

EVERYTHING YOU DO ONLINE LEAVES A TRACE

Revealing too much could leave you open to being cyberstalked.

Cyberstalking can be linked to domestic and sexual abuse.

For information visit www.adva.org.uk
Devon Domestic Abuse Helpline 0345 155 1074

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Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking can be defined as threatening behavior or unwanted advances or harassment using the Internet, email, social networking sites or text messaging.

It shares some characteristics with stalking in that it is deliberate, persistent and personal and involves the pursuit, harassment, or contact of others in an unwanted manner.

Cyberstalking and Domestic Abuse

One in five women and one in 10 men report being stalked at some point in their lives (British Crime Survey 2009/10).

Stalking is a key factor in many domestic abuse cases and is predominantly committed by a former partner after a relationship has ended. With the growth of internet use the popularity of the internet and social networking sites, cyberstalking has opened up a whole new element of risk for victims of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse ex-partners often have access to victims computers, mobiles and often know the on and offline habits as well as knowing their victims passwords and security questions.

The Internet and mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets (a mobile computer) have made it easier to find and contact people directly as well as find personal information.

These new technologies provide perpetrators of domestic abuse with an 'extra tool' to hurt, abuse and humiliate victims.

Types of cyberstalking

Three of the most common types of cyberstalking are: online abuse, trolling and sexting.

Online abuse - actions that use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm another person. Victims are often known personally by the perpetrator.

Trolling - trolling is deliberately sowing hatred, bigotry, racism, misogyny, or just simple bickering between others. Trolls are users who thrive in any environment where they are allowed to make public comments, like blog sites, news sites, discussion forums, and game chat starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community.

Sexting - the use of a mobile phone or other similar electronic device to distribute pictures or video of sexually explicit images. Often carried out by ex-partners who still have access to sexually explicit images to humiliate and embarrass their victim. Read more about this [here](#)

Cyberstalkers target their victims through social media platforms, chat rooms, message boards, discussion forums, and e-mail. Cyberstalking takes many forms such as;

- Threatening or obscene e-mail or direct messages
- Spamming (in which a stalker sends a victim a multitude of junk mail)
- Live chat harassment or flaming (online verbal abuse)
- Leaving improper messages on message boards or in guest books
- Sending electronic viruses
- Sending unsolicited e-mail or direct messages
- Tracing another person's computer and Internet activity
- Electronic identity theft
- Spywear installed on phone or computer
- Passwords changing or no longer working
- Files and contacts disappearing from a computer
- Money taken from bank accounts or goods been bought without permission

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) centre has uncovered a worrying trend in children self-harming or taking their own lives as a result of being forced into performing slave-like sex acts live on webcam by sexual abusers, according to research released in September 2013. Read more on this [here](#)

The easiest way to prevent yourself or someone you know from experiencing cyberstalking is to secure your networking profiles to reduce the risks. See our 'Help and Advice document' to find out how.

Recognising cyberstalking

Cyberstalking can leave victims feeling isolated, scared, threatened and humiliated. Hate speech and harassment is a crime and can therefore be investigated by the Police. Anyone experiencing domestic abuse or cyberstalking does not have to suffer in silence.

Are you a victim?

Cyberstalking shares important characteristics with offline stalking; many stalkers – online or off – are motivated by a desire to control their victims. Many people are often not aware they are the target of a cyberstalker. The contact might start positively but through emotional control lull the recipient into a false sense of security.

The control can take many forms but gradually makes the person do things and behave in a way they might not feel entirely comfortable with. This control can increase until it becomes frightening, unwanted and threatening.

Cyberstalking behaviour can include:

- False accusations

Cyberstalkers may make false accusations in order to cause distress to a person or damage their reputation and they may try to turn victims' friends and family against them.

A cyberstalker may set up their own website, blogs, or social network pages to post accusations about a person, or they may use existing websites and social networking sites which allow public contributions.

- Gathering information about the victim

Cyberstalkers may try to gain information about the victim through their friends, family and work colleagues' social networking sites. They may also try to advertise for information on the internet, or hire a private detective.

- Monitoring their target's online activities

A cyberstalker might attempt to gather information about their victim through their online activity; they may try to gain their IP address which can reveal a lot of information about the victims.

- Encouraging others to harass the victim

Many cyberstalkers may try to involve third parties in the harassment. They may claim the victim has harmed the stalker or his/her family in some way, or may post the victim's name and telephone number in order to encourage others to join the pursuit.

- False victimisation

The cyberstalker may claim that the victim is harassing him/her when realistically it may be the other way round.

Types of stalkers

Stalkers can range from people with a crush that seek attention to more serious stalkers that enjoy the risk factor and might cause harm and be violent towards the victim.

Types of stalkers can include;

Intimacy Seeker might have a crush on celebrities or individuals not well known by the perpetrator. Intimacy seekers can be after a relationship (not always sexual) with the victim.

Incompetent Suitor's tend to stalk in the context of loneliness and target strangers or acquaintances. They usually stalk for brief periods, but if they persist their behaviour might be maintained by the fact that they are indifferent to the distress of victim.

Rejected stalker refers to a broad area and applies to both male and female. Often, they can't accept that a relationship is over and will do everything to woo an ex partner back. They create opportunities for contact and it can be incredibly hard to stop this type of stalker.

Resentful stalkers tend to be higher risk and are often ex partners of the victim. They are often angry and frustrated and can boil over into violence/rape. The initial motivation for stalking can be linked to a desire for revenge and is maintained by the sense of power and control.

A Predator stalker is the highest risk. They can be sadistic and predatory stalking often arises in the context of deviant sexual practices and interests. Perpetrators are usually male and victims are usually female strangers in whom the stalker develops a sexual interest.