

Stalking

(adapted from Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence newsletter, Vol. 22, Issue 1 2003)

Stalking is a pattern of behavior that makes the victim feel afraid, nervous, harassed or in danger and includes actions meant to harass, track and/or frighten such as:

- Damaging property or stealing things that belong to you
- Knowing your schedule and showing up at places you go to
- Sending gifts, mail, email, pictures or calling you repeatedly
- Other actions taken to contact, harass, track or frighten.

You can be stalked by someone you know casually, a current boyfriend/girlfriend/partner, someone you dated in the past, an ex-girlfriend/boyfriend, or a stranger. Getting notes, gifts, repeated emails or voicemail messages or having someone show up at your work or home, follow or track you may seem harmless (or even flattering), but if you don't want the gifts, phone calls, messages, letters, etc. it doesn't feel harmless. Stalking behaviors can be part of an abusive relationship.

If you are being stalked, you might . . .

- Feel frustrated, helpless, anxious, fearful, angry or depressed
- Feel that you can't get away from the stalker and imagine that you are always being watched
- Have difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Feel that you are not in control of your life.

HELP YOURSELF

You can help yourself by planning how to be safer. Ask yourself:

- Where could I go for help?
- Who could I call who would help me?
- How would I escape a violent or dangerous situation?

Other things you can do include:

- Letting friends and family know what's going on and what kind of help you need
- Telling someone when you go out where you're going and when you'll be back
- Calling 911 or your local police department in an emergency
- Memorizing the phone numbers of people to contact or places to go in an emergency
- Keeping spare cash, calling cards or a cell phone handy
- Saving notes, letters or other items the stalker sends you and keeping a record of any and all contact the stalker has with you.

HELP SOMEONE ELSE

If you know someone who's being stalked, you can help by:

- Educating yourself about stalking
- Encouraging your friend to seek help
- Being a good listener and asking how you can help.
- Avoiding confrontations with the stalker. (This could be dangerous for you and for your friend.)

Stalking is a crime and can be dangerous. The legal definition of stalking and the possible punishment varies from state to state.

Contact the Sojourner Family Peace Center at 414-276-1911 to find out more about the dynamics about stalking, what the legal system can do and/or to get help.