is because the ways stalking is carried out can vary widely.

The joint CPS and Police Protocol defines Stalking as:

“

A pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour which is intrusive. It can include harassment that amounts to stalking or stalking that causes fear of violence or serious alarm or distress

”

Stalking behaviours suggest greater risk of harm and require greater consideration of risk management. Stalking will often focus on a person

Cyber-enabled Stalking

Cyber-enabled stalking is an 'expansion' of Stalking, in that it includes the use of online tools and technologies to either enable the stalking or complete the stalking in its entirety.

The level of technology available to the average consumer continues to increase at a significant pace; smart doorbells, digital assistants, pet microchips and other smart tracking tags have all helped to improve the comfort, safety and security of the public over recent years. However, with these rapid advances in accessible technology comes increased risk for some of the most vulnerable people in society. Smart tags the size of a key fob can be used by perpetrators of stalking to monitor their victims' movements.

The internet, hardware and software can be used for a range of purposes, for example:

- to locate personal information about a victim
- to communicate with the victim
- as a means of surveillance of the victim
- identity theft such as subscribing the victim to services, purchasing goods and services in their name
- remote access of heating or other functions within the home (economic abuse)
- damaging the reputation of the victim
- electronic sabotage such as spamming and sending viruses
- accessing spyware or malware
- tricking other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim

Cyber-enabled stalking is no different to 'standard stalking' in that it can and does have a very serious impact on its victims. The actions of stalkers often compel victims to changes their daily habits and routines. Understanding the risks presented by these readily available devices is vitally important.

Advice for victims of cyber-enabled stalking

Modern technology, and social media, makes it easy for perpetrators of stalking to have ready access to their victims, and can bombard them digitally across a wide range of methods and platforms utilise hardware and software. As a result, many victims are receiving over a hundred electronic communications daily.

Most people's reaction to this display of fixated obsession would be to block their stalker's number or delete them on social media and this may seem like good advice to give. In fact the opposite is true, because:

- Communications can be used as evidence in an investigation and or stalking protection order.
- Blocking a perpetrator may increase the risk of them trying to make physical contact with the victim and or those around them.
- Blocking can force the stalker to lose their sense of '**control**', elevating their fixation and frustration to more dangerous or violent tactics ultimately increasing the risk posed to victim(s).
- Victims often feel better prepared knowing what the perpetrator is thinking, feeling, doing and where they are.

MUTE **DON'T** BLOCK



Stalking victims are advised not to block their stalkers on social media, particularly if it's someone they know or an ex-partner.



A victim should never be advised / told to block a phone number. It's important to explain to victims that if contact via mobile devices is stopped, the stalker may decide to start trying to make physical contact.

Tweaking of notification settings can help with the emotional impact of the bombardment of contact.

See: Secure Your Tech, Safety Information from Refuge
<https://refugetechsafety.org/secure-your-tech/>

Supporting victims to collate evidence

Keeping a record of experiences, in the form of a log or diary can victims build up a picture of the course of conduct they are being subjected to. Encourage victims to document in detail about each incident as soon possible after it happens, including time and date and how this made them feel. (Some victims will be hesitant to call the police). Ask victims to retain evidence, which may be in the form of electronic messages, screenshots of social media contacts or posts; gifts or other items left for them or family members, at home or work. CCTV recordings, in the form of ring alarms, dash cameras etc.

This will be especially important if for some reasons, a report of Stalking is made, and case is filed due to insufficient evidence. The stalking may continue, and a log of evidence may make it possible to prosecute and seek a stalking protection order in the future.

A stalking log template is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/fx77n3b2>

Tips and Advice

General advice

- Do not engage with your stalker in any way.
- Talk to family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, or your manager about the stalking if you feel comfortable doing so. They may be able to help by collecting further evidence on your behalf or by putting protective measures in place.
- Be aware of how much of your personal information is in the public domain and take steps to protect your data.
- Above everything, trust your instincts.
- Call 999 if you are in danger.

Physical Stalking

- Consider carrying a personal alarm.
- Vary your daily routine and take different routes to and from work.
- Know where the nearest safe location is, for instance a police station. But, if there isn't one nearby, you could use a 24-hour supermarket with security guards and CCTV.
- Talk to the police about using CCTV and/or installing a panic button at your home.
- Consider installing an alarm system.
- Ensure all your doors and windows are locked before you leave home or go to sleep.
- Seek support of specialist services in your area (see Local Contacts at the bottom of this information).

Cyber Safety

- Get your computer checked for malware and key logging software.
- Change your passwords frequently and don't use the same password for everything.
- Limit the amount of information you share about yourself on social networking site and check your privacy settings to ensure you are not giving away more information about yourself than you intend to.
- Keep your anti-virus software up-to-date.
- Report any stalking activity on websites to the administrators. If they won't act, contact the web hosting company.

