

What is Stalking?

Stalking might generally be defined as a series of actions directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalking is serious, often violent, and can become more intense over time. Stalking is a crime that affects 1.4 million people every year in the United States.

In most cases, a stalker is someone known to the victim, perhaps someone the victim has dated or been otherwise involved with. Although most (about 75%) stalking cases consist of a man stalking a woman, there are also cases of women stalking men, men stalking men, and women stalking women. Statistics from the National Center for Victims of Crime show that one in twelve women, and one in forty-five men are stalked in their lifetimes.

Stalking activities may vary from case to case, but there are certain behaviors that are frequent characteristics of stalking.

- Following the victim and “just happening” to show up wherever she is.
- Repeated phone calls (including hang-ups), text messages, emails, or mail. This may be of a non-threatening nature at first, but often escalates to become more threatening.
- Repeatedly driving by or hanging out at the victim's home, work, or school, or waiting beside the victim's car.
- Sending unwanted gifts or flowers.
- Monitoring the victim's phone calls or computer use.
- Tracking the victim's whereabouts through the use of GPS or other devices. Some cell phones now have GPS chips in them, making this easier for the stalker.
- Searching out information about the victim through the use of public records, internet search programs, or private investigators, by talking with the victim's family and friends, or by going through the victim's trash.
- Threatening to hurt the victim's family, friends, or pets, or even the victim herself.
- Breaking into the victim's home or car, or doing other damage to the victim's property.

As with any other serious crime, there's not any one thing that will help a victim stay safe in each and every stalking situation. Each situation is unique. There are steps that a stalking victim can take to increase her safety, however.

- If at any time you feel you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- Trust your gut feelings. If you feel that you are in a dangerous situation, you probably are. Don't minimize the situation.
- Take all threats seriously. The most dangerous times are typically when the victim is trying to end the "relationship," or when the stalker talks about suicide.
- Domestic violence programs like RACS can help you consider your options, including applying for an order of protection, developing a safety plan, and contacting other resource centers.
- Developing a safety plan can help you feel better prepared to handle an emergency situation. Safety plans should include things like changing your routine, having a safe place to stay away from your home, having someone else accompany you when you leave your home, and planning for what you'd do if the stalker showed up at various locations like work and home.
- Consider contacting a law enforcement agency. Stalking is a crime in Missouri, and in many cases of stalking, the stalker has also broken other laws at the same time, such as destruction of property or assault.
- An order of protection can offer additional safety to a stalking victim. With an order of protection in place, if the stalker attempts to contact or approach you, law enforcement officers can arrest him for violating the terms of the order.
- Be sure to tell friends, family, co-workers, and school officials about the stalking, and enlist them in helping to watch out for the stalker.

Stalking is never the victim's fault. For more information about stalking and how to stay safe, visit the National Center for Victims of Crime's website: [.ncvc.org/](https://www.ncvc.org/)