



Supporting Stalking Victims in the Military

Advice for Advocates

1. **Listen to the victim in a non-judgmental way.** Let him/her describe in detail the behaviors and emotions being experienced.
2. **Believe the victim.** Stalkers intrude on the victim's life in a lot of different ways, and technology only enhances that capability. It may seem incredible to you that a stalker knows everywhere the victim goes or everyone she talks to, but there are documented cases where this has happened. Stalkers use friends and family members, global positioning systems, hidden cameras, computer Spyware programs, and more to monitor and track their prey. Unless or until you have compelling reason not to believe the victim's version of events, assume it to be true.
3. **Express concern and sympathy to the victim for what he/she is experiencing.** Everyone deserves to live a life free from harassment and stalking.
4. **Inquire about possible related acts.** Victims often focus on particular events like vandalism to a vehicle or home. A little digging might reveal that the victim has experienced other stalking behaviors, such as following, unwanted communications, and unwanted gifts.
5. **Find out whether the victim knows who is stalking him/her.** If not, is there a prime suspect? If the offender is known (or strongly suspected), what is the relationship between the stalker and the victim? This could make a difference in what types of resources are available to the victim, such as protective orders and/or shelter services.
6. **Assess the threat level.** Make an effort to understand the severity of the stalking from its context. If the behavior does not seem that serious to you but does to the victim, there is probably more to the story that you do not know or understand. Ask questions to gain an understanding of why the behavior is so frightening (assuming it is not obvious). It is also important to find out what level of access the stalker has to the victim and to the victim's personal information. For example, if the victim and offender were once married, they know each other's Social Security numbers from tax return documents, and this can provide the stalker with access to much more information about the victim, greatly escalating the threat level.
7. **Advise the victim to save every piece of evidence and to document every act of stalking or suspected stalking.** Using a Stalking Log will make this easier. A model Stalking Log is at the end of this section (also available at www.ncvc.org/src). Make copies for the victim.

8. **Work with the victim to create a safety plan.** A safety plan for stalking should include strategies for avoiding contact with the stalker as well as contingency plans for when the victim does encounter the stalker. The Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime provides help with safety planning at www.ncvc.org/src.
9. **Advise the victim that reporting the case to law enforcement is an option** and offer to assist him/her in the process if he/she wishes to pursue it.
10. **Advise the victim not to contact the stalker and not to respond to the stalker's requests for contact.** While stalking does not tend to "just go away" without some type of intervention, it may not be safe for the victim to communicate with the stalker in any way. If there is some question that the stalker may think the contact is welcome, a third party—preferably a law enforcement officer, commanding officer, private attorney, or JAG officer—should be the one to provide that intervention.
11. **Advise the commanding officer.** If the stalker is a member of the armed forces, his/her commanding officer has a great deal of control over him/her, and should be advised of the situation so appropriate restrictions can be placed on the stalker to make the victim safer. If the offender is not in the military but the victim is, the commanding officer may be able to assist by reassigning the victim to another location, altering his or her work schedule, providing extra security at work, or providing other options that can increase safety.
12. **Advise the victim of the availability of protective orders.** Whether or not he/she qualifies for a protective order likely depends on the prior relationship between him/her and the stalker, the nature of the stalking acts, and the statute of the jurisdiction in which the behavior occurred. Make sure that the victim does not have a false sense of security about a protective order. Protective orders provide law enforcement and prosecutors with a valuable tool for arrest and prosecution, but are unlikely to stop a highly motivated stalker. In fact, the service of the order may actually increase the risk to the victim, so extra safety-planning measures should be taken at that time.
13. **Look up the stalking law for your jurisdiction** at www.ncvc.org/src. The actual law will give you an idea of what needs to be proven to make a stalking case.