Stalking in the Workplace

Stalking can take place in many forms in the workplace. Some stalkers are colleagues or clients of the victim, others are individuals who are unrelated to the workplace but who make contact with the victim at work because of ease of access or to cause them further distress.

Stalking behaviour can include:

- Telephone calls
- Following
- Making false complaints to employers
- Monitoring or spying
- Hacking
- Visiting place of work

Suzy Lamplugh Trust's [Stalking in the Workplace Guide](https://tinyurl.com/4dxyzdu4)

(<https://tinyurl.com/4dxyzdu4>) offers advice to help employees and employers to manage the risk of stalking, plus advice on setting up a Workplace Stalking Policy.

Advice for professionals

DO

- Record the extent of the victim's perception of risk of harm
- Take allegations of threats to kill very seriously
- Complete a [DASH risk assessment](https://tinyurl.com/yc66ttsc) (<https://tinyurl.com/yc66ttsc>, available in different languages) and 11 stalking [SDASH screening questions](https://tinyurl.com/3vwyfe6k) (<https://tinyurl.com/3vwyfe6k>) and refer it on for action
- Seek specialist advice from West Midlands Police or National Stalking Helpline

DON'T

- Send the victim away believing that it is not a serious matter or say that they are lucky to receive this level of attention.
- Think it any less serious if there has been no physical violence.
- Suggest that the victim talk/meet with the stalker to resolve issues.
- Tell the victim to change their phone number or to block their number. This will not stop the behaviour – they will find another means of contact and could escalate risk.

Risk considerations: The context and detail of the behaviours are crucial. Research shows that those who are at highest risk of assault are ex-intimate partners who have been threatened.

Local Support

- ♦ See domestic abuse website for professionals:
[Help and advice about domestic abuse](#)
- ♦ If you need advice or support go to Solihull Council's Domestic Abuse website. Here you will find information on services for survivors, children/young people and perpetrators.
- ♦ West Midlands Stalking Service: Supports women and men over 16 who are experiencing stalking and harassment across the West Midlands including Solihull.
 - Call 0121 553 0090 (covers Coventry, Solihull, Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell)
 - www.blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk
- ♦ Referral form: <https://tinyurl.com/24fknx9u>

National Support

- ♦ National Stalking Helpline (Suzy Lamplugh Trust)
 - See: www.stalkinghelpline.org
 - Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm (except Wednesday 9:30am to 8pm) or call 0808 802 0300
- ♦ Paladin National Stalking Advocacy Service: Paladin NSAS is a trauma-informed service to assist high risk victims of stalking in England and Wales
 - See: www.paladinservice.co.uk or call 0207 8408960
- ♦ Protection Against Stalking | Look Forward Not Behind
 - See: <https://www.protectionagainststalking.org/>
- ♦ Local Police or 999 if you or someone is in danger. 101 if it is not an emergency

A New Tool to Safeguard Victims of Stalking

The new national Unwanted Prisoner Contact service (formerly Victims Helpline) prevents victims, including survivors of domestic abuse or any member of the public, from receiving unwanted contact from prisoners. It is a hugely important service. It protects victims and witnesses from unwanted contact.

Who can use it?

Anyone who wishes to stop contact from prisoners. This includes stopping unwanted letters, blocking phone calls, texts, messages from a prisoner.

This is a service anyone can use, including members of the public (including all victims of crime), a family member or friend acting on behalf of the victim, police, probation, victim liaison officer acting on behalf of the victim, or from an organisation working on behalf of the victim to block the contact, for example: solicitors, victim and / or domestic abuse charities

How do I access the service?

The process to stop contact is simple, fast, and easy, the quickest way is to use the online portal: [Stop prisoner contact online form](https://tinyurl.com/ynmujap8) (<https://tinyurl.com/ynmujap8>)

The service can also be accessed by email: unwantedprisonercontact@justice.gov.uk or telephone: 0300 060 6699, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm

Videos and resources you might find useful

- Alice Ruggles Trust Video - three-minute animated video to raise awareness of stalking: <https://youtu.be/nllxOwu3zbo>
- West Midlands Police: [We're talking stalking - life isn't like the movies](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GvBovL5TkY) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GvBovL5TkY)
- Staffordshire Police: [Let's Talk Stalking](https://youtu.be/Z9aAD_hmkLA) (https://youtu.be/Z9aAD_hmkLA)
- [Am I being Stalked](#) – self assessment tool available in different languages (Suzy Lamplugh Trust)
 - <https://tinyurl.com/zrzax5cy>
- Hollie Guard Personal Safety app - offers a discreet mobile safety solution, empowering users to alert loved ones and emergency services during distressing situations. <https://hollieguard.com/>
- Bright Sky app is free to use and can help spot the signs of abuse, know how to respond, and find a safe route to support. The app is available on both the Apple App Store and the Android Play Store <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>