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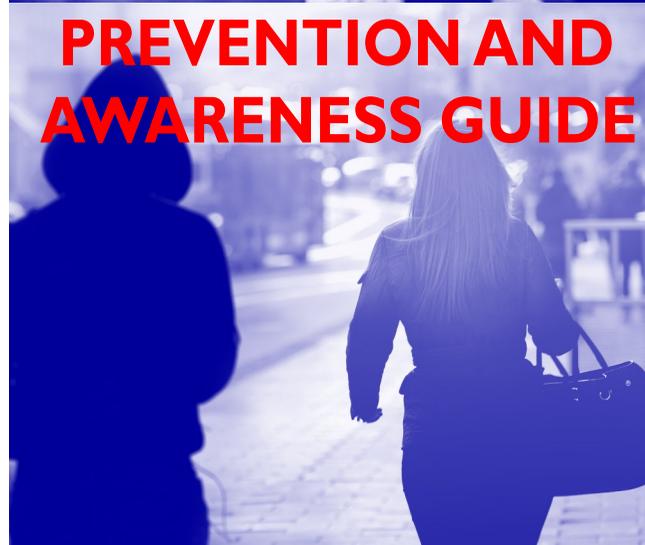
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STALKING



PREVENTION AND AWARENESS GUIDE



STALKING



Stalking is a serious and often violent crime that can escalate over time.

A stalker can be an unknown person, an acquaintance or a current or former intimate partner.

- 6.6 million people are stalked every year in the United States.
- The majority of stalking victims are stalked by someone they know.
- 66% of female victims and 41% of male victims of stalking are stalked by a current or former intimate partner.
- 2/3 of reported stalkers pursue their victims at least once per week. Many pursue their victims daily often using more than one method.
- Stalking is a crime under the laws of 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories and the federal government.

Stalking is unpredictable and dangerous. No two stalking situations are alike. There are no guarantees that what works for one victim will work for another, yet you can take steps to increase your safety. Remember, you are not to blame for a stalker's behavior.

Information in this section obtained from:
The National Center for Victims of Crime
Stalking Resource Center
www.ncvc.org/src

MISSISSIPPI STALKING LAWS

MS CODE ANNOTATED §97-3-107(1) provides that "any person who purposefully engages in a course of conduct directed at a specific person, or who makes a credible threat, and who knows or should know that the conduct would cause a reasonable person to fear for his or her own safety, to fear for the safety of another person, or to fear damage or destruction of his or her property" is guilty of **stalking** (misdemeanor).

MS CODE ANNOTATED §97-3-107(2) provides that a person is guilty of **aggravated stalking** (felony) if the person commits stalking and one of the following circumstances exists:

- The stalker used or displayed a deadly weapon while committing an act of stalking;
- The stalker has been convicted of stalking within the past 7 years; or
- The stalker is an individual required to be on the sex offender registry and the victim is under the age of 18.



MS CODE ANNOTATED §97-3-107(2) provides that a person is guilty of **cyberstalking** (felony) if the person uses electronic mail or other electronic communication to threaten, terrify or harass. It is also a crime under this statute to knowingly permit someone to use your electronic communication device to threaten, terrify or harass.

If at any time you feel that your life is in danger,
CALL 911 immediately!

IF YOU ARE being stalked...

The following tips and suggestions may help keep you safer and may also help in the prosecution of your stalker.

Notify local law enforcement or campus security.

All stalking incidents should be reported to law enforcement and, if you are a student, to the university police, campus security or school resource officer. Request that each incident be documented. Keep a copy of the report from your local law enforcement agency for your records. Make sure you know the name of the officer taking the report. Give law enforcement all written correspondence and report any phone threats. Document dates any correspondence is received from the stalker. When possible, show law enforcement a picture of the stalker.

Keep a journal. Write a description of each incident, including time, date and place of each occurrence. Obtain the names and addresses of witnesses. Complete records are essential to the successful prosecution of stalking cases.

Do not have contact with the stalker. If the stalker calls, immediately hang up the phone. Do not talk to the stalker. Screen your calls. Write down the time and date the stalker calls. Keep recorded messages, and give them to law enforcement.

