

Stalking Safety Planning on Campus

Stalking is a highly prevalent victimization on college campuses with rates comparable to those of sexual and intimate partner violence. While the majority of stalking on campus involves students stalking students, faculty, staff, and individuals not formally associated with campus life can also be either victims or stalkers, and all of these possible combinations affect the campus community. Because of the potential for serious injury or death, individuals experiencing stalking need comprehensive safety planning, and campuses should leverage their resources to help enhance victim safety.

Stalking is a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety or the safety of others; or suffer substantial emotional distress.



The individual incidents that establish a pattern of behavior may or may not be criminal acts or violations of campus policies on their own.

Fear is central to the definition of stalking. Common stalking behaviors include—but are not limited to—repeated unwanted phone calls and messages, showing up when uninvited, following, surveillance, spreading rumors, and threats.

The guidance below is intended for general informational purposes only; it is not exhaustive and any safety plan should be tailored to each specific individual and what they are experiencing. Remember that safety plans are not a guarantee of safety, so both victims and the campus professionals supporting them should understand the limitations of safety planning and remain vigilant.

What is safety planning?

Safety planning is the process of creating an individualized plan that identifies specific strategies and interventions that may increase safety. A safety plan provides practical ways to decrease risk; puts victims in contact with a variety of services, agencies, and individuals who can help; and focuses on **both physical and emotional well-being**.

Ideally, safety planning with stalking victims should be done by professionals trained in trauma-informed practices and victim-centered responses. As stalkers often change their behaviors over time, responders should work with victims to examine their **current situations as well as anticipate what stalkers might do next** and plan actions the victim can consider to reduce risk and the potential for harm. Part of creating a safety plan is also preparing the victim to carry it out to the best of their abilities, rehearsing the steps with them, and identifying trusted people they can share the plan with.

Safety planning must reflect the realities of campus life. Safety planning on college campuses can be particularly challenging given the geographic confines of the campus as well as the intertwined social networks between victims and stalkers. Campuses can be a "world within a world" where creating distance and/or opting out of academic, social, and other activities can be especially challenging and isolating.



Remember that neither a victim nor a safety plan can change the stalker’s behavior — that is only within the stalker’s control. However, safety planning may reduce risks and harms. The victim knows their situation best, so help them think through what steps they, their support systems, and the campus might take to keep the victim, people important to the victim, and the broader campus community safe. These steps may be very different considering who the stalker is, their role in the victim’s life, their role in campus life, and how they are affiliated (or not) with the campus.



Who should be involved in safety planning?

Stalking can impact every aspect of a student's life and is not only a Title IX or Public Safety/Campus Police issue; stalkers may approach victims in a variety of settings and contexts. To increase safety for the victim and campus, consider coordinating with diverse departments on and off campus (for more information, see SPARC’s resource on a [Coordinated Campus Response](#)). On campus, this might include Health and Wellness, Housing, Student Life, Student Affairs, Academic Support, Greek Life, and Athletics; leveraging campus resources is critical for victim safety. Victims (especially students) may be unaware they can access off-campus resources and need your support connecting with local law enforcement, community victim support services, and mental health services.

Remember that stalking is a [Title IX violation](#) and students experiencing stalking are entitled to the same campus accommodations as students experiencing other violations.

When coordinating across campus, remember that **some campus personnel are mandated reporters who are required to follow a certain protocol after learning about a potential stalking situation** involving members of a campus community. Similarly, **some personnel can maintain the confidentiality of anything a victim tells them while others cannot**; it is vital that victims understand these different roles when considering which campus personnel to involve. In order to reduce the likelihood of a victim accidentally triggering a chain reaction they do not want or understand, **it is important for a victim to discuss with a confidential victim advocate what it would entail if they engaged with different individuals and departments both on and off campus.**



