

# Help Starts Here.

## Information on Stalking (Criminal Harassment)

### What is stalking?

Stalking (also called criminal harassment) occurs when one person is followed, watched, communicated with, or subjected to any form of behaviour from another person such that they begin to fear for their safety or for the safety of those known to them. Stalking/criminal harassment often involves repeated conduct over a period of time between the perpetrator and the victim. Although stalking/criminal harassment may not result in injury, it can be a precursor to violent acts.

Stalking/criminal harassment is not a sign of love. It is a form of abuse that is based on power and control. It is also a crime under the Criminal Code of Canada. It can frighten you and take away your sense of security and personal safety. It can even lead to physical harm.

**If you are a victim of criminal harassment, help is available.**

### Signs of Stalking/Criminal Harassment

If someone is:

- threatening you or your children, Grandchildren, family or friends
- following you or your children, grandchildren, family or friends
- threatening or damaging your property or hurting your pets
- calling you over and over, hanging up or not speaking when you answer
- sending you unwanted repeated text messages
- contacting you by email or through social networking websites over and over
- calling your children, grandchildren, family, friends or co-workers and asking about you
- sending you things you don't want

Or if you feel that:

- your emotional or physical safety is being threatened
- you are afraid to say something about the person's conduct
- you can't do what you want or go where you want due to fear
- you need to change your lifestyle to avoid this person

You may be the subject of stalking/criminal harassment. Stalking/criminal harassment can be perpetrated by anyone. Examples include a spouse or partner, a person you lived with, someone you dated, a client, a former employee, a co-worker, a fellow student, a peer, or a total stranger. Although almost three out of four victims of criminal harassment in Canada are women, children, adolescents, and men can also be victims.

If you are concerned that you are being harassed, don't hesitate to call the police or contact VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808. Your safety and peace of mind are important.

### If You Believe You're Being Stalked Contact the Police

If you are in a dangerous situation, call 911 or the emergency police number for your community. If you are not in immediate danger, call the non-emergency number for the police in your area. You may find it helpful to bring a friend with you to the police station. Bring a written statement with you and include a detailed description or a photograph of the stalker. Tell the officer if you have kept any notes about past incidents, if you have received any threatening letters, emails, or voicemails, or if there is anyone who saw the perpetrator being violent or threatening you. It is important to maintain detailed



notes about the stalking and to keep any recorded telephone messages, emails, text messages, gifts, letters or notes that have been sent by the perpetrator.

Make sure you write down the police case or file number and the officer's name. Use the file number every time you call the police to report anything that could be part of the harassment. If you have any questions or concerns, it is easiest if you talk to the same officer who will be familiar with you and the case.

Keep emergency numbers and your police file number with you at all times.

You may find it helpful to speak to a Victim Service Worker about your situation. You can ask to be referred to a Victim Service Worker through the police or by contacting VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808.

In some communities personal safety alarms may be available. Ask police, a Victim Service Worker or a transition house worker if this type of alarm is available for you. You can also contact the Victim Safety Unit for more information at (604) 660-0316 (lower mainland) or 1-877-315-8822 (toll-free in BC).

If you move to another area and you have an active police file, inform the police in your new community about the harassment. Tell them from where you moved, your file number, and the name of the officer who was helping you.

If the stalker has been charged and convicted on this or any other crime, you can get information about the stalker's whereabouts, any upcoming day passes, or the release date. Contact the Victim Safety Unit for more information by calling (604) 660-0316 (lower mainland) or 1-877-315-8822 (toll-free in BC). If you know that the stalker has violated a court order, tell the authorities.

## Keep Written Records

If you haven't kept notes, start now. Write down what you remember and ask others you trust to do the same.

Write down the time, date and place of every contact or event with the stalker. Note what happened and how it made you feel, beginning with the first incident. Even if an event seems trivial, or unrelated, write it down as it may help to show a pattern of criminal harassment.

Copy and save any messages left on your answering machine or voicemail and make notes of times when you answered the phone and the other person either hung up or didn't speak.

Keep your record book handy, make a copy of it, and keep the copy in a safe place outside of your home. Keep any notes, letters or parcels sent by the stalker. Good records are very important for investigation.

## Tell Others

If you are being stalked, tell friends, family, trusted co-workers, employers and neighbours about what is happening to you. Ask them to write down any contact they may have with the stalker and to note the time, date, place and what happened. It may help to direct them to read this publication.

If you're getting child support through the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program, tell your worker about your situation.

Tell your children's caregivers, school principal and teachers about your situation. If you have a photograph of the stalker, show it to them. Be clear and direct and ask them to help you stay safe. Ask them to keep all information about you private and to let you know if the stalker contacts them. Add their reports to your record book.



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### Take Care of Yourself

Your emotional health and sense of self-worth are important. Talk to your friends and get support from someone you trust such as a doctor, religious leader, a Victim Service Worker, or a counsellor.

It is important that you get help for yourself and for others close to you when you're dealing with the trauma caused by criminal harassment. If you have children or grandchildren they may need help too.

