



Responding to Military-Connected Survivors of Stalking

Considerations for Community-Based Support Services

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Stalking is a prevalent, dangerous, and traumatic victimization that too often remains unrecognized and unnamed. Military-connected survivors can experience and be affected by stalking in unique ways. This resource aims to help legal personnel, victim advocates, and allied professionals outside of the military system better understand how stalking can take on specific tactics—and implications—when offenders identify characteristics that they can exploit as part of the abuse, including military rules, hierarchies, and social expectations.

“Military-connected survivor” includes any of the following who have experienced domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking:

- Active Duty Service Members
- National Guardsmen
- Reservists
- Veterans
- Civilian dependents who are an adult or child of an aforementioned service member.
- An intimate partner who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic nature with any of the aforementioned service members, which can include a current or former spouse, someone who has shared a child, or someone who has shared a home.

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Recognizing Stalking

Stalkers can be intimate partners, friends, family members, coworkers, acquaintances, or even strangers—but in most cases, they have a personal connection to the survivor. The closer the relationship, the more likely the stalker is to know the survivor’s vulnerabilities and how to exploit them through fear or intimidation.

Stalking often co-occurs with other forms of abuse, such as domestic violence and sexual assault, yet it frequently goes unrecognized or unnamed by both responders and survivors. Given the increased risk of harm and lethality in stalking cases, it is essential to identify it as a distinct form of abuse—even when it co-occurs with other forms of victimization.

Legal definitions of stalking vary by jurisdiction, but generally

STALKING IS DEFINED AS:

A pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to **FEAR** for their safety, the safety of others; or suffer substantial emotional distress.

Victim service providers must be able to recognize stalking behaviors, regardless of how survivors or offenders describe the experience. Stalking carries unique risks, requires tailored safety planning, and has specific policy implications.

When survivors talk about what they are experiencing, they are unlikely to use the word “stalking.” Instead of asking if they are being stalked or harassed, it is more effective to

Stalking disclosures may sound like:

My ex is being kind of creepy.

Another recruit won't stop bothering me.

The lieutenant is making things awkward.



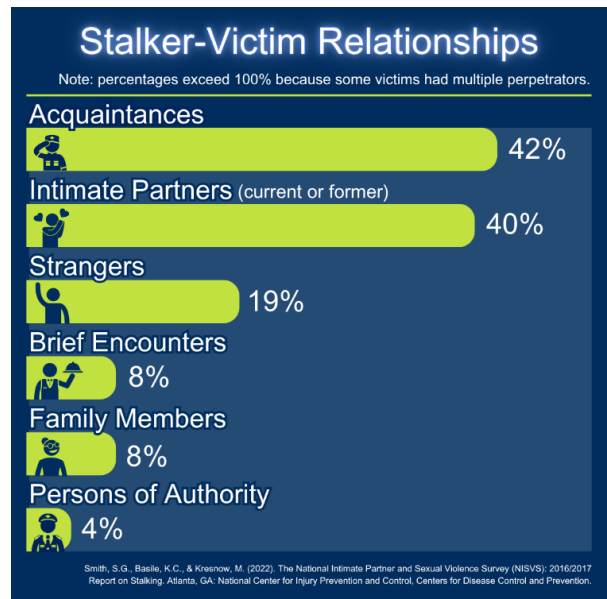
ask about specific behaviors that may indicate stalking. To help identify stalking, consider that stalking includes a wide range of threatening and disturbing behaviors that can be classified into four categories: [Surveillance](#), [Life invasion](#), [Intimidation](#), and [Interference through sabotage or attack](#) (SLII).¹ These four categories overlap and build on each other.

Survivors respond to stalking in different ways, and fear is often masked by other emotions, especially among individuals from communities that emphasize stoicism and emotional restraint, such as the military. In these environments, values like perseverance and the suppression of fear or vulnerability can make it harder for survivors to recognize or express the fear they’re experiencing. Understanding how survivors adjust their lives in response to stalking highlights that the behavior is unwelcome and may be an indication of fear. Responders should be familiar with [stalking SLII behaviors broadly](#) as well as the unique ways that military-connected survivors may experience stalking.

¹ SLII Framework Attributed to: Logan, TK & Walker, R. (2017). Stalking: A Multidimensional Framework for Assessment and Safety Planning. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 18(2), 200-222.