Important Considerations for Stalking Safety Planning

- **Trust victim instincts.** Many victims of stalking feel pressured by friends or families to simply ignore the stalker's behavior or "just tell them off." Stalkers are dangerous and victims are the experts on their own lives and situations; victims are just as good or better than formal risk assessments in determining their level of danger. Ask victims what they worry about. Stalking victims are often hypervigilant as a result of constantly being in heightened states of fear and anticipation. Victim hypervigilance can be misinterpreted as paranoia or overreaction.
- **Stalkers can be unpredictable and dangerous.** Whether in-person or through technology, stalkers use a variety of strategies to invade the lives of their victims. Most stalkers use multiple tactics and may escalate their behavior(s) at any time.
 - Research shows college students most likely to be stalked by someone they know – frequently an acquaintance (a friend, classmate, or person they recognize) or an intimate partner (current or former).¹ Campus victims who are not students are also most likely to be stalked by someone they know. All stalkers can be dangerous, with research showing that intimate partner stalkers use violence and threats the most, followed by acquaintance stalkers, and then strangers.²
- **Consider what has happened, what is happening, and what might happen.** Being proactive is vital – safety plan around behaviors that have already happened, and also consider what the victim thinks the stalker is capable of. Consider what the stalker might do in the future, especially in reaction to specific dates, events, or actions taken by the victim. Use these resources for help identifying stalking behaviors:
 - [Identifying Stalking Strategies](#)
 - [Identifying Stalking Behaviors and Sexual Violence](#)
 - [Law Enforcement Questions to Identify Stalking Behaviors](#)
 - [Stalking & Harassment Assessment & Risk Profile](#) (a free online tool designed to examine and assess stalking that asks about the course of conduct and generates safety planning suggestions)
- **Consider what access to and information about the victim the stalker has.** Do they have mutual friends or colleagues who might share information with the stalker? Does the stalker know the victim's passwords? Can the stalker access the victim's housing, office, or other places where the victim frequently spends time? What campus spaces are open to the campus community and/or public? What campus spaces are difficult for the victim to avoid (for example, dining halls, libraries, gyms)?



- **Consider how the stalker may react** to any changes the victim makes or any disciplinary actions the campus might take, identifying new or additional safety measures needed. Stalkers often escalate their behavior when the victim reacts (for example, after being blocked on social media, the stalker might start showing up in-person at the victim’s housing, classroom, or work). Victims often have exceptional insight into what the stalker may do next. Have conversations about strategies for safety and keep in mind that victims may not want to engage in certain strategies for fear of reprisal or escalation.



- **Consider physical safety, technology safety, and emotional safety.** Ask the victim what they need to feel safer – on campus, in class, at work or internships, at activities/clubs, at home or in their dorm, in their social life, and in transit. Discuss technology, both the victim’s use of technology as a method of support and the stalker’s use of technology as a method of abuse. Also discuss what emotional support they need in their academic, professional, and family life.
- **Victims must balance their need to live normal lives with their concerns about safety.** Safety planning can be restrictive and severely compromise a victim’s freedom. Only victims can decide what tradeoffs are realistic and appropriate for themselves. Recognize that a victim’s priorities might vary from your own and respect their decisions. For example, a student may be unwilling to change their use of a social media platform that you consider frivolous, but to them is an important aspect of their social life and mental health. There is no single “right” safety plan; there are many different ways to cope and survive.
- **Maintain a non-judgmental approach,** meeting students where they are in their journey and recognizing that victims are the experts on their own lives and should have the autonomy to make their own decisions.
- **Safety plans should evolve,** changing as the stalking situation changes. Check in with victims regularly about what has changed and how the safety plan should adapt. With each subsequent contact with the victim, assess the likelihood of continued violence by the stalker toward the victim or other people. Review and revise safety plans and response strategies, as needed, to provide optimal protection. Conduct risk assessments and use the [Stalking & Harassment Assessment & Risk Profile](#) (a free online tool designed to examine and assess stalking) as circumstances dictate.

Campus Safety Planning Checklist to Discuss with Victims

- **Identify if the victim feels they are in any immediate danger.** Listen for signs that actions that might seem harmless (like the stalker driving by their housing or leaving a gift) are causing fear.
- **Document every stalking incident,** including the date, time, what happened, and the names and contact information of any witnesses. Documentation is key to understanding the scope of the situation, safety planning, and holding the stalker accountable. [Access sample documentation logs here.](#)
- **Conduct relevant danger, risk, or lethality assessments** of the stalker's behavior and discuss results with the victim. [Access the Stalking & Harassment Assessment & Risk Profile \(SHARP\) here.](#)
- **Consider the stalker's history, likelihood of violence, and the specificity of any threats made.** Obtain information and share it with other relevant campus and local partners, while keeping victim confidentiality and privacy in mind. As the response to stalking is often disjointed, focus on collaboration and, when possible, share information between departments and responders about: campus disciplinary hearings, criminal and civil history, prior stalking arrests and convictions, firearm possession prohibitions, current and pending protection orders, bond orders, conditions of release, outstanding warrants, unexecuted sentences (e.g., escape from custody, revoked parole or post-sentence bond, deferred sentence), and probation/parole statuses.
- **Discuss three questions with the victim:**
 - What have you already done?
 - What do you need help doing?
 - What are you not willing to do?
- **Discuss with the victim if they can safely stop all communication with the stalker.** Many stalkers perceive any contact, even negative contact, as encouragement.
 - **While disengagement is advisable, it's not always possible or realistic to cease all communication.** Some victims feel safer by communicating with their stalkers to gain information on the stalker's mood and plans. Some victims believe stopping all communicating or telling the stalker to stop will lead to an escalation in behavior and/or the stalker harming someone (themselves, the victim, or others). Some victims must maintain contact with their stalker due to shared friends, activities, academics, or custody of children. It is important to discuss with victims how continued contact may impact orders of protection, no contact orders, campus hearings, or criminal cases.
 - **If there is any contact the victim must have with the stalker, suggest using a third party or neutral location.** For example, if the stalker has visitation rights to children in common with the victim, transferring children from one to the other can be done through a third party or at a neutral location (like the public safety/campus police department) to avoid face-to-face confrontation.