You can talk to a Victim Service Worker for assistance in formulating a safety plan for you and your family. Call VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808 to locate a victim service program in your area.

### Ways to Increase Your Personal Safety

A stalker may try to track you down at home, work, or other places. Here are some steps you can take to enhance your personal safety. Please keep in mind that these steps are not intended to replace you contacting the police.

#### Protect Your Personal Information

Be aware of where you are and who is close by when talking about family, social and travel plans. Someone could be listening.

Avoid giving out your social insurance number in most circumstances. It is legally required only by banks and on employer tax forms.

If you live in an apartment building, remove your name from the door-buzzer, or use an alias if a name other than 'occupant' is required.

Get a post office box. Put in a change of address card at the post-office and notify all personal and professional contacts of your new postal box address. If you have a mail-slot in your door, seal it closed. Make sure your

name is not on anything that is delivered to your home.

Remove your home address and telephone number from anywhere there's a record, including:

- auto mechanic records
- business cards
- car registration
- cheques
- children's sports
- church/club records
- couriers
- credit bureau
- credit card records
- dentist's office
- doctor's office
- driver's licence
- dry cleaners
- florists
- Internet and social networking (e.g., Facebook, MySpace)
- land registry files
- libraries
- luggage
- medical records
- medical services plan
- personnel file at work
- pharmacies
- photo-developers
- recreation centre files



- schools
- subscriptions
- universities
- utility bills
- veterinarians
- voter records

You may be able to get your address removed from public records. Contact your local police or VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808 for more information.

### Safety at Home

When approaching your home have your key in your hand before you reach the door.

Keep all doors and windows locked, even when you are in the house, and check to see that they remain locked.

Keep emergency numbers and your police file number near your telephones.

Install extra outside lights at a height where they cannot be easily removed. Keep lights on inside your garage. Keep shrubs around your home trimmed. If possible, install motion detector lights and security alarms. If you have an outside fuse box, keep it locked. If you rent, consider asking your landlord to provide some of these items.

Place lamps near windows to reduce shadows on the curtains or blinds.

Consider changing the locks. Use deadbolt locks and keep track of all keys. If you lose a key, replace the locks and have new keys made. Keep your garage locked at all times.

Drill a hole for a metal stopper in the frame of sliding windows and doors so they can't be pushed open.

Put a wide-angled peep-hole in the door and always

check to see who is at the door before you open it.

Ask any repair persons for identification if they come to your home. Refuse to accept packages or deliveries that you did not order.

Make sure your name and address and any personal details are removed before you recycle or throw out mail.

Tell trusted neighbours, landlords or building managers about your situation and ask them for help in watching your home. If you have a photograph of the stalker, show it and ask neighbours to tell you or the police if the person is seen in the area. If you can, describe the stalker's car and give them the licence plate number.

Have an emergency plan. Make sure your children and grandchildren know about the emergency plan and where to go for help.

Keep an emergency bag packed with extra clothes, medications, identification and cash or credit/debit cards. Include toys, books and any special items your children might want or need. You may want to keep this bag in your car or at your workplace, or at a neighbour's or friend's home.

### Safety on the Phone

You can use \*67 before dialling a phone number to block your name and number from appearing on a call display. You may want to check with the phone company to see if this and other privacy protection services are available in your area.

If you are getting harassing calls, talk to the phone company, ask about \*57 call trace service. Get a new phone line with an unlisted phone number. Keep your old phone number on a second line and connect it to an answering machine. Keep all messages that may be related to the criminal harassment.

Consider getting a cellular phone for emergencies.



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Be aware that conversations on cellular and mobile phones can be traced by a scanner.

Protect your privacy by not making 1-900 calls on your phone. Only use 1-800 and 1-888 numbers for police and justice system information.

### Safety on the Internet

Take care when posting personal or private information on the Internet. This information may be available to anyone.

Review your Internet Service Provider's harassment policies. Your Internet Service Provider may be able to help protect you from harassment online.

Learn about online tools to block unwanted communication.

Never use your full name as a user ID.

Change your passwords often.

If you receive harassing emails or experience chat room abuse, contact your Internet Service Provider. They may be able to control the abuser's account.

### Safety at Work

You may need to make special arrangements at your workplace in order to keep yourself and your family safe. Be clear and direct with your coworkers about the help you need.

Tell trusted co-workers and your employer about what is happening to you. It may help to show them a copy of this publication.

Ask others to screen your calls. Ask them to take names and messages.

Remove your name from the in/out board and tell people not to say where you are or when you are expected.

Remove any personal information from your files, time sheet, locker, desk or computer.

Remove your name plate from your desk or office door.

Do not accept any packages you are not expecting.

If you have a photograph of the person who is harassing you, show it to other staff and on-site security. Make them aware of your safety needs.

### Safety When Walking

Look around and be aware of what is going on around you.

Avoid distractions such as wearing headphones or digging in your purse or backpack.

Wear your purse strap on your shoulder, not looped around your neck and shoulder.

Wear comfortable shoes such as runners.

Walk with others whenever possible.

