



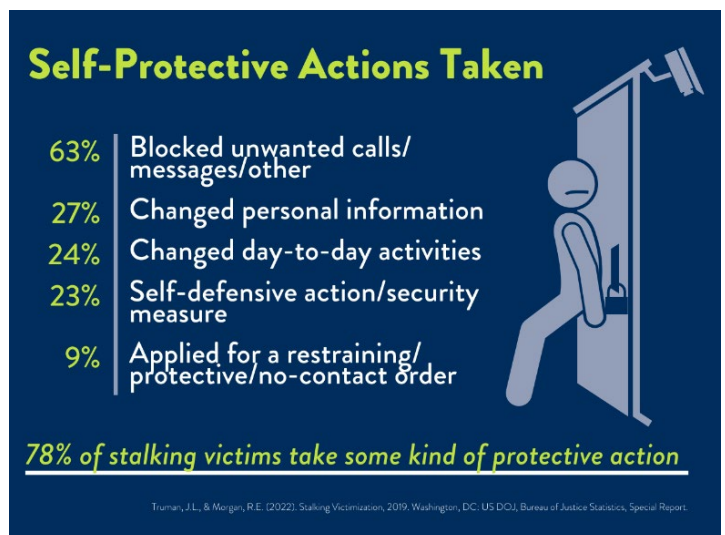
The popular Netflix series *YOU*'s penultimate season contained love, murder, intrigue, and – as we've come to expect – a lot of stalking. **What can *YOU* teach us about real stalking victimization?** This short guide discusses the show's fourth season (spoilers ahead!).

A [combined discussion guide on previous seasons](#) and individual guides for [season one](#), [season two](#), and [season three](#) are also available. Consider using this guide as a starting point for further learning and sharing relevant [fact sheets](#), [infographics](#), and [short videos](#) to introduce key information on stalking and intimate partner violence.

## Coping with a Stalker

Twist aside, when Joe believes he is being targeted by an anonymous stalker, he reacts how many stalking victims do – by taking self-protective actions. He ceases contact for a while, changes his locks, installs a camera, and then tries to determine the best tact to take when texting with the stalker in order to appease them.

- **How are these actions (often recommended as safety planning) burdensome for victims?**
- **How might a victim's life change when trying to stay safe from a stalker?**
- Like most stalking victims, Joe does not contact the police. In his case, being a serial killer who has fled his home country is a strong deterrent. Most stalking victims have no such history, yet fewer than 1 in 3 stalking victims report to police<sup>1</sup>. **Why might stalking victims choose not to report to law enforcement?**



<sup>1</sup>Truman, J.L., & Morgan, R.E. (2022). Stalking Victimization, 2019. Washington, DC: US DOJ, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report.

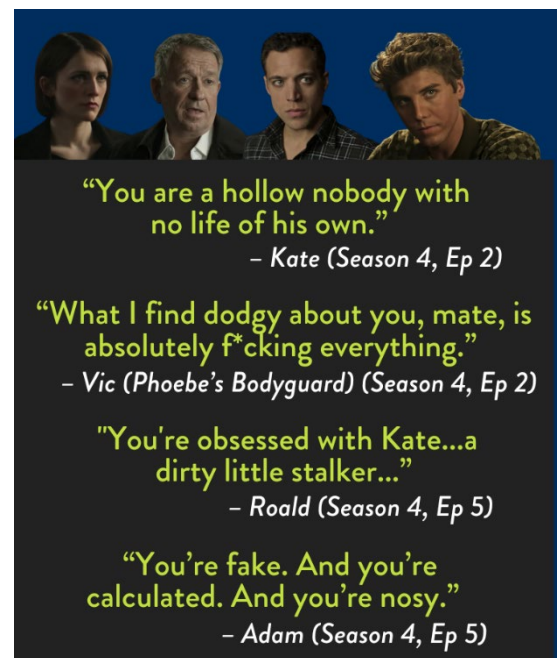
## Main Points:

- Stalking victims are often advised to make major life changes to enhance their safety. Taking actions like changing one's contact information, avoiding places where one might see the stalker, and becoming more private and cautious in one's social life can be very isolating.
- Victims often spend time, energy, and money to avoid their stalkers and stay safe. They may not be able to participate in their daily lives the way that they want to.
- There are many reasons why a victim may not want to report to law enforcement. These reasons might include fear that they won't be believed, their own minimization of the issue (e.g., "Maybe I am overreacting..."), worrying that there's no crime to report (e.g., "Is it a crime to text me all the time and show up uninvited?"), lacking evidence, distrust of law enforcement, fear that the stalker might escalate their tactics when they find out about the report, and/or not wanting to get the stalker in trouble.