Military-connected survivors may be stalked by service members, Department of Defense (DoD) employees, civilians associated with the military, or individuals with no direct connection to the military. Some stalkers may meet their victims through the military as colleagues or acquaintances, others—like intimate partners—may have connections to their victims outside of the military.

In this resource, “service members” refers to active duty, reservists, or National Guard service members. While active duty, reservists, and National Guard have different policies, procedures, and services available to survivors, there is a lack of research on military-connected survivors of stalking and minimal prioritization of stalking prevention and response in the DoD. So, this resource groups them together as “service members” unless a clear distinction between these forms of service is needed.



Military Elements Affecting Stalking Survivors

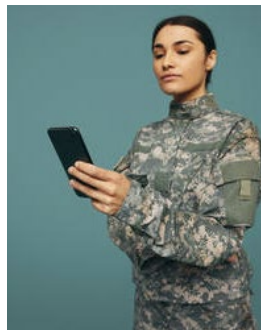
There are unique cultural factors within the military that may affect military-connected stalking survivors. These include environmental, professional, and social elements of the military that stalkers may leverage as part of their stalking behaviors. Some important special considerations for military-connected survivors are listed below.

Barriers to Leaving

For service members and their families, military rules and cultural expectations often create strong emotional and environmental ties to the community, making it especially difficult to leave—even when safety is at risk.

- Due to the requirement for authorization to leave base and the obligation to be present at assigned locations, service members may be restricted from accessing help or safe spaces when needed.
- Survivors may request an Expedited Transfer after they make an unrestricted report to their branch investigative authority such as the Army Criminal Investigation Division (Army CID) or Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). Expedited Transfers can enable to survivor to transfer to another duty station prior to their normal rotation. A transfer is not guaranteed and although the request should be processed within a specific timeframe (90 days), historically that is not the case, with survivors often waiting much longer for a determination.

- The U.S. Department of Defense provides two reporting options for service members and eligible military-connected individuals who experience sexual assault or domestic abuse: Restricted and Unrestricted. Both options grant access to support services; however, a Restricted Report remains confidential, without law enforcement involvement or command notification. Unrestricted Reports notify DoD law enforcement and the chain of command to initiate a possible investigation.
- Service members do not have the same freedom to resign as civilians do. Exiting the military involves a formal separation process that can be lengthy, emotionally challenging, and may negatively impact their livelihood and future career opportunities.
- Many military installations are located in rural, overseas, or otherwise remote areas with limited community support. These conditions can further isolate survivors, restrict access to critical resources, and reduce their ability to safely leave dangerous situations.
- When the offender and survivor are part of the same unit or command, they may be required to participate in shared communication platforms—such as group chats or apps used to report to leadership. Even if the survivor is removed from the group, it can still cause harm by drawing unwanted attention and potentially triggering backlash.



The Military Environment

The immersive nature of military life creates significant overlap between professional, social, and personal spheres, often leaving survivors feeling constantly surrounded—and monitored—by the institution.

- A military installation often functions as a self-contained community, where service members and their families live, work, shop, and socialize within a confined geographic area. For stalking survivors, this can mean regularly encountering their offender in shared spaces such as gyms, dining facilities, and recreation centers—with few alternatives available.

- Some of these facilities require sign-in logs that are visible to others, making it easier to monitor the survivor's routines and whereabouts.
- The close-knit structure of military units and installations can significantly reduce a survivor's anonymity, increasing the likelihood of surveillance or control by an offender.
- Offenders may exploit the tight-knit nature of military communities to isolate survivors, enlist others to monitor them, or discourage them from seeking help by portraying it as disloyal or damaging to the military's reputation.



Misuse of Military Values

Core principles such as loyalty, mission-first mentality, stoicism, and military exceptionalism can be distorted to pressure survivors into silence or discourage them from seeking support.

- Friends and family members may minimize or dismiss the survivor's experience by urging them to "keep quiet," "not cause chaos," or avoid "wasting time or resources"—often out of concern for the survivor's career or their unit's cohesion.
- Stalking survivors may face shame or dismissal from others who say things like, "You survived combat—how can one annoying person bother you?" This kind of minimization—from offenders, peers, family members, or even the survivors themselves—can silence survivors and invalidate their experiences.
- A common belief within military communities—that outsiders "just don't understand"—can discourage survivors from engaging with civilian service providers, creating additional barriers to support and recovery.
- Because stalking is rarely discussed and there is no dedicated agency within the DoD focused on stalking survivors, the issue may be perceived by leadership as a low priority—or mistakenly believed not to occur at all.
- Service member survivors may avoid seeking help or reporting due to fear of being perceived as weak, a perception that carries significant stigma within military culture.