- Some victims feel that they should ensure the stalker knows that the contact is unwanted. If that is true for a victim’s situation, work with the victim to decide how and when to tell the stalker once – and only once – that they do not want any contact. After that, it is important to consider cutting all ties with the stalker, including not answering messages or calls. Some examples of how to express the desire for no contact include:
 - “I am not interested in a relationship with you. Do not contact me ever again.”
 - “Do not call, stop by, text, or contact me in any way whatsoever.”
 - “I do not want you to contact me in any way. If you continue to do so – or if you are on my property, or follow me – I will report you.”
 - “I am ending this relationship. I am not going to change my mind. Do not contact me again. I do not want to have any communication with you, in any form. If you try to contact me, I will report you/take legal action.”



- **Consider measures to increase physical security for the victim**, such as a residence security check with public safety/campus police, noting areas of reduced lighting and/or where a stalker could hide, upgrading locks and lighting, installing a security system with a panic button, obtaining an otherwise unused cell phone for emergencies, and/or obtaining a door alarm stopper for inside the residence.
- **Consider measures to increase technology safety**, including changing privacy settings and passwords.
 - See Safety Net’s [Technology Safety & Privacy: A Toolkit for Survivors](#) for more information.
- **Vary daily routines** if possible – routes to and from class, work, and campus, as well as the grocery store, gym, or other places the victim regularly goes. Encourage the victim to develop additional strategies that will help them avoid face-to-face contact with the stalker, such as varying routes traveled, transportation methods, and shopping locations; avoiding making appointments to which the stalker may be privy or which they might anticipate; arranging for formal (public safety/campus police) or informal (friends, family, teammates) escorts whenever possible.

□ **Review a map of campus to discuss geographic and proximity challenges.**

Use a printed campus map to have the victim identify where and when they cross paths with the stalker on a regular basis. Ask the victim to write down their schedule and the stalker’s schedule to identify how they can avoid their stalker. (If they don’t know the stalker’s schedule, you can’t share it with them but you can look it up yourself and provide suggestions.) Considering the map, schedules, shared social networks, and shared spaces that the victim wants and needs to access (housing, libraries, dining halls, athletic facilities, etc.), identify possible ways the victim can modify their use of campus services to avoid the stalker, as well as campus supportive measures like altering classes, housing, campus work hours, or other activities the victim has on campus.



- **Discuss with the victim what they would do and who they would call if the stalker contacted them or**

showed up in a variety of situations and locations. Jurisdictional issues can be tricky and victims may not know who to call for help in different locations: on campus, off campus, at work, in class, etc. They may not be familiar with local jurisdictions and how campus security and local law enforcement work together and share information (or don't), or who has the power to arrest someone or ban them from on- or off-campus locations.

- **Discuss with the victim if they want to [tell friends, family, roommates, social networks, neighbors, and/or coworkers](#) about the stalking and instruct them on what they should do if they see the stalker or the stalker contacts them.** Encourage the victim to discourage any third party from intervening with the stalker on their behalf (other than in situations of assisting in self-defense). Discuss with the victim if they want help doing this.
- **Ask the victim if they would like an authority figure to contact the stalker on their behalf to tell the stalker to cease contact. This could be a campus security professional or local law enforcement. This "line in the sand" can be helpful for ensuring that communication has been clear and, when ignored, demonstrates the respondent's disregard for the victim's wishes. It's vital to consider that such notice could escalate the stalker's behavior,** creating an increased safety risk for the victim and/or people around them. If so, take precautions to address the potential of increased threat (i.e., extra safety planning for the victim, extra patrols, and public safety/police surveillance).
 - This could be a letter, phone call, or face-to-face discussion telling the stalker they are under investigation for stalking and additional contact or actions directed toward the victim may result in campus adjudication, criminal arrest, and/or prosecution (depending on the situation and responder's role). Include in the statement that the stalker's previous contacts have made the victim fearful, and the victim does not desire any further contact with the stalker. Document the suspect's receipt and understanding of this notice to cease contact.
 - Remember to discuss with the victim what additional processes this might trigger – for example, if involving campus security automatically prompts a Title IX investigation that requires an investigation and interview with any alleged stalker.
- **Consider a campus protection/no contact order, a campus ban, or civil protective order.** Discuss the pros, cons, and processes.
- Review the stalker behaviors, safety tips, and documentation strategies below for school and work, technology, and housing/home.



