

Someone is following me, showing up places, seems to know a lot about me.

Stalking

General Information **Stalking or persistent unwanted behavior describes repeated harassment or intrusive behavior. Stalking may cause fear, annoyance or anger in the person who is being targeted. Sometimes the targeted person may minimize the situation, but bystanders may see it as dangerous or concerning. Stalking can occur in our out of relationships, between acquaintances or complete strangers.**

Some behaviors include:

- information gathering from friends, internet, co-workers, teachers.
- repeated non-threatening mail, email, pages and phone calls.
- notes or flowers left on a car.
- observing/following and coincidentally showing up wherever the target goes.
- waiting outside class/work, or next to the targets car.
- false reports to authorities, spreading rumors, giving misinformation or secrets to friends, family, or professors.
- disparaging messages or images on the web, discussion groups.
- vandalism or destruction of property, sabotage of schoolwork.
- threatening mail, email, notes, text messages, phone calls and or pages (threats direct, implied or symbolic).
- breaking into home, car, email, etc and leaving evidence.

Each stalking behavior by itself may or may not be illegal. What matters here is that there is a set of behaviors which can have an impact on an individual or a group of people. The person who is following, watching, or harassing may have various different motives, but the impact on the target or the community is the most important aspect of assessing the situation.

A Practical Example-- breaking up:

A lot of adults have trouble dealing with an ex-partner who just won't let go of the relationship. Often, when people try to break up with a partner they have a hard time getting the other person to accept the breakup and leave them alone. The ex-partner may do things like call repeatedly or call late at night, leave notes at an apartment or dorm room, send unwanted e-mails or make physical threats. Some will do these things because they hope that maintaining contact will help get the relationship back together; others are expressing their anger and frustration. Sometimes the ex-partner is simply annoying, but other times can be frightening or dangerous.

However, intrusive behaviors may also begin suddenly and unexpectedly from a complete stranger or an acquaintance.

The important thing is to consider the impact. Are you or a friend changing your life to avoid or contend with harassment, being followed, or unwanted emails? Regardless of how it happens support and resources are available.

What to Do

Support

If you are concerned that you are being stalked, it may be useful to talk with someone who is knowledgeable about the issue. People who are experiencing unwanted attention may feel a wide variety of emotions regarding their situation, from annoyance to fear to anger to complete overwhelm. Sometimes they feel numb, but friends or family may express concern. The OVA may be helpful in working with these experiences and providing practical information about what to do and how to connect to other campus resources.

Being the target of unwanted behavior can create a host of practical and emotional consequences. Seeking support takes many different forms. Discussing the situation with someone may help you sort out your feelings and decide what to do. While you may want to talk to someone you trust, such as a friend, co-worker, family member, or spiritual advisor, there are also confidential resources available on campus. Some people seek out a supervisor or individual in a position of power to help remedy the situation but keep in mind that if you tell a university employee they may have a supervisory duty to report.

When you seek help from professionals, first ask what their confidentiality is. Because some stalking behavior between former intimate partners may be considered intimate partner violence the person you disclose to may have an obligation to report. Asking about confidentiality first means you can make an informed decision. OVA can provide you with information that may be helpful in dealing with your situation and has no duty to report.

Some things you might discuss:

- figuring out what you feel and think about what's going on.
- getting information that will help you assess the situation, and figure out what you want.
- talking about how to manage your academics, or work given your relationship.
- talking about making a safety plan. There are many strategies available.
- getting medical treatment if you have injuries or are worried about your health.
- changing where you live to get some space, or safety. There is community help with this.
- reporting to the police or the CU Office of Judicial Affairs or Office of Discrimination and Harassment if appropriate.

If you are not ready to talk to somebody but want to get more information about your situation, the web is a great place to do that. If you are concerned that someone may be monitoring your computer, you should know that most computers keep track of websites you visit. There is a lot of useful information on the web, and it might be best to seek these resources on a public computer such as at a lab on campus, a public library or at a friend's house.

Housing

If you feel that your current housing situation is no longer safe or comfortable, you may want to consider moving or making your current home safer

Police

There are several levels of intervention that can help in dealing with persistent unwanted behavior and for some, reporting to the police is one option. Reporting to the police can take many forms and doesn't have to

lead to the filing of criminal charges. Some victims simply want to file an “informational” report with the intention of making the police aware of their situation, but without pursuing charges. Other people are interested in having the police contact the person and give a verbal warning. At the same time, many people choose to file criminal charges. You should know that if you have had a previous relationship with the person who is harassing you the police may classify it as intimate partner violence and if so would need to make an arrest. The OVA can talk with you about reporting issues, as well as help you make connections with the police if you want help in assessing the situation.

Protective Orders

A protective order is a legal document obtained through the courts that puts restrictions on individuals who may be dangerous to you. If they violate these restrictions they can be sanctioned by the court. If you are interested in obtaining a protective order speak with your local police department.

How to Help

If you know someone who is being stalked there are ways to support them. Targets of stalking may feel angry, irritated, fearful, shameful or hopeless about their situation. They may attempt to minimize (it’s no big deal), even though you may notice them making behavioral changes (changing their routine, avoiding certain locations, asking for friends to accompany them places) because of the stalking. You might also notice them taking responsibility for the situation or feeling protective of the stalker.

- Don’t minimize the situation.
- If your friend is showing signs of strain, let the person know what you notice about their behavior, and express your concern.
- Encourage them to keep a record of what has been happening.
- Don’t take on the job of investigating the situation. If a formal investigation needs to happen, you may inadvertently compromise that investigation.
- Help your friend preserve evidence and keep records.
- Be aware if you start to feel that you must become the person’s bodyguard. Consider consulting with OVA yourself if this is happening.
- Do not confront the stalker-- this can backfire and escalate the situation, putting the target or yourself at risk. Do not make this about you.
- If you have been the target of a similar situation your experience may help. Your friend’s reaction may differ, and their choices may differ, but knowing that they aren’t alone can be helpful in itself.
- Do the research to find out the resources and options, if your friend wants help.
- If you haven’t been the target of a similar situation, you can listen, and then learn more.
- Consider referring them to a confidential and supportive resource like OVA.

Remember to take care of yourself; a person who is being stalked may be in the situation for a long time. Getting support for yourself will allow you to be more available for your friend.

Prevention

What can I do to make a difference?

The typology of stalking is complicated, however there are significant differences between cases in which an actual current or previous relationship exists, and not. In cases of a previous relationship, some of the information on [the intimate partner violence](#) page may be helpful. However in cases in which the actual relationship did not exist, or is quite different than the aggressor imagines, prevention looks different and safety strategies for the person who is the target are important to discuss.

Resources

[COURAGE CU Rape and Gender Education](#)

[Interactive Theater](#)

<http://www.trynova.org/>

<http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/Main.aspx>

<http://www.antistalking.com/victim.htm>