



Stalking Safety Planning

The following is not intended to be a set of strict guidelines for stalking victims but rather some general information to assist them. There is no guarantee that if a victim follows all or some of these strategies he/she will be safe; however, implementing these strategies may reduce the odds of physical or emotional harm from his/her stalker.

Victims in Imminent Danger

The primary goal of a victim in imminent danger should be to locate a safe place for her/himself. Safety for stalking victims can often be found in the following places:

- Police stations
- Residences of family/friends (location unknown to perpetrators)
- Domestic violence shelters
- Local churches
- 24-hour businesses
- Public areas (stalkers may be less inclined toward violence or creating a disturbance in public places)

According to the *National Violence Against Women Survey*, stalking victims undertook the following self-protective measures:

- ◇ 22% took “extra precautions”
- ◇ 18% enlisted help of family and friends
- ◇ 17% got a gun
- ◇ 11% changed address
- ◇ 11% moved out of town
- ◇ 7% avoided stalker
- ◇ 5% talked to an attorney
- ◇ 5% varied driving habits

If departure from the current location is not possible, the victim may contact family members or friends to assist in their departure from their home or office. Upon reaching safety, a victim may want to contact local law enforcement, victim services, mental health professionals, and/or some social service agencies in order to receive additional assistance and referrals available in the community. A victim of stalking should always identify her/himself as such and request confidentiality of all information given and any records kept on file.

Victims in Danger, But Not Immediately at Risk

1. Contingency Plans

While a victim may not be in imminent danger, the potential always exists; therefore, a contingency plan (safety plan) may be appropriate. Suggestions include:

- Knowledge of and quick access to critical telephone numbers (law enforcement numbers and locations).
- Safe places (friends, domestic violence shelters, etc.).
- Contact numbers for use after safety is secured (neighbors/family, attorneys, prosecutors, medical care, childcare, pet care, etc.).
- Reserve money.
- Other necessities readily available (creditors’ numbers, and personal welfare items: medication, birth certificates, social security information, passports, etc.).
- Miscellaneous items (a full tank of gas and backup keys for neighbors).
- If the victim has children, she/he may want to pack a few toys, books, or other special items belonging to the child(ren).
- Alert critical people to the situation who may be useful in formulating a contingency plan (law enforcement, victim service providers, employers, family, friends, and neighbors).

2. Preventative Measures

Install solid core doors with deadbolts. If the victim cannot account for all keys, change locks and secure spare keys. If possible, install adequate outside lighting and trim back bushes and vegetation around the residence. Maintain an unlisted phone number. Vary travel routes, stores, and restaurants, etc. that are

regularly used. Limit time walking, jogging, etc. Inform a trusted neighbor and/or friend and/or colleague about the situation. Provide them with a photo or description of the suspect and the possible vehicles he/she may drive. If residing in an apartment with an on-site property manager, provide the manager with a picture of the suspect. Have co-workers screen all calls and visitors. When out of the house or work environment, try not to travel alone if at all possible, and try to stay in public areas. If you ever need assistance, yell “FIRE” to get immediate attention (people more readily respond to this cry for assistance than to any other). If financial means exist, use a *dummy* answering machine connected to a published phone line. The number to a private unlisted line can be reserved for close friends and family, then the stalker may not realize you have another line.

Possible Legal Options

Legal options include formal and informal use of the criminal justice system. According to the *National Violence Against Women Survey*, informal law enforcement intervention (contacting or warning stalker but not arresting) is most effective when the stalker had some prior relationship with the victim and is not “mentally ill.” On the other hand, according to Gavin De Becker in his book, *The Gift of Fear*, it is best to have sufficient grounds to formally charge a stalker as informal warnings can actually reinforce the behavior of some stalkers. Unfortunately because a stalker’s response to legal intervention is unpredictable, victims need to make informed choices based on their individual situations.

1. **Filing a Stalking Complaint:** To file a complaint that will trigger an arrest and prosecution, it must be accompanied with sufficient evidence to establish “probable cause” that the stalker engaged in conduct that is illegal under Idaho code. If law enforcement officials do not witness such conduct first hand, it is often up to the victim to provide them with the evidence necessary to establish probable cause. In other words, stalking victims are often put in the position of having to first prove their case to law enforcement officials before being afforded the opportunity to prove their case before a court of law. For this reason, it is crucial for stalking victims to document every stalking incident as thoroughly as possible, including collecting and keeping any videotapes, audiotapes, phone answering machine messages, photos of the stalker or property damage, letters sent, objects left, affidavits from eye witnesses, notes, etc. Experts also recommend that victims keep a journal to document all contacts and incidents, including the time, date, and other relevant information.
2. **Restraining/Protective Orders:** **Protection orders** may be filed when a domestic relationship has existed between the victim and the stalker. They do not require an attorney. **Restraining orders** do not require the presence of a domestic relationship but do require an attorney and also involve a filing fee. Generally, these orders require the offender to stay away from—and not interfere with—the complainant. If violated, they may be punishable by incarceration, a fine, or both. These orders are not foolproof and can only be enforced if they are broken. Victims should be cautioned against developing a false sense of security. These orders are obtained through the local court and are granted at the discretion of the court.
3. **Other Illegal Acts:**
 - Trespassing – If he/she comes on property after being notified he/she is not welcome.
 - Theft – If he/she takes property not legally belonging to him/her.
 - Kidnapping – If he/she takes a child he/she has no custodial rights to.
 - Malicious injury to property – If he/she damages property not legally his/hers.
 - Assault – If he/she threatens or attempts to injure victim.
 - Battery – If he/she intentionally touches or causes bodily harm against the victim’s will.

“Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands...And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.”

1 Samuel 23:14 & 16

Additional Resources

The Gift of Fear, Gavin De Becker.

The Domestic Violence Sourcebook, Dawn Bradley Berry.

A Safe Place Ministries Quick Look—Protection Orders.

¹ Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes, *Stalking in America: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey* (Publication No. NCJ 169592, April 1998). Washington, D.C.: U. S. Dept. of Justice, National Institute of Justice and National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

² Gavin De Becker, *The Gift of Fear* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1999), pg. 214.