

Stalking

Experiencing stalking can be a frightening, frustrating, and life changing experience. Although it is tempting to dismiss stalking behaviour in the hopes it will stop, stalking can be a very serious and potentially dangerous offence that typically

escalates. The risk of violence aside, those who exhibit stalking behaviour can instill fear and anxiety in those who they stalk, and can completely disrupt someone's life.

What is stalking?

Stalking is a crime known as "Criminal Harassment."¹ According to Section 264 of the Criminal Code of Canada, Criminal Harassment can involve repeatedly following, communicating with, watching, and/or threatening either directly or through someone the survivor knows.

To be considered criminal harassment, the stalking

behaviour:

- must be unwanted
- must give you good reason to fear for your personal safety, even if the stalker claims to have no intention of frightening you
- must have no legitimate purpose
- must be repeated, usually (in extreme cases one incident may be enough for charges to be laid)

Stalking Facts

Similar to sexual assault, there are a lot of myths in our society about stalking that can make it hard to understand the realities of the experience. Below are some core facts about stalking that are important to know.

Fact: According to a Statistics Canada (2014) survey, approximately 2 million Canadians experienced stalking within the last 5 years. Almost half of these individuals were between the ages of 15 and 34, and 62% of them identified as women. This means that stalking is a very common occurrence for everyday people.

Myth: Stalking is a rare occurrence, and only happens to celebrities.

Fact: Stalking is an incredibly overwhelming, violating, and terrifying experience for those it affects, and it can have a significant emotional impact.

Myth: Stalking is annoying, but it is ultimately not a big deal.

Fact: According to the same Statistics Canada (2014) survey mentioned above, 49% of people who have been stalked were stalked by someone they knew personally, like a friend or family member. 21% of people reported being stalked by a current or past intimate partner.

Myth: People are only ever stalked by complete strangers.

Fact: Stalking behaviour is not likely to stop if someone ignores the behaviour. Typically, it will escalate without some form of intervention.

Myth: Stalking behaviour usually stops if you just ignore it.

¹ Criminal Code, R.S.C., C-46 (1985). Retrieved from <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-264.html>

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Stalking Behaviour Patterns

Stalking has been referred to as a "building block crime" because it usually starts with smaller incidents and can get more and more serious and/or frequent.

Stalking behaviour patterns are very similar to those behaviour patterns in domestic violence, even when the parties are not former partners. The pattern usually begins when the stalker feels rejected or wronged in some way.

Perceived rejection often leads the stalker to attempt to "woo" their victim into a relationship; this wooing may involve giving gifts or acting in a particular way to prove their "love" or "friendship." In the case of an ended intimate relationship, the stalker may be trying to show they have "changed."

When these attempts are spurned the stalker often begins to harass their victim. This harassment can have many different forms, and often it becomes more and more severe.

A serious concern is the possibility that the stalker may turn to violence. Remember that each situation is different, and often the actions of the individual exhibiting stalking behaviour cannot be predicted. Some will never turn to violence, and others will become violent soon after the stalking has begun. It is important not to assume there is less risk of violence in any situation; all stalking situations are potentially dangerous. It is also important to note that, while there is risk in every stalking case, there is a higher risk of physical/sexual harm in a continuing domestic violence situation. Violent and abusive former partners who engage in stalking behaviour should be considered particularly dangerous.

Most commonly, stalking cases involve²:

- gathering your personal information from school, friends, internet, etc
- repeated non threatening email, calls, mail, etc
- persistent approaches requesting dates, meetings, etc
- following/watching and "coincidentally" showing up near you
- sitting outside your home, work or car
- spreading rumours, misinformation or secrets to your family/friends

In approximately 50%² of stalking cases, behaviours escalate to things such as:

- vandalism or destruction of your property
- direct or symbolic threats to you or loved ones
- breaking into your home/car when you are not there

Some situations may also result in the individual exhibiting stalking behaviour acting violently towards the individual's family and/or friends.

² Stalking: A Handbook for Vicims, Emily Spence-Diehl, 1999,

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Options for those experiencing Stalking

If you are experiencing stalking, you have the right to decide what actions you feel comfortable taking. However, due to the dangerous and urgent nature of stalking situations, it is a good idea to review the following recommendations and options; you might find taking some of the following steps to be reassuring, and other options might become helpful later on should the stalking escalate. There are a couple measures that are strongly urged in every stalking situation, even if you choose to do nothing else:

1. Issue a No Contact Statement

The individual exhibiting the stalking behaviour must hear (or read) on one occasion that you do not want any more contact. It is necessary to have a clear No Contact statement on record should the authorities become involved later. It might also deter the stalking behaviour.

It is critical that you make no further contact with the individual after this statement. No matter how the individual exhibiting stalking behaviour attempts to manipulate you into communicating with them, it is important to remain firm. If you give the No Contact Statement, then eventually answer one of the individual's attempts to contact you for any reason, they have learned to just keep trying.