- A survivor may hesitate to report stalking out of concern for “ruining the offender’s career,” especially if they feel a sense of loyalty to the military or to the individual. Service member survivors may feel particularly connected to the offender—or to the unit or group they belong to—due to shared military experiences, reinforcing emotional or professional bonds that complicate disclosure.



Misuse of Status or Authority

Service member offenders may misuse their rank, authority, or professional network to monitor survivors, restrict their movements, and obstruct access to support or safety.

- An offender’s rank, position, or professional network may grant them access to sensitive systems or data—such as personal details or deployment orders—that can be misused to facilitate stalking.
- Service members may fear career retaliation—particularly when the offender holds a higher rank or influential role. Offenders can exploit their position or network to undermine the survivor’s performance evaluations or hinder opportunities for promotion.
- For non-service members, the complexity of the military structure and perceived institutional power can be intimidating, often discouraging them from seeking help or engaging with military systems.
- Offenders who have committed other forms of violence—such as sexual assault—may engage in stalking to intimidate the survivor and prevent them from reporting or seeking help.
- Lower-ranking service members or even non-military individuals who perpetrate abuse may attempt to damage a service member’s career or reputation through tactics such as cyberbullying, technology-facilitated abuse, or the spread of misinformation.

- Higher-ranking members may engage in punitive actions as part of the stalking and/or to discourage the survivor from seeking help, like withholding promotions or assigning unwanted or humiliating tasks.
- An offender's role may give them access to systems, databases, records, and evaluation systems to influence, change, or modify an active-duty survivor's records and positive performance—without the survivor's knowledge.



Difficulty Getting Help

Survivors may not be comfortable accessing military support services and may not have access to non-military support services.

- Because stalking is an ongoing pattern rather than a single event, it often spans multiple locations and jurisdictions. As a result, responders may only see fragmented pieces of the case, leading to individual incidents being treated as isolated events rather than part of a broader pattern of abuse.
 - In addition, jurisdictional issues between military and civilian law enforcement can delay or even stop certain measures meant to protect stalking survivors.
- Survivors may feel social pressure and stigma not to report stalking, for example, because it “would negatively affect the mission,” it’s “not a big deal” compared to military issues, and/or it’s a “distraction” from what’s important.
- Stigma surrounding combat or deployment-related trauma may cause stalking survivors to minimize their experiences, viewing them as less visible or legitimate, and therefore unworthy of attention or support.
- There is no dedicated military agency or office that focuses on stalking, such as the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (for instances of sexual assault) or the Family Advocacy Office (for domestic and child abuse).
 - Therefore, the only way to get support from a military agency with stalking is to report to military investigative services, which would inform the chain of command of any military service members involved and potentially cause retaliation and ostracization of the survivor.

- The requirement to report through the Chain of Command can deter survivors from coming forward due to fears of retaliation, disbelief, or social and professional ostracization.
- Survivor advocacy within the military justice system is often limited, and non-military support services are frequently restricted from direct involvement.
- Survivor access to emergency services may be limited.
 - Not all countries hosting U.S. military installations provide accessible off-base, non-military services, including emergency support.
 - Although all Sexual Assault Prevention & Response and Family Advocacy Programs have hotlines, accessing emergency medical services may require military law enforcement to respond, which limits reporting options of certain forms of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking (DVSAS).
 - Receiving an emergency protective order and it being enforced immediately and effectively are not always a guarantee. Military bases are all different sizes with different capacities. Additionally, there are additional barriers when the military-connected survivor lives off-base and military protective orders cannot be enforced unless there are additional agreements and policies in place between military police and the local law enforcement.
- Besides the challenge of service members being moved every few years, which breaks their support systems, survivors also face varying laws in different states and countries that can create additional barriers to help.



Practical Takeaways

Although stalking is not heavily researched or discussed in the military community, there are preventative steps and trauma-informed actions that advocates can implement in working with military-connected survivors. The National Organization for Victim Advocacy (NOVA) "[Advocating for Military-Connected Survivors](#)" project provides resources, information, and actionable strategies to supporting military-connected survivors of DVSAS.

