



SEPS

the situation determines the solution

MODULE 3 - SEPS WOMEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY PROGRAM

Some people, especially if you have been the victim of violence, may find some of the subject matter contained in this article disturbing or traumatizing. If you are still in the process of recovering from violence and abuse, you may want to consult with a mental health professional before reading this content. The subject matter is also intended for an adult audience, and so if you are under 18, you should have an adult read the material first (parental guidance is advised for people under 18). This article addresses the subject matter head-on, so reader discretion is advised.

SYNOPSIS

Stalking is a strange crime because it is determined by the way the victim/target perceives another person's actions and behaviors, rather than by those actions themselves. A person can make continuous phone calls, send emails, have gifts and packages delivered to another, and as long as that person doesn't feel at risk from these actions or mind them happening, they would not be defined as stalking. When these actions and behaviors form a campaign, which causes the target/recipient of them to fear for/consider their personal safety, then the term "stalking" can be applied. It is important to note that it is a string of activities committed over time, rather than odd, isolated incidents, which really define stalking.

STALKING & STALKERS

There are some people who just need to be in a relationship; it doesn't matter if the person they are targeting no longer wants to be with them, never wanted to be with them, or even despises them. For some people, to be negatively associated with someone is better than to not be associated with them, at all.

For a long time, most people's perception was that stalking was restricted to celebrities and famous people, as opposed to members of the general public. Whilst the media does focus on those

individuals who are obsessed and stalk the famous - who they have never, or only briefly, met - these aren't the majority of all stalking cases, and in truth rarely lead to violence or assassination attempts (for every John Lennon and Rebecca Schaefer there are a thousand stalkers of the rich and famous who have no plans to harm the person they are pursuing). Most incidents of stalking involve individuals who know each other, have had some form of interaction with each other or who might have had a relationship with each other e.g. ex-partners and husbands - whilst women do stalk other men and women, the higher percentage of all stalking incidents involve men pursuing women.

THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND STