

STALKING: Wrecking Havoc in People's Lives

Though stalking is sometimes glamorized in movies and sitcoms, in real life it is anything but. Stalking wreaks havoc in the victim's lives, and being stalked is nothing to be flattered about.

According to a recent study conducted by the Department of Justice, an estimated one million women and 400,000 men are victims of stalking. They are plagued by unrelenting pursuits, by people who harass them, terrorize them, and in some cases, kill them.

The ability of stalkers to find their victims and harass them has been enhanced in recent years by the information superhighway. E-mail and the Internet have spawned a new psychiatric legal term: cyber stalking.

Protect yourself, don't be a victim. Check out the **DO's** and **Don'ts** for combating stalkers.

FACTS:

- Studies suggested that one in 20 women in the United States will be stalked at some point in their lives. In a study conducted among college students in West Virginia, 34 percent of women and 17 percent of men reported they had been stalked. Although only about 2 percent of stalking result in homicide, 50 percent of stalkers threaten their victims with violence or property damage or injuring their victim's pets.
- Even when no physical harm is involved, victims' lives can be greatly affected. Some are forced to relocate, change identity, find new jobs, and alter their appearances.
- A majority of victims will suffer from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder, marked by chronic anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.

DO'S AND DON'TS of Stalking:

For most victims of stalking, it is a walking nightmare characterized by constant fear and hyper vigilance that triggers lasting emotional distress and sometimes results in bodily injury or even death.

Since one in 20 women can expect to be stalked at some time during their lives, it pays to know what to do if it should happen to you.

DO'S:

- * **Be firm** - In an effort to be kind and gentle, too many women give their stalkers mixed signals, leaving them to believe that if they keep at it, they will eventually win the women they desire.
- * **Cut off all contact** - Stalkers don't care what kind of attention they get, as long as it's SOME attention. Explicitly reject the stalker, and cut off all contact.
- * **Keep your address private** - Use a postal box instead of residential address on everything. Give your address only to your most trusted friends.
- * **Get an answering machine that records on cassette** - If you are being harassed, put a beep tone on your line and let the caller know that the call is being recorded.
- * **Guard your e-mail** - If you are being cyber stalked, change your e-mail to something that is hard to guess, and do not put any personal information on on-line profiles.
- * **Keep a diary** - Record every stalking incident and names, dates, and times of contact. Save a tape of the entire phone messages and packages sent to you by the stalker.
- * **Secure your home** - Trim the bushes around your house. Always lock the doors with dead bolts. Use window locks on basement and ground floor windows.
- * **Secure your vehicles** - Always lock your cars. Look carefully inside before entering. When you travel to and from work, vary your schedule and route.

DON'TS:

- * **Don't give out your telephone number** - Get an unpublished and unlisted phone number. Never print your phone number on checks. If asked for a phone number, give your work number.
- * **Don't accept packages you did not order** - This includes flowers, gifts, and other things that you didn't order and sent to you by people other than your friends or family.
- * **Don't agree to meet the stalker in person** - Never, ever, agree to meet the stalker in person, even if he says good-bye for one last time.

- * **Don't have anything shipped to your home address** - Have packages delivered to your work address.