Consider these practical suggestions for appropriately supporting military-connected stalking survivors.

- Community education and outreach [to raise awareness around stalking](#) helps survivors, informal support systems, and formal support systems be better able to identify stalking and respond appropriately.
 - People often rely on their idea of what a “real” or “legitimate” crime looks like when reporting and responding to crimes. January is National Stalking Awareness Month, but awareness efforts are important year-round.
- [Establish a Coordinated Community Response \(CCR\) Team](#) connecting military and civilian agencies to ensure that policies and procedures are in place with an understanding of available resources and appropriate roles and responsibilities.
 - Coordination is key before a stalking situation occurs. This helps non-military victim advocates be ready to support and appropriately respond to military-connected survivors.
 - [Conduct an Organizational Self-Assessment](#) to assess your organization’s readiness to support military-connected survivors of DVSA.
- Acknowledge a survivor’s military connectedness.
 - During intake, ask the survivor, “Are you military-connected?” rather than “Did you serve in the military?” This will ensure you are not excluding spouses, dependents, or intimate partners.
 - If you ask if they have served in combat, be sure to ask, “were there any other experiences that had a strong impact on you or your career?” This will ensure that you are not giving the survivor the perception that only combat experiences justify getting help.
 - Do not immediately refer survivors to military services or Veterans Affairs. Asking this in the very beginning stages of interaction can discredit your knowledge, minimize your trustworthiness, and make the survivor feel as if they went to the wrong place. There is probably a reason they did not use Department of Defense services.
- To learn more about the situation, ask open-ended questions about what help they want to receive, discuss any mandatory reporting requirements (such as abuse to children or vulnerable adults), and do not contact or involve local law enforcement or the military without first discussing it with the survivor.
 - Contacting law enforcement or military authorities can rapidly escalate a situation and initiate a military process that is often irreversible.
 - Local law enforcement may have formal or informal ties with the military and notify them when incidents involve military-connected individuals.



- [Legal definitions of stalking](#) vary by jurisdiction, so it's vital to know local statutes around criminal stalking and civil protection orders that relate to stalking behaviors.
- Remember that stalking is a “covered offense” under Article 130 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and can be reviewed by the Office of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC).
 - It says that any person under the authority of the chapter is guilty of stalking and shall be punished as a court-martial may direct when the Government proves the following three elements:
 - (1) The offender wrongfully engages in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear death or bodily harm, including sexual assault, to himself or herself, to a member of his or her immediate family, to his or her intimate partner, or to his or her dating partner;
 - (2) And the offender has knowledge, or should have knowledge, that the specific person will be placed in reasonable fear of death or bodily harm, including sexual assault, to himself or herself, to a member of his or her immediate family, to his or her intimate partner, or to his or her dating partner;
 - (3) And the offender's conduct induces reasonable fear in the specific person of death or bodily harm, including sexual assault, to himself or herself, to a member of his or her immediate family, to his or her intimate partner, or to his or her dating partner.

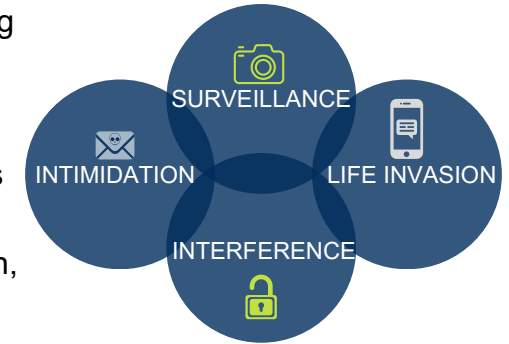
Identify Stalking Behaviors

Research and practice show that responders should ask specific questions about stalking behaviors to better identify and respond to stalking. This is more effective than asking if a survivor is being stalked or harassed. The SLII framework is a useful tool for identifying the wide range of threatening and disturbing behaviors that can be stalking.

- The following questions use the SLII framework to help victim service providers identify some of the specific tactics and implications of stalking that military-connected survivors experience when offenders use military rules, hierarchies, and social expectations as part of the stalking.
- It can also be used as a stand-alone tool.

