

A FREE SAFETY & AWARENESS GUIDE

Understanding Stalking

What it is, how it happens, the warning signs, and the steps that help you document it, report it, and stay safer.

10 short chapters
Free tools at stalking.org
501(c)(3) nonprofit

stalking.org

WELCOME

You picked up this guide for a reason — trust that.

Maybe something has been happening to you. Maybe it's happening to someone you love, or someone you work with. Wherever you're starting from, this guide gives you a clear, calm walk-through of what stalking is, how it shows up, and what steps actually help.

Every chapter ends with something concrete you can do, and every page links back to a free tool at Stalking.org — no account, no cost, no judgment.

In this guide

01 What Stalking Really Means

A plain-language definition and why it's a crime everywhere in the U.S.

02 How Stalkers Watch and Follow

Surveillance, following, and hidden GPS trackers explained.

03 Stalking by Phone, Text, and Screen

Why calls, messages, and cyberstalking are treated just as seriously.

04 Warning Signs of Escalation

Research-backed factors linked to a higher risk of violence.

05 Threats: What Counts, Legally

Direct, implied, and third-party threats, and why every one matters.

06 Building an Evidence File

How to document incidents the way police and courts expect.

07 Your Personal Safety Plan

A practical framework you can build today, for free.

08 Getting Help Right Now

Hotlines, tools, and how Stalking.org supports you.

Q Chapter 01

What Stalking Really Means

Stalking is a **pattern** of unwanted contact, following, or watching that would make a reasonable person **afraid**. Those two ideas, pattern and fear, are what separate stalking from a single awkward message.

Stalking is a crime in **all 50 states** and under federal law. It does not require any physical contact. Courts have upheld convictions built entirely on repeated phone calls, or on a person who never spoke a word but kept appearing wherever the victim went.

"Living with the feeling of being watched changes how you sleep, work, and move through the world — long before anyone is ever touched."

Common tactics

- Repeated unwanted calls, texts, or emails
- Following or waiting outside home or work
- Unwanted gifts, letters, or deliveries
- GPS or app-based location tracking
- Monitoring social media, fake accounts
- Contacting your friends, family, or boss

~3.4M

U.S. adults stalked annually, per a federal estimate — read current figures at stalking.org/stalking-facts-research

Myth	Fact
✗ "It's not stalking unless he touches me."	Physical contact is never required. Watching and repeated contact are enough on their own.
✗ "He's never said anything threatening."	Many laws don't require a spoken threat — the pattern itself can be the crime.
✗ "We used to date, so it's a grey area."	A past relationship changes nothing about your right to say no now.

GO DEEPER ON [STALKING.ORG/BLOG](https://stalking.org/blog)

What Is Stalking? Meaning, Examples, and the Law

Who Stalks and How Long Does It Last?

Chapter 02

How Stalkers Watch and Follow

Some of the most frightening cases involve no words at all — the person simply keeps appearing. Courts have consistently ruled that silent surveillance and following can support a stalking charge on their own, because the fear it causes is just as real.

Following & surveillance

Trailing someone on foot or by car, waiting at places they regularly visit, or repeatedly showing up "by coincidence" at work, church, or the gym.

Signs you may be tracked

- They know where you've been without being told
- You keep seeing the same car or person
- An unfamiliar device is on your car or in your bag
- Your phone battery drains unusually fast

GPS & Bluetooth trackers

Small trackers hidden in a car, bag, or gift let a stalker follow your location in real time. Courts have upheld convictions for exactly this — one appeals court rejected a stalker's claim that using a hidden GPS device "wasn't really surveillance."

If you find a tracker

- Get to a safe, public place first
- Photograph it before touching it further
- Call police before removing it — it may be evidence
- Use a device the stalker has never touched to search for help

Think you're being followed or tracked?

Run the free Evidence Auditor before you touch anything.

stalking.org/#evidence-audit →

GO DEEPER ON [STALKING.ORG/BLOG](https://stalking.org/blog)

Stalking Without Words: Following & Tracking

The Complete Guide to Digital Safety

Chapter 03

Stalking by Phone, Text, and Screen

A common myth is that stalking requires following someone in person. Courts disagree — repeated phone calls alone have supported convictions, and cyberstalking laws now cover texts, email, and social media in nearly every state.

What counts

- Nonstop calls or texts after being told to stop
- Emails or messages sent to your boss or coworkers
- Fake or monitoring social media accounts
- Messages passed through a mutual contact
- Unwanted gifts ordered to your address

Documentation habit

Screenshot everything with the date, time, and sender visible. Never delete a message, even upsetting ones — they're evidence. Keep backups somewhere the stalker can't reach, like a new email account.

30-60%

of stalking victims report receiving at least one direct threat, according to published research summaries

"Polite or loving messages can still be stalking. Courts look at the pattern, not the tone."

Ready to lock down your accounts?

Read the Complete Guide to Digital Safety.

stalking.org/blog/complete-guide-to-digital-safety →

GO DEEPER ON STALKING.ORG/BLOG

Can Calls, Texts, and Emails Be Stalking?

What Is Cyberstalking?

⚠ Chapter 04

Warning Signs of Escalation

No one can predict a single case with certainty. But researchers who have studied thousands of stalking cases point to a few factors that, together, are statistically linked to a higher chance of violence.

Research-linked risk factors

- A prior intimate relationship with the victim
- Explicit threats of harm or death
- A history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Access to weapons
- Violating a protective order

Other signals to watch

- Contact becomes more frequent or intense
- Sudden contact with your children or new partner
- Talk of "having nothing left to lose"
- A major life change — breakup, job loss, court date

This is not a test

These are patterns found across large groups of cases, not a checklist that predicts one person. If even a few apply, it's time to update your safety plan and loop in an advocate — not to panic, but to prepare.

Not sure how urgent your situation is?

The free Risk Assessment gives you a clearer picture in five questions.

stalking.org/#risk-assessment →

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Stalking Warning Signs: When Risk Rises

Recognizing Intimate Partner Violence

Chapter 05

Threats: What Counts, Legally

Many stalking statutes hinge on a "credible threat" — one that would make a reasonable person fear for their safety. That threat does not have to be spoken aloud to count.

Direct threats

A stated intent to harm — spoken, written, or sent as a message. The clearest form of threat, and the easiest to document.

Third-party threats

A threat relayed through a friend, coworker, or relative can still count if the stalker intended it to reach you.

Implied threats

Courts have upheld findings that repeated, silent staring, or statements like "call me before it's too late," can qualify as threats once the full pattern is considered.

"Most people who threaten never act on it. But most people who do act, threatened first. Treat every threat seriously."

Preserve every threat

- Save the original message or voicemail
- Screenshot with date, time, and sender visible
- Write down spoken threats immediately, word for word
- Note witnesses and how you reacted

GO DEEPER ON [STALKING.ORG/BLOG](https://www.stalking.org/blog)

[Stalking Threats: Direct, Implied & Third-Party](#)

[Understanding Stalking Laws](#)

 Chapter 06

Building an Evidence File

Strong stalking cases are rarely built on one dramatic piece of proof. They're built from many small, well-organized records that tell the same consistent story.

What to collect

- Every message, voicemail, and email — never delete
- Screenshots showing date, time, and sender
- Photos of gifts, notes, or damage
- Names and contact info for any witnesses
- Police report numbers and court paperwork

Keep a simple log

For each incident, write down:

- Date, time, and place
- Exactly what happened
- Who saw or heard it
- How it affected you

Never confront to get proof

Don't put yourself at risk to capture a photo or a recording. Use a device the stalker cannot access, and store backups in more than one place.

Not sure if your evidence is strong enough?

Run it through the free Evidence Auditor checklist.

stalking.org/#evidence-audit →

GO DEEPER ON STALKING.ORG/BLOG

Proving Stalking: Witnesses, Records & Your Story

Evidence That Holds Up in Court

 Chapter 07

Your Personal Safety Plan

A safety plan turns fear into a set of concrete, rehearsed decisions. You don't need to build it perfectly today — start with these five pieces.

1. Safe person

Someone who knows your situation and can be reached any time, day or night.

2. Safe places

A police station, a friend's home, or anywhere open and public that you can get to quickly.

3. Code word

A simple word you can text or say that means "call for help" without explanation.

4. Go-bag

Copies of ID, some cash, a spare phone charger, and copies of key evidence, kept somewhere accessible.

5. Digital cleanup

New passwords, two-factor authentication, and a check for any shared accounts or location sharing still turned on.

Build yours in minutes, for free.

Answer a few questions and get a private, printable plan.

stalking.org/#safety-plan →

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[How to Build a Safety Plan](#)

[The Complete Guide to Digital Safety](#)

♥ Chapter 08

Getting Help Right Now

Crisis lines**Emergency** — 911**National DV Hotline** — 1-800-799-7233**Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** — 988**Free tools at stalking.org**

Risk Assessment · Safety Plan Builder

Evidence Auditor · Police Report Organizer

Protective Order Guide · Data Broker

Removal

ABOUT US**Stalking.org**

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit providing free, accessible safety tools to people facing stalking and cyberstalking — no account, no cost.

stalking.org/about-us · stalking.org/mission-advocacy

Support the work

Donations keep every tool on this site free for the next person who needs them.

stalking.org/#donate

This guide provides general information only. It is not legal, medical, or mental-health advice, and Stalking.org is not a crisis service. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Laws vary by state — consult a qualified attorney or advocate about your situation. Full disclaimer at stalking.org/disclaimer.