

Stalking

Stalking is the unwelcome pursuit of one person by another, involving repeated instances of willful harassment. Stalking can be disturbing and even dangerous, regardless of whether the stalker has malicious intent. Stalkers are invariably obsessed and may, in some cases, be delusional (i.e. hold beliefs that are unrealistic or irrational). Being the target of a stalker can be a very unsettling, confusing, and anxiety-provoking experience.

Stalking Facts and Figures

The following approximations are based on information supplied by the National Center for Victims of Crime:

- While both males and females are the targets of stalkers, females are much more likely to be targeted.
- 70% to 75% of stalking victims are female.
- 85 to 90% of stalkers are male.
- 8% of women and 2% of men are stalked at some point in their lifetime.
- 60% of female victims and 30% of male victims are stalked by someone who has been an intimate partner.
- 60% of stalkers make unwanted phone calls; 33% send unwanted letters.

Stalking on Campus

There is evidence that stalking is more prevalent in college communities than it is in the general population. College campuses are relatively small communities within which an individual's daily routines can be observed and personal information—such as an individual's on-campus residence, phone number, and e-mail address—is readily accessible. Approximately 80% of college women who are stalked know their stalkers. Most commonly, the stalker is an ex-boyfriend. In many instances, however, the stalker is simply a friend, classmate, or acquaintance.

What to Do If You Are Being Stalked

You may not be sure whether or not the behavior you're being subjected to is stalking. You may, for example, have just broken up with someone, and that person may not realize that the relationship is really over. You may be receiving attention from a friend or acquaintance that is not clear that his or her attention is unwelcome. Perhaps you are not sure whether or not you want the relationship in question to end completely. Maybe you would like the relationship to continue, but with clear limits. In such cases, it is important to decide what it is you really want. Otherwise, you will run the risk of sending a mixed message and be unable to communicate clearly or convincingly that the attention you are receiving is unwanted. Clear communication is essential, whether you are attempting to end a relationship or alter one.

If you do believe you are being stalked and are clear that you want no further interaction, you should consider a number of options. First and most importantly, acknowledge that a serious problem exists and that you need to do something about it. It is often the case that people being stalked minimize what is occurring, or avoid having to make adjustments in their lives. If you are being stalked and you feel this way, you are not alone. Nonetheless, it is important to make adjustments to preserve your safety and enhance your sense of control. Denial of the problem is the greatest threat to resolving it.

Although the stalker's behavior ultimately is not within your control, there are steps you can take to discourage him or her and to influence the situation. Among the options you should consider:

- Communicate clearly to the stalker—once and only once—that his or her attention is unwanted.
- Do not permit or encourage any further interaction.
- Keep a cell phone with you and use it if you feel endangered.
- Screen your phone calls. Never take calls from your stalker, who may try to engage you in an argument or elicit your sympathy.
- Alert your family and friends to your situation, and ask them not to divulge personal information about you. Family and friends can be a source of both safety and emotional support.
- Alert Public Safety, Residence Life, police or other authorities to your situation. They may be able to influence the behavior of the stalker in ways that you can't.
- Discuss your situation with a professional counselor. Counseling can provide an opportunity to discuss matters you can't discuss with family or friends.

For More Information

Being stalked can be a very difficult experience that leaves a person feeling anxious, depressed and confused. It can be helpful to discuss your concerns with a caring, knowledgeable professional who will help you consider your options.

Professional help is also available for students who are concerned that they may be at risk of engaging in stalking behavior. If you are having difficulty letting go of a relationship and accepting another person's requests for limits, or if you are consumed with thoughts about someone, counseling can help in regaining perspective. You can make an appointment by stopping by the front desk at the Wicker Wellness Center or by calling (518) 388-6161. You may also meet with an Officer from Union College Campus Safety.