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STALKING

PREVENTION & AWARENESS GUIDE

MISSISSIPPI STALKING LAWS

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

If you are being stalked, call 911.

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 §97-45-15(1) 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!**

STALKING BEHAVIORS INCLUDE:

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.

IF YOU ARE BEING STALKED

The following tips and suggestions may help keep you safe 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. Make sure to document the date of any correspondence that you receive from your stalker. When possible, show law enforcement a picture of your stalker.

Do not have contact with your stalker.

If your stalker calls, immediately hang up the phone. Do not talk to your stalker. Screen your calls. Write down the time and date your 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. Save all emails and text messages. This information also may be useful in prosecuting your offender. Do not delete emails or text messages. Print emails and save them. Keep all correspondence. Make a copy of anything you receive from your stalker.

Stay alert. Park in secure and well-lit areas. Ask someone to escort you to your car. Be aware of your surroundings and the people and things around you. Be sure your friends and family know where you are going to be and when to expect your return. Do not go out alone.

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 authorities at your place of business and your child's school or daycare. Provide a picture or description of your 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.

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.

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.