Save recordings on your answering machine or on your voicemail. This may prove to be valuable evidence in the prosecution of your stalker. Contact your local law enforcement agency for information on how to preserve this type of evidence.

Save all emails and text messages. This information also may be useful in prosecuting your

offender. Do not delete emails or text messages. Print e-mails and save them. Ask your local law enforcement about the procedures for saving text messages, or call the Office of the Attorney General's, Cyber Crime Unit at (601) 576-4281.

Keep all correspondence. Make a copy of anything you receive from the stalker. Touching materials as little as possible will help preserve fingerprints.

Tell everyone. Give family, friends, co-workers and neighbors a description of the stalker. Show them a picture of the stalker. Ask them to document each time they see the stalker. Be sure your friends and family know where you are going to be and when.

Stay alert. Be aware of your surroundings and the people and things around you.

Do not go out alone. You are in greater danger when you are alone. If at all possible, leave work or school with groups of people, and if you can, ask a friend to follow you home to make sure you arrive safely.

Change your routine. Vary routes of travel when you come and go from work, home or school.

Park securely and in well-lit areas. Ask someone to escort you to your car.

Be aware of vehicles following you. If you are followed, drive to a police station, fire department or busy shopping center and sound the horn to attract attention.

Alert managers or security at your place of business. Provide a picture or description of the stalker.

Complete a security check of your home to ensure it can be locked safely. Secure all doors and windows in your home and vehicle.

Install security lights and/or alarm system at your home. Install security systems that include cameras.

Maintain an unlisted number. If Caller ID is available in your area, obtain the service for your phone. While maintaining an unlisted number, if possible, keep your old line to use to collect messages from the stalker for evidence and to serve to help keep the stalker from searching for the unlisted number.

Do not dismiss any threat, written or verbal. Call the police or sheriff's department and save any documentation.

Develop a safety plan for yourself and family members in case of emergency. Decide on a safe place to meet and someone to call if problems arise.

Carry a cell phone. Get personal security devices with alarms and GPS. Take a self defense class.

Get a Protection Order or Restraining Order. Depending on your relationship with the offender, you may be eligible for a Civil Domestic Abuse Protection Order. This civil court order can, among other things, order the stalker to stay away from you and from certain areas near your home, work, or your child's school. There is no cost for a protection order. In Mississippi, civil protection orders can be granted by certain courts to protect you from abuse, threats of abuse, stalking, or sexual assault by a current or former spouse, a current or former cohabitating partner, a current or former dating partner, someone with whom you have a child, or a person related to you by blood or marriage who resides with you or who formerly resided with you. If you do not qualify for a protection order, you may still be eligible to file for a Restraining Order against your stalker without incurring filing and/or processing fees.

For more about civil protection orders, contact your local domestic violence shelter, an advocate with the Attorney General's Office or visit our website at: http://www.ago.state.ms.us/form_categories/domestic-violence/ to download a petition for protection and instructions on how to file for a civil protection order.

WHAT TYPES OF BEHAVIORS DO STALKERS USE?

A stalker may exhibit one or more of the following behaviors:

- Follow the victim and/or victim's family or household members;
- Send gifts or presents;
- Make telephone calls or send threatening mail, text messages or emails (use of electronic means to make direct or implied threats may also constitute cyberstalking);
- Drive by or park near the victim's home, office or other place familiar to the victim;
- Cause damage to property—perhaps by vandalizing a car, harming a pet or breaking windows in a victim's home;
- Deflate the victim's tires;
- Have third parties deliver messages or packages; or
- Break into the victim's home.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MINIMIZE MY CHANCES OF BECOMING A STALKING VICTIM ?

While there are no guarantees you will not become the victim of a stalker, the following suggestions may make you less vulnerable.

Maintain your privacy. Never give personal information to anyone in places where the information can be overheard. Remove your phone number and Social Security number from as many items as possible. Do not post personal information on social networking sites.

Vary your routine. By altering your schedule or taking different routes home, to work, etc., you may make it difficult for a potential stalker to follow or find you.

Trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy, or if someone's behavior makes you feel uncomfortable, take action. Do not feel embarrassed or downplay your fear.