Safety Planning for School and Work




Stalkers may:	Safety Planning Tips:	Documentation Strategies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the victim to, from, or around work, classes, activities • Contact classmates, colleagues, professors, staff about the victim • Show up at the victim's housing, classes, dining hall, work, study sessions, or other campus activity • Contact the victim by phone, text, or e-mail while in class or on campus • Send gifts or mail to the victim' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform security guards, front desk staff, and friends at work/school about the situation; provide a photo/description of the stalker and their vehicle • Change routes to and from work/school (if possible) • Adjust hours or switch class schedule (if possible) • Have a colleague or security guard walk the victim to their car/ transportation • Make sure professors, colleagues, student affairs, and other staff know not to give anyone the victim's contact information • Keep an easily accessible copy of any protective order, no contact order, or ban against the stalker, make sure all campus/work offices are aware of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest the victim save any voicemails, text messages, e-mails, and other communication • Work with building security to acquire any records/logs of the stalker being present on campus/at work

Safety Planning for Technology

Stalkers may:	Safety Planning Tips:	Documentation Strategies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly contact their victim: phone calls, text messages, online messages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly or through third parties • They may make it seem like the contact is coming from someone else • Track/monitor location through devices, software, social media • Track/monitor/surveil through Stalkerware, social media, or online accounts • Impersonate victims online (for example, creating fake profiles) • Hack into accounts, including smart home devices • Share private or personal images with others • Film, record, or photograph the victim without their consent • Search the internet for information about the victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update passwords to accounts frequently • Use two-factor authentication • Change answers to security questions so that the stalker is not able to reset passwords or gain access to accounts • Adjust default settings on phone, apps, and websites so they are private and location information is not shared • Do an internet search on the victim's name to check if any personal information is posted by others; if there is, notify the site's webmaster immediately and request the information be removed • Don't share online account or identification information • If the stalker has had access to the victim's phone or computer, they may be monitoring the device via Stalkerware, key logging software or other means and so could see any changes made to the device; in this case, the victim may want to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use another, safer device (for example, a friend's phone, the computer at a library) • Acquire a new device (if feasible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take screenshots of all text or internet communications with the stalker; consider apps that can assist in taking screenshots of long text conversations • Get a second camera to capture (or have a friend capture) messages and/or photos that disappear or might notify the sender when a screenshot is taken • Get phone records from the phone company to demonstrate frequent calls • Keep track of the stalker's behaviors by writing down every incident in a Documentation Log (https://www.stalkingawareness.org/documentation-log/) • Learn more at NNEDV Safety Net (www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors)

Safety Planning for Housing/Home

Stalkers may:	Safety Planning Tips:	Documentation Strategies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow the victim to, from, or around their housing • Invade the victim’s housing • Damage the victim’s property • Hack into wireless networks or home devices • Disconnect power/cable/ internet service • Send gifts or mail to the victim • Install cameras to monitor the victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform neighbors, front desk staff, housing staff, and security guards about the situation; provide a photo/description of the stalker and their vehicle • Pack a bag with important items in case of needing to leave quickly • Discuss escape routes with roommates and housing staff • Change locks and upgrade any security system, if possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider installing a camera or security device (depending on state law) to capture evidence of the stalker’s behaviors • Photograph evidence of property damage

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 1000 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1010 | Washington, DC 20005 | (202) 558-0040

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¹ Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Madden, K. (2020). Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and misconduct. Westat.
² Mohandie, K., Meloy, J., McGowan, M., & Williams, J. (2006). The RECON typology of stalking: Reliability and validity based upon a large sample of north American stalkers. *Journal of Forensic Science*, 51(1), 147-155. DOI: [10.1111/j.1556-4029.2005.00030.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-4029.2005.00030.x)