The statement must be clear and firm. Resist the urge to be vague or apologetic; it is not rude to set strong boundaries with someone whose behaviour is obsessive, erratic, and frightening. It is ideal to save a written copy of this statement, such as a saved email or a dated letter. If the statement is spoken, make note of it in your documentation.

Examples of a Strong No Contact Statement:

"I'm not interested in having a relationship with you. I will consider further contact from you to be criminal harassment, and I will report it to the police."

"I am ending our relationship. Do not make any attempt to renew it. I will not change my mind. I do not wish to have any contact, now or in the future. If you try to contact me, I will take legal action against you."

It is important to note that if you describe taking any specific action if you are contacted (eg. contacting the police) **you must be willing to follow through on that should the individual contact you.**

2. Document All Stalking Behaviour

It is important to keep a record of all stalking behaviour, especially everything that occurs after issuing a No Contact Statement. Even if you do not want to involve the police now, you might find that you one day require their assistance; if that occurs, the police can help more when there is documentation. Keep an extra copy of this documentation somewhere for safekeeping.

Keep a log of all that has happened, in chronological order (this pamphlet includes sample documentation sheets, which you can refer to or photocopy). It is important that the documentation include:

- dates, times, and places of each incident
- every detail you remember about each incident
- any witnesses to the incident
- copies of notes/emails, recordings of voicemails, photos of damage, and any other physical evidence
- records of all contact with police or other relevant organizations

3. Reporting Stalking Behaviour

Since what you are experiencing is a crime, you have the right to report to the police. Even if the police cannot press charges, they will be able to document individual incidents as well as offer you some guidance and protection.

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Even if you are currently hesitant about involving the police, unless the stalking behaviour stops on its own, you may want to connect with the police in the future.

If you are a member of the campus community, University Protective Services is an excellent resource. They can respond quickly should you feel unsafe on campus, and they can provide accompaniment on campus and to nearby locations to help minimize risk.

If you wish to report the stalking behaviour to EPS, you can begin by calling the non-emergency line at 780-423-4567. They will explain the process moving forward, and what you might expect. Typically, the first step is dispatching uniformed officers to your location to take a statement, after which you are followed up with by an investigator.

You also have numerous options available to you through University of Alberta Protective Services. You are able to meet with them to discuss what safety

options you have access to that are specific to your life on campus, without launching a formal investigation. If this is something you are interested in, UASAC staff can make that connection for you. They are also able to accompany you to any and all meetings; you can also bring a friend or family member for support.

When reporting, it can be helpful to take notes, or have your supporter take notes. Ensure that you record: the date, the name of the officer, what the officer said, and/or the file number for use every future time you contact the police.

You may also want to bring a photograph of the individual exhibiting the stalking behaviour, a written description of them, and any and all documentation.

More Safety Options

Even if the stalking behaviour initially feels harmless, as time goes on you may find that you want/need some options to keep safe. Please know that making such life changes is frustrating, annoying, and unfair, but unfortunately they are sometimes necessary. Here are some options that may be helpful to consider:

- Trust your intuition; don't dismiss feelings of fear or uneasiness.
- Talk to family, friends and coworkers regarding the situation; the situation's seriousness, how to identify the stalker, how to assist with safety precautions, documenting all incidents, etc.
- Try to keep your address, phone number, and other personal information secret (including car registration, university records, personal files at work, luggage, subscriptions, dry cleaners, credit card records, pharmacies, libraries, cheques, florists, etc.)
- Vary your schedule and routes to make tracking harder.
- Get a new phone number and share it only with individuals that you trust
- Increase the security of your home: You can ask the police to do a home security check. If you can afford to do so, you may want to install deadbolts, motion sensor lights, an alarm, a wide angle peephole, etc.
- Keep emergency numbers and your police file

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number by the phone, and be sure to shred personal information before you recycle or throw out mail.

- Consider telling trusted co workers what is going on. Provide a photo of the person and advise what action you would like them to take if they see that person.
- Ensure co workers do not give out your personal information or disclose where you are at any given time. Consider having others screen your calls. Consider removing your name from public locations; such as in/out boards, list of employees, etc.
- Remove any personal information from your workplace files, time sheets, computer, locker, and/or desk.
- Set up an email filter so that emails from the individual will not appear in your inbox, while still saving them somewhere for evidence.
- Consider staying in a safer location; talk to a staff at the Sexual Assault Centre about emergency accommodation options if you have nowhere to go.
- Make an emergency plan; have an emergency bag packed to save time if you should have to flee.
- Remember, any precaution that increases your sense of safety is worth it, even if it seems extreme.
- Maintain a support network to offer practical and emotional support; seek support and guidance from a counsellor or the U of A Sexual Assault Centre.
- Practice self care; try to make time to eat well, exercise, get some sleep, and for fun or relaxing activities

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Date	Time	Description of the Time	Witnesses? (Name, phone #)	Evidence?	Police? (Officer name, file #)