

If You Become a Stalking Victim - What to Do - White Paper

If you become a victim of a stalker you must, above all, educate yourself. There are several national organizations that provide information on stalking. Stalking victims don't like to be called victims. They will say, "I won't let myself be victimized," or "I'm not going to change my life because I'm being stalked." Sorry. *Your life has changed.* Forever. And unless you accept that, you will actually be helping the stalker. *You are a crime victim.* The crime happens to be stalking. You must understand that the phrase "stalking victim" says volumes about the perpetrator, but nothing about you. It does not tell us whether you stay at home in terror with sheets over the windows, or whether you've decided to move, or to become active to change the laws in your state. On the other hand, accepting that you are a stalking victim serves to remind you that you must, from now on, take extra precautions that others do not have to take. Here are some basics to start with:

1. *Tell the stalker "NO" once and only once*, and then never give him the satisfaction of a reaction again. The more you respond, the more you teach him that his actions will elicit a response. This only serves to reinforce the stalking.
2. Get a dog. The Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit says this is "one of the least expensive but most effective alarm systems."
3. Block your address at DMV and Voter Registration. If you don't, *anyone* can get it for the asking. This is how Robert Bardo found actress Rebecca Schaeffer and was able to murder her at her front door.
4. *Never* give out your home address or telephone number. Get a post office box and use it on all correspondence. For those places that will not accept a post office box, change "PO Box" to "Apt." and leave the number. Put this address on your checks.
5. When the stalker gets your home telephone number, don't change it. Instead, always let an answering machine pick-up. Get a new, unlisted number, and give it to everyone who calls but the stalker. Gradually, only your stalker will be using your old number – it will become his private line. If it upsets you when he calls, put the machine in a room you don't use. You can even have someone else monitor the tapes. This way, the stalker will think he is still getting through to you, although you will never make the mistake of picking up when he calls. Whenever you close off one avenue for a stalker, he will find another and it could easily be worse. Plus this garners more documented evidence for the police.
6. ***Document everything.*** Even if you have decided not to go the legal route, you may change your mind. Keep answering machine tapes, letters, gifts, etc. Keep a log of drive-bys or any suspicious occurrences. The police and judge will want to see this in support of your claims. You should go forward as soon as possible with *seeking a restraining order*. Become the actor, not the re-actor. You need to

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take control of the situation, this is your life we're talking about, and not be constantly reacting to his new approaches to get at you.

7. ***Get a Restraining Order***, but don't assume that the stalking will finally end, either because the stalker will stop on his own, or because the police will stop him. This gives you a legal recourse, and if you get evidence of them breaking it, it will allow the judge to issue and arrest warrant for him. Remember that a restraining order is just a piece of paper. It cannot protect you. You need to be able to protect yourself, so learn to do that as a priority. It's time for you to step up. Obviously, the police will not be there when the perpetrator violates. Only after.
8. ***Take a Self-Defense class***. The best self-defense classes teach you how to become more aware of your surroundings and avoid confrontations, things that stalking victims would do well to learn.
9. Tell you friends, family and co-workers your situation, and have them screen all calls and visitors.
10. Don't accept packages unless they were personally ordered.
11. Remove any name or identification from reserved parking at work.
12. Destroy discarded mail. Use a shredder on everything personal and when you place your trash out, check in on it to see if someone's stealing it. Also pour oil, cat litter, dog poop, and anything else disgusting on it, to dissuade someone from messing with it.
13. Equip your gas tank with a locking gas cap that can be unlocked only from inside the car.
14. Get a cell phone and keep it with you at all times, even inside your home, in case the stalker cuts your phone lines. Get a spare cell phone in your vehicle for worst case situations.
15. If you think you are being followed while in your car, make four left- or right-hand turns in succession. If the car continues to follow you, drive to the nearest police station, *never* home or to a friend's house.
16. Never be afraid to sound your car horn to attract attention. In fact, a personal protection horn / siren in your purse to alert those around you to come closer to investigate, possibly pepper spray too.
17. Acquaint yourself with all-night stores and other public, highly populated places in your area.

