



PREVENTION UPDATE

Stalking and Cyberstalking

Overview

According to the [Stalking Resource Center](#) (SRC), “While legal definitions of stalking vary from one jurisdiction to another, a good working definition of stalking is a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalking is serious, often violent, and can escalate over time.”

[Model Campus Stalking Policy](#), a collaborative report from SRC (a program of the [National Center for Victims of Crime](#)) and the [California Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#), characterizes stalking behaviors as “persistent and frequent unwanted in-person contact, surveillance, and unwanted telephone and other electronic contact.” The various technological means to stalk include use of the Internet, e-mail, or social networking sites to gather information, harass, and intimidate; use of cell phones and landline phones; text messaging; global positioning systems (GPS) to track a person’s whereabouts; or placing spyware on a victim’s computer. Among other behaviors, SRC recommends that the following stalking behaviors be listed in any campus stalking policy:

- “Non-consensual communication including in-person communication, telephone calls, voice messages, text messages, email messages, social networking site postings, instant messages, postings of pictures or information on Web sites, written letters, gifts, or any other communications that are undesired and/or place another person in fear
- Following, pursuing, waiting, or showing up uninvited at a workplace, place of residence, classroom, or other locations frequented by a victim
- Surveillance and other types of observation, whether by physical proximity or electronic means
- Direct physical and/or verbal threats against a victim or a victim’s loved ones
- Gathering of information about a victim from family, friends, co-workers, and/or classmates
- Manipulative and controlling behaviors such as threats to harm oneself, or threats to harm someone close to the victim
- Defamation or slander against the victim”

The [Hunter College Department of Public Safety](#) defines cyberstalking as “similar behavior through the use of the internet or other electronic means to accomplish the same end. The fact that cyber stalking doesn’t involve physical contact doesn’t mean that it is less dangerous than physical stalking. An experienced Internet user can easily find the victim’s personal information such as phone number, address or place of business to locate their whereabouts. This can then lead to more physical behavior.”

During a January 21, 2011, presentation titled “Campus Safety and Cyber Dangers: Stalking on College Campuses in the Digital Age” at DePaul University’s College of Law as part of National Stalking Awareness Month, [Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan](#) said, “College campuses provide an ideal environment for stalkers because it is so easy to track a college student’s movements. Class schedules, meal plans, set practice times, and study groups make for predictable daily routines. Add to that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter where personal information is easily accessible, and students can become prime stalking targets.”



Information on criminal and civil stalking laws, as well as updates on new legislation, is available on the [Stalking Laws](#) page at the Stalking Resource Center.

What the Evidence Tells Us

According to [Stalking Victimization in the United States](#), “During a 12-month period, an estimated 3.4 million persons age 18 or older were victims of stalking. Stalking is defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.” The Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS), which is the basis of this report, was conducted in 2006. Selected findings included:

- 3 in 4 stalking victims are stalked by someone they know.
- 30 percent of stalking victims are stalked by a current or former intimate partner.
- Persons aged 18–24 years experience the highest rate of stalking.
- 11 percent of stalking victims have been stalked for 5 years or more.
- 46 percent of stalking victims experience at least one unwanted contact per week.
- 1 in 4 victims report being stalked through the use of some form of technology (such as e-mail or instant messaging).
- 10 percent of victims report being monitored with GPS, and 8 percent report being monitored through video or digital cameras, or listening devices.

Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities

For the most part, campus-based stalking prevention programs focus on raising awareness and providing education on stalking behaviors as well as providing victims of stalking with advice on how to report stalking and take measures to protect themselves. For example, the [University of Idaho](#) Web page Stalking: Know It. Name It. Stop It. tells students, “Make no mistake: Stalking is NOT love, it is NOT harmless fun, it is form of violence and abuse, and need it be said, it is illegal both nationally and in the state of Idaho,” and refers students to violence prevention programs’ resource specialists for help. The stalking prevention Web page at [California State University, Northridge](#) provides students with safety tips, such as treating any threat as a legitimate threat and notifying the police immediately; being sure vehicle doors are locked while you are in the vehicle, and checking in and around the vehicle before entering it; and using an answering machine to screen calls, because saved messages not only document the call but may assist police as well.

An October 27, 2009, [Webinar](#) “Stalking on Campus” provides an overview of the nature and effect of stalking and what campuses can do to reduce stalking. It highlights social marketing campaigns on two campuses. The University of New Hampshire’s [Know Your Power](#) program tells students that they can “Step In, Speak Up,” when it comes to stalking and other forms of violence. Virginia Tech’s [Stop Abuse](#) program used the catchphrase “If it doesn’t feel right, it isn’t.”

Higher Education Center Resources

Web Page: [Stalking](#)

Publications

- [Catalyst](#) (Spring 2006) Vol. 7, No. 3: Violence Prevention
- [Preventing Violence and Promoting Safety in Higher Education Settings: Overview of a Comprehensive Approach](#)
- [Prevention Update: Primary Prevention of Violence—Stopping Campus Violence Before It Starts](#)

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