Stay on well-lit streets, in the centre of the sidewalk, away from doorways, bushes, and parked cars. Cross the road if necessary.

If you think you are being followed, go to a safe place such as a store or cafe, or get on a bus or in a taxi. Tell someone you are being followed.

### Safety on Transit

Carry a transit schedule. After dark, arrive just before the transit vehicle is due.

Wait in well-lit areas.

On the bus, sit near others. If you feel unsafe, ask the driver to call for help.

Request a Special Stop to let you off the bus closer to your street or door if available on your bus route.

Call TransLink (Metro Vancouver) or BC Transit (outside Metro Vancouver) for more information about routes that provide Special Stop Service.



## Safety in Your Car

Lock your car doors and windows at all times, even when you are in your car. Use a locking gas cap. Try to use a car with a front hood that can only be opened from the inside.

When you approach your car, have your key ready. Check your car before opening the door. Look inside and under your car, do a quick check of tires and wipers, and make sure the front hood and trunk/hatchback are closed.

Do not identify your car keys with a name, car model or licence plate tag. Keep your car registration hidden in the trunk/hatchback of your car.

Park in well-lit places or near attendants in parking lots. Use extra caution in parkades. Never give your car keys to a parking valet.

If someone is waiting near your car, leave the area.

If a suspicious looking van is parked on the driver's side of your car, enter from the other side, or leave if you feel unsafe.

Tell the people who service your car to keep all information private and to keep your keys safe.

If you are being followed in your car, drive directly to a police, fire or gas station. Stay in your car and honk your horn until someone comes out.

Try to write down the licence plate number of any car following you. Keep a pen, paper and flashlight in your car.

Change your routine; drive on different roads.

Know where to find police, gas and fire stations.

Plan your trips ahead of time. Know your routes and exits.

## Legal Options to Help Increase Your Safety

### Peace Bonds

A Peace Bond is an order made by a judge in court to help protect one person from another. If you are the subject of stalking/criminal harassment, you can get a Peace Bond if you fear for your own safety or for the safety of your family or property. A Peace Bond lists certain conditions that the perpetrator must follow. It can direct the person to have no contact with you or your family and to keep a certain distance from you, your workplace, or your home. It gives the police the right to arrest the stalker if the Order is broken. A Peace Bond is enforceable anywhere in Canada and lasts for up to one year, but can be renewed under certain circumstances.

#### To get a Peace Bond . . .

Ask the police officer who is working on your file to start the process for a Peace Bond. If you have children, ask if they should be mentioned, and tell the officer what you want included in the order.

When you get your Order, ask the police if it has been registered with the Protection Order Registry. The Protection Order Registry is a computer database of protection orders issued by BC courts.

Make copies of the Order and keep one with you at all times. If the stalker breaks the conditions of the Order, call the police immediately.

If the Order includes your children, give a copy of the order to the principal at your child's school or daycare, sports coaches, recreation instructors, and so on as appropriate.

### Family Law Protection Order

A family law protection order is a protection order made under the BC Family Law Act. The order can protect you from a "family member," which includes your partner, your child's parent or guardian, a relative of theirs who



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lives with them, or a relative of yours who lives with you. The order can protect you, your children, and other family members who live with you, and any other children living in your home, the home of your partner, or the home of your child's parent or guardian. The order is meant to protect you from what the law calls "family violence" by a family member, which includes physical abuse (or attempts), including being locked up or restricted, or denied food or other basic needs, emotional or mental abuse, such as being intimidated, harassed, stalked, threatened, or having your property damaged, sexual abuse (or attempts), and children being exposed to family violence.

If you are afraid for your safety or if you are concerned about other matters (such as to get your partner or ex-partner to stop calling you every day, or to stop him from showing up uninvited at your home or your child's school), you can apply for a family law protection order.

### **To get a Family Law Protection Order . . .**

You can apply for a family law protection order in Provincial Court or Supreme Court. You can apply for one on its own, or when you apply for other family court orders. (Only orders about safety can go in the family law protection order.) You choose the court, and then fill out the necessary court forms.

You may apply for a family law protection order with or without a lawyer, but a lawyer is recommended. The hearing will be in civil (family) court.

A family law protection order lasts for as long as the judge sets it for. If the judge doesn't set an end date, it lasts for one year. The police or RCMP in your new province may be able to enforce your family law protection order. Check with the nearest court registry in your new province.

For more information about Peace Bonds and Family Law Protection Orders, see the publication, *For Your Protection: Peace Bonds and Family Law Protection Orders* available at: [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/publications](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/publications)

### **VictimLink BC 1-800-563-0808**

VictimLink BC is a toll-free, confidential telephone service available across BC and Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence.

VictimLink BC is TTY accessible. Call TTY at (604) 875-0885; to call collect, please call the TELUS Relay Service at 711. Text (604) 836-6381. Email [VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca](mailto:VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca). Website: [www.victimlinkbc.ca](http://www.victimlinkbc.ca)

*Please note: This pamphlet provides general information only. It is not a legal document.*