## Trusting Instincts

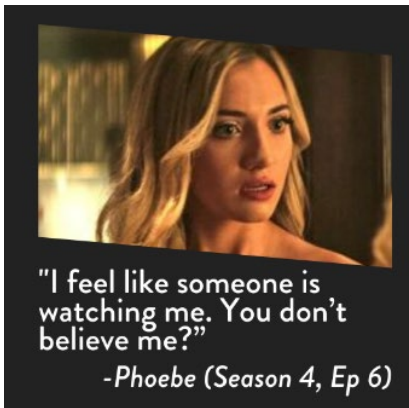
As in past seasons, multiple people instinctively distrust Joe/Jonathan. Some maintain their skepticism, some die, and some (like Kate) change their minds. Despite their reservations, Phoebe is the leader of the group and likes Joe, so he continues to gain more access and information about the group, as well as grow his relationship with Kate.

- **How might instincts play a role in identifying a stalker? Why might people minimize or ignore their instincts?**
- Phoebe unreservedly likes Joe and continues to include him in events and let him into her circle, despite the others' reservations. **Why might it be hard for someone with less power in the group to speak up about their concerns and/or avoid the person who is making them uncomfortable?**
- Later in the season, Phoebe (accurately) suspects that she has a stalker – but no one believes her. In episode 6, Adam calls her "paranoid" and Joe says he "assumed she was overreacting." **How might friends' responses impact stalking victims and their trust in their own instincts?**



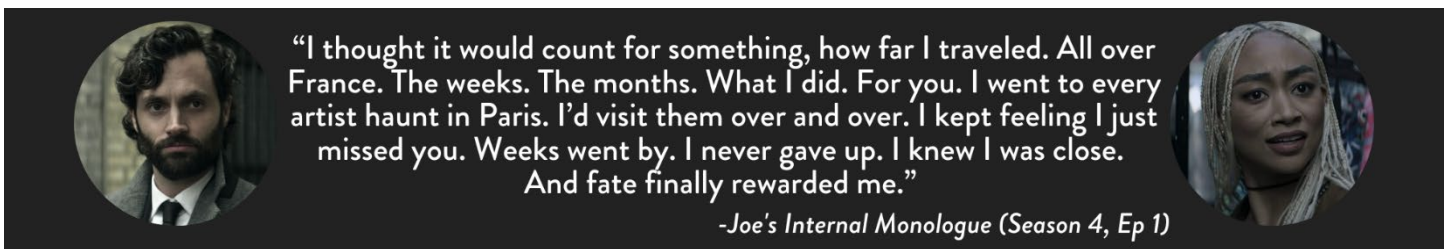
## Main Points:

- Stalking survivors often share the same message – to trust your instincts. When someone is making you uncomfortable, there is likely a reason.
- People may ignore or minimize their instincts because they worry they are being unfair or unkind. They may want to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. They may feel that it would be awkward to say something or want to wait for proof that the person is a problem before saying anything. But it's okay to trust your instincts and disengage when someone is making you uncomfortable.
- Most stalkers and victims know each other and share social circles. When a leader with power in the group, like Phoebe, decides someone is "in," it can be awkward, divisive, and have negative social consequences for other members of the group to speak up when they are uncomfortable.



- Most victims of stalking share their concerns with a friend or family member before seeking any official help. When those trusted people minimize, dismiss, or do not believe the victim, it often makes victims further distrust their own instincts and decreases the chances that they will seek further help.
- Many stalking victims are dismissed as paranoid when in fact they are being reasonably hypervigilant in response to a frightening or distressing situation.

## Justifying Stalking



The season begins with Joe's internal monologue sharing the thought that, "Love chooses us. The only thing we can control is what we do. How far we go." Later in the same episode, he watches Kate masturbate through her window and thinks to himself, "Why does the universe keep doing this to me?" Towards the end of the season, his dark side tells him, "All you ever wanted was to be seen, to be loved, and you've been willing to earn it the hard way."

- **How might cultural attitudes/sayings about love and destiny be misused to justify stalking and/or abusive behaviors** (for example, "love chooses us" or "never give up on love")?
- **What do you make of Joe's interpretation that "fate finally rewarded [him]" when he gets a clue as to Marianne's location?**
- **In what ways has Marianne indicated that she does not want Joe to find her?**
- **Does Joe's decision to stalk Marianne mean that she owes him something?**

### **Main Points:**

- The romanticization of the idea that one should pursue a romantic interest at all costs and stop at nothing robs the romantic interest of any agency and disrespects their actual wants.
- Joe uses concepts like "fate" and "destiny" to avoid responsibility for his own choices, pretending that he's just a pawn in some grand romantic plan rather than recognizing that he is making his own decisions.
- Marianne has changed her number, left no address, relocated to another country, and gone dark on social media. She clearly does not want Joe to find her.
- Marianne does not owe Joe anything. Joe is choosing to focus on finding Marianne regardless of what she wants and does not want. Working hard to pursue someone who doesn't want to be pursued doesn't mean he has earned anything.
- Joe consistently chooses to lie, stalk, and kill – but he consistently absolves himself of responsibility for his actions, going so far as to invent Rhys as an external alter-ego forcing him to cause harm.