These questions help victim service providers identify some of the specific tactics and implications of stalking that military-connected survivors experience when offenders use military rules, hierarchies, and social expectations as part of the stalking. Stalking survivors rarely identify their victimization as stalking and are unlikely to use the word 'stalking' to describe what they're experiencing. Research and practice show that responders should ask specific questions about stalking behaviors rather than simply asking if someone has been stalked/harassed.

The questions are grouped into four categories of stalking behaviors: Surveillance, Life invasion, Intimidation, and Interference through sabotage or attack (SLII). These categories overlap and build on each other.



Surveillance

ASK: Has the offender ever tracked, followed, or monitored you in any way? In-person or using technology?

Has the offender:

- Leveraged an insular military community to monitor and gather information about you? Socially or professionally? For example, tracking when you arrive on base and scan your identification card?
- Searched military records, systems, and/or social media for information about you?
- Used their status as a member of the military community to gain information about you? To gain access to your privileged, private, or confidential information and places? To communicate on your behalf?
- Leverage the physical/geographic limitations of a base/military community to monitor and find the you? For example, using the gym, dining areas, or recreation areas at the same time as you? Or waiting for you outside of the only shopping center or bowling alley?
- Leveraged required communication to keep tabs on you?



Life Invasion

ASK: Has the offender repeatedly invaded your life and/or privacy by initiating unwanted contact? In public or private? In-person or through technology?

Has the offender:

- Leveraged the insular environment and community to show up where you work, live, or are likely to be, with the intent to upset, worry, frighten, slander, monitor, or humiliate you? This could include communal spaces like the gym and dining facilities, and/or specific events like recreational sports or exercise classes, a movie showing, or a child's sporting event.
- Showed up to public military events and functions for the sole purpose to be around you? These could be optional, such as an installation picnic, or mandatory (leaving you with the difficult choice to request permission to be present or not).
- Purposely and publicly shared or referenced your military rank, work, or history when you didn't want it shared?



Intimidation

Intimidation tactics must be considered within the context of the situation, with the totality of stalking behaviors and the survivor and offender's relationship and history in mind. Things that may be innocuous in a different context may become menacing due to their repetitiveness or intrusiveness, or because of the history of violence in the relationship between stalker and survivor.

ASK: Has the offender intimidated or scared you with threats? Explicit or implicit threats?

Has the offender:

- Leveraged cultural norms to keep you from reporting the stalking or getting help? For example, misusing the concept of "mission first" to make you feel self-indulgent for worrying about or reporting personal matters.
- Threatened to interfere with the your military career, work, and/or community? For example, to falsely report you for military infractions, to make you late for work, to damage your uniform, or to spread rumors?
- Threatened to damage your reputation in the military or local community?
- When in a foreign country, threatened to withhold language interpretation, falsely interpret, or cause problems related to being overseas?
- Engaged in symbolic violence? For example, destroying keepsakes from deployments or your family.
- Threatened to take children away from the you? To remove children or remove you from the military community?



Interference

through sabotage or attack

Interference through sabotage or attack can show up in many ways, affecting everything from the survivor's reputation to their employment and/or physical safety. A common and significant consequence is survivors losing financial and other resources, which can quickly spiral.

ASK: Has the suspect significantly and directly interfered with the your life through sabotage or attack?

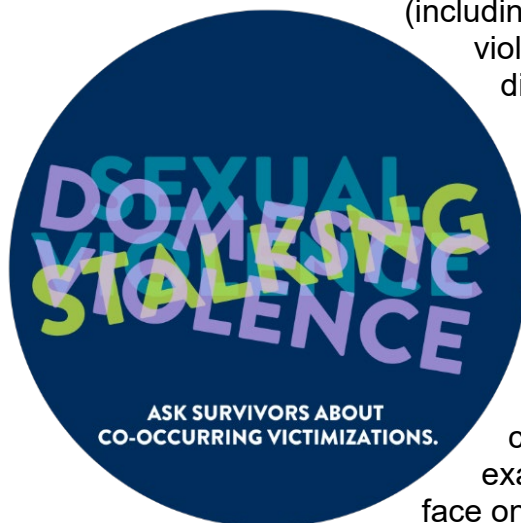
Has the offender:

- Spread rumors and/or slandered you to hurt your reputation in the military community or the local community? For example, spreading rumors about you in your squadron? Making false accusations to command or leadership resulting in disciplinary action or negatively affecting your military career? Ruining your reputation in the local community where your kids are involved in sports or other activities?
- Provided false information or reports to the military about you?
- Shared/posted private information, photos, videos with the military community that you didn't want shared?
- Intentionally argued in public to disclose information that you didn't want shared with the community?
- Restricted or sabotaged your access to community spaces and/or events?