18. Consider moving if your case warrants it. No, it's not fair, but nothing is fair about stalking. If you stay and fight through the legal system, you might get some justice, (although not necessarily your definition of it), but you almost certainly won't get safety: There is no possibility of life imprisonment for stalkers. Research how to keep your destination secret. Stalking and victims' organizations can help.
19. Don't be embarrassed and think you caused this somehow. Stalkers need no encouragement. Your shame is your stalker's best weapon. It makes you more likely to engage him or agree to plea bargains, which are bound to be taken as sympathy and we know where that leads. Instead, tell everyone you know that you're being stalked, from neighbours to co-workers, so that when the stalker approaches them for information about you, they will be alerted not to divulge anything and will let you know he's been around.
20. Join one of the stalking victims' support groups that are springing up all over the country. They can be invaluable resources for information in your community (such as how local law enforcement handle these cases) as well as provide essential support. Tragically, we can guarantee you are not the only person being stalked in your area.

Stalker Violence

There are cases in which stalking lasts for years and years and never turns violent. Then, there are those cases that turn deadly quickly. How can you tell which cases will lead to murder?

First of all, the cases that seem harmless, may, in fact, be the most deadly. An Australian singer was stalked by an erotomaniac man who went to all her performances and even followed her to social events. When her friends expressed their concerns to the young woman, she told them he was simply sad and harmless. There was no warning before he finally did approach her in the street, fatally stabbing her. Weeks before, he had confided to his mother that he was going to marry the singer. What changed his plans from marriage to murder? A newspaper article reporting her engagement to a prominent local businessman. He felt humiliated at her "betrayal" and decided to "get even."

Most stalking victims erroneously believe that if they have not been threatened, they are not in any danger. Here's a question, then: If he really wanted to harm you, why would he warn you ahead of time? Conversely, think about the many, many times in your own life that you threatened someone and then didn't follow through on the threat. Never happened? What about that jerk who cut you off on the highway last week? Didn't you threaten to – well, never mind. The point is, study after study indicates that whether or not a stalker makes a threat has no bearing on whether or not he poses a threat. Of course, any threat should be taken seriously. But there are other indicators that cannot be ignored when assessing a stalker's potential for violence.

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Additionally, it is a false belief that if a perpetrator has no history of violence, the likelihood of his becoming violent in the future is small. John Hinckley, Jr., Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, Sarah Jane Moore, Lee Harvey Oswald, Sirhan Sirhan and John Wilkes Booth, never perpetrated an act of criminal violence on another person before the attacks that made them famous. That is also true of the most recent celebrity stalker-murderers, Robert Bardo, who killed Rebecca Schaefer, and Mark David Chapman, who killed John Lennon.

Factors which studies show seem to increase stalker propensity for violence are: stalking more than one victim, a past criminal history unrelated to stalking, substance abuse, access to and knowledge of weapons, high degree of obsession with the victim, great length of time stalking the victim, travelling a distance to be near the victim. Male sex is usually added to this list because, in general, men are more violent than women. However, a recent study found that women stalkers were just as likely to become violent as their male counterparts.

It is also important to understand that it is not only the victim who is in danger, but those surrounding the victim, particularly if the stalker perceives them to be in his way. Madonna's stalker tried to kill her bodyguard because he was seen as an obstacle to the star. Peggy Lennon's stalker (from the singing Lennon Sisters on the Lawrence Welk Show) hunted her father down and shot him to death, believing he was an obstacle to being with Peggy, whom he called, "my true wife."

Once again, become an actor not a re-actor. You didn't ask for this, but it is happening and will get worse if you succumb or do nothing. Do your research, a background check, know your enemy and empower yourself with new abilities, knowledge and confidence.