

Harassment and Stalking: What Is It and What Can I Do To Protect Myself?

What is Harassment?

Harassment is a crime in which a person seeks to harass, annoy, or alarm another person with repeated contact or telephone calls, physical contact, obscene language, or gestures.

Harassment by Stalking:

- A person commits harassment by stalking when they directly, or indirectly through another person, make a credible threat; and in conjunction with that threat commit any of the following activities:
- Intent to harass, annoy, or alarm another person, including physical contact of any kind (striking, shoving, kicking, or otherwise touching another person or subjecting them to physical contact).
- Obscene language or gestures, obscene comments, or gestures directed toward a person in a public place.
- Telephone calls, anonymous or otherwise, in a manner intended to harass, threaten bodily injury, or cause harm to property.
- Repeated contacts. The perpetrator contacts a person more than once during inconvenient hours and interferes with a person's privacy or use of home or property more than once with no purpose. This includes phone, e-mail, texting, or other electronic forms of communication.
- The perpetrator follows a person or a member of that person's immediate family in or around a public place.
- The perpetrator causes the victim, the victim's immediate family, or someone with whom the victim is involved in a relationship serious emotional distress through following, unwanted communication or contact, or surveillance. The victim need not receive professional treatment to show serious emotional distress.

Definitions:

Credible Threat: A threat or physical action that would cause a reasonable person to be in fear of his/her life or safety or the safety of their immediate family.

Immediate Family: Includes a person's spouse, children, parents, grandparents, and siblings.

Threat Assessment:

Stalking can be a cycle of events or phases (tension building, violence, hearts and flowers) which escalates in frequency and severity and may continue for years.

Tension Building Phase:

- Phone calls, texts, e-mails, or messaging
- Unsolicited letters and/or gifts
- Minor acts of vandalism
- Psychological terrorism

- Threats
- Watching or following the victim
- Increased attempts to control the victim

Explosive or Acutely Violent Phase:

- Assault
- Burglary
- Violence against the victim's family

- Kidnapping
- Acute acts of vandalism
- Murder-suicide

Hearts and Flower Phase:

The perpetrator may temporarily stop the stalking in an attempt to make the victim complacent about safety. This is a common strategy used by the perpetrator so it is important that the victim continues to use personal safety.

The Cycle is Repeated, Escalating in Frequency and Severity

- Can continue for years.
- Although rare, perpetrators can escalate to murder/suicide after the cycle has been repeated many times, and it is apparent that all of their attempts at coercion have failed.
- Perpetrator sometimes abandons his/her current victim and redirects their fixation to new victim(s) who is not yet alert to their behavior.

What You Can Do:

- **Document everything.**
- **Report every incident to the Police.**
- Keep a log of all contacts made by the perpetrator. Be sure to list dates, times, and locations of each incident.
- Photograph injuries or damage to property.
- Keep all voice messages, text messages, and e-mails left by the perpetrator.
- Trace phone calls. After hanging up from the call, pick up the phone and dial *57 (or 1157 on a rotary phone). The phone number used by that caller can be forwarded to the phone company's Identification Center, which may then assist the officer investigating your case.
- Keep letters and gifts sent by the perpetrator. The more information you can provide, the easier it will be to establish the stalking pattern.
- Go to court and apply for a protection order - ***Carry it with you at all times.***

Personal Security:

- Change locks and install deadbolts.
- Install additional outdoor lighting, if necessary.
- Review your cell phone and computer regularly to insure that unauthorized software applications such as spyware have not been downloaded.
- Screen phone calls on your home and cell phone. You can control the calls you receive to your home phone by using your call blocking feature *60. Up to 15 calls may be stored in this feature; *77 can block anonymous or blocked calls.
- Do not give personal information over the phone without confirming that the person you are speaking with is who you think they are.
- Know telephone numbers and physical locations of police and other safe places.
- Keep money, a spare set of keys, and a packed suitcase available for quick departure.
- Inform your friends and neighbors of the situation. If possible, show them pictures of the perpetrator so they may warn you and call police if they see him or her.

Guard Personal Information

- Use a post office box for mail delivery (and use the post office box address as your physical address).
- Obtain an unpublished phone number.
- Inquire about placing a password on all personal financial records, including utilities, bank accounts, credit cards, and club memberships.