"One day, I overheard my father hiring someone to follow me... phone records, who I'd given a blowjob to, even my f\*cking menstrual cycle... He said, 'I'm your father, the world isn't safe and I need to protect you'... he owns me."

-Kate (Season 4, Ep 10)

Joe and Dawn aren't the only stalkers this season. Kate's father, Tom Lockwood, undermines her attempts to distance herself from him. In episode 9, she is deeply disturbed when he reveals that he has orchestrated much of her professional success, which he says he did to "keep [her] safe."

- **How has Joe used similar thinking about needing to protect others to justify his stalking behaviors?**
- **How might Tom's stalking behaviors be less apparently scary than Joe's behaviors?**
- **How do Tom's actions undermine Kate as a capable adult with her own wants and agency?**

### Main Points:

- A stalker's justification that they are protecting the people they love lets them think of themselves as heroes rather than villains.
- Just like Joe pursuing Marianne out of "love," this robs the victim of their own agency and is a patronizing twist on stalking for "love."
- Even actions that may seem nice (like helping Kate's business) are a way for Tom to extend his power and control over her. An outsider may not understand why these behaviors are upsetting to Kate. Stalkers often engage in actions that are threatening in the context of the relationship rather than overtly scary.

### Are Stalkers Crazy?

This season introduces the term "erotomania" and portrays both Joe and Dawn (Phoebe's stalker) as erotomaniac.

The season's twist reveals that Joe has actually been stalking Rhys Montrose, a public figure, and imagining a relationship with him that never existed (while also obsessively watching the real Rhys, taking items from him, and, ultimately, killing him).

"I know you're a good person, but you need help. You're not well... a German postal worker thought he knew my very good friend, Madonna. He was suffering from something called erotomania, sweetheart. It's a delusion... you think you know someone you simply don't. He thought Madge was proposing through traffic lights."

-Phoebe (Season 4, Ep 6)



### **In reality, most stalkers do not have severe psychological disorders.**

One study found that fewer than 2% of stalkers had major psychiatric conditions (such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression<sup>2</sup>).

- Many people assume that stalkers are "crazy" and describe stalking as a mental health issue – despite the reality that the vast majority of stalkers do not have any significant co-occurring mental illness. **Why might it be easier to think of stalkers as "crazy" than to acknowledge that most are actually just people who choose to stalk and try to exert power and control?**

<sup>2</sup> Patton, C.L., Nobles, M.R., & Fox, K.A. (2010) Look who's stalking: Obsessive pursuit and attachment theory. Journal of Criminal Justice, 38 (2010): 282-290.




- Joe has been stalking people since season one. **Does presenting Joe as deeply delusional this season make him seem less responsible for his behaviors? How or how not?**
- Like Dawn and Joe, delusional stalkers in real life are more likely to target celebrities than people they actually know. Dawn and Joe are both incredibly dangerous stalkers – Dawn actually kidnaps Phoebe and approaches her with a knife, and Joe tortures and kills his victim. In reality, while all stalkers can be dangerous, stalkers who target strangers are the *least* likely to threaten and/or harm their victims. **Why would an intimate partner stalker be more dangerous, on average, than a stranger stalker?**



### Main Points:

- It may be more comforting to dismiss stalkers as simply “crazy” than to realize that, actually, *anyone* can be a stalker – including people we know, like, and consider sane.
- It would be nice to believe that stalkers do not understand the harms they are causing and that there is some kind of misunderstanding. In reality, that is rarely true – most stalkers want to scare their victims and are consciously choosing to do so.
- Joe being delusional this season may contribute to the myth that stalkers are crazy and not aware of the harm they are causing.



% by Stalker Relationship to Victim	Intimate Partner	Acquaintance	Private Stranger	Public Figure
Presence of Threats	83	66	50	18
Presence of Violence	74	50	36	2

Mohandie, K., Meloy, J.R., McGowan, M.G., & Williams, J. (2006). The RECON Typology of Stalking: Reliability and Validity Based upon a Large Sample of North American Stalkers. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 51(1): 147-155.

- The more information and access a stalker has to their victim, the more threatening and violent they are likely to be. Intimate partner and acquaintance stalkers know more about their victims' routines, schedules, and fears than a stranger would. Public figure victims are also likely to have more security and resources.

### What's Next?

Joe is back in the States with more money and a seemingly full acceptance of his dark side. Do you think he and Kate will “keep each other good” as promised?

**Check back for Season Five!**

Learn more about stalking at [www.StalkingAwareness.org](http://www.StalkingAwareness.org).



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