Safety Planning

Safety planning must take into account specific issues of military-connected stalking survivors, including (but not limited to) the following:

- **Living on base v. off base:** Both living on-base and off-base present challenges for safety planning, including jurisdictional confusion and inconsistent enforcement of protective orders. Collaborating through a Coordinated Community Response Team can help address and resolve these issues.
- **Life changes:** A survivor may be unable to change their schedule, routine, method of transport, housing, phone number, appearance, job, and more without approval, paperwork, or hardship—autonomy, control, and self-empowerment are more challenging in the military.
- **Deployment and transfers:** Offenders rarely cease stalking behaviors when either the survivor or offender is deployed or transferred. In some cases, the survivor relocating may escalate the situation or cause the stalking to shift to online platforms.
- **Being a survivor:** Survivors may encounter heightened barriers to reporting stalking, accessing services, or being believed based on aspects of their identity. Offenders may exploit these facets of a survivor's background to intimidate, harass, monitor, or discredit them. Additionally, survivors are sometimes unjustly held responsible for the offender's behavior due to prejudices related to their personal history or identity.
- **Co-occurring victimizations:** Many abusive behaviors and crimes frequently co-occur with stalking, including domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment (including workplace harassment), protection order violations, trespassing, burglary, nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, vandalism, property damage, threats of bodily harm, and witness intimidation. It is essential to identify and address all forms of victimization to meet survivors' diverse needs and hold offenders accountable for the full extent of their conduct.



Within the military environment, these victimizations can jeopardize survivors' careers, peer acceptance, and job duties. For example, an active-duty service member may face ongoing abuse even if their stalking case is difficult to substantiate legally, while remaining bound to their command, installation, military occupational specialty, or service branch. Although transfer options may exist, they typically require substantial evidence and formal legal action against the offender.

- **DVSAS:** Military communities have high rates of domestic violence and sexual violence, but military and civilian definitions and eligibility criteria often differ. It can still be empowering for providers to work with survivors to self-actualize and name the full scope of victimizations happening, naming the abuse and that nobody deserves it. When intimate partners engage in behaviors like excessive contact, surveillance, showing up, and/or hacking accounts, these are stalking behaviors used as part of the coercive control offenders exert over their victims.
 - To learn more about the intersection of domestic violence and stalking, [watch the SPARC awareness video here](#).
 - Stalking offenders may use sexual violence as part of a stalking course of conduct (such as repeated unwanted communication of a sexual nature, threats of violence or sabotage if the survivor refuses to perform sexual acts, sexual harassment), and sexual violence offenders may use stalking tactics to plan a sexual assault, monitor a survivor after a sexual assault, or keep a survivor from reporting sexual violence. To learn more about the intersection, [watch the SPARC awareness video here](#) and use the resource on [Stalking SLII Behaviors and Sexual Violence](#).

Learn More

To learn more about stalking, visit StalkingAwareness.org and review SPARC's resources for victim service providers, particularly those listed below. Contact SPARC at tta@stalkingawareness.org with questions, concerns, or requests for technical assistance on responding to survivors of stalking. While SPARC resources can help advocates, other professionals, and survivors learn more about stalking, SPARC does not provide direct services to survivors of stalking.

- [Guide for Victim Advocates Responding to Stalking](#)
- [Safety Planning Strategies for Stalking Survivors](#)
- [Tools to help identify stalking](#)
- [Stalking Victim Advocate Community of Practice](#)



To learn more about military-connected survivors of stalking, domestic violence, sexual violence, and dating violence, visit the Advocating for Military-Connected Survivors website at MilitaryConnectedSurvivors.org. There you will find tools and resources to help build awareness on supporting military-connected survivors, including the below:

- [Military Protective Order/Civilian Protective Order Tip Sheet](#)
- [NOVA Technology Abuse Tip Sheet](#)
- [Military-Civilian CCR Toolkit](#)
- [Organizational Self-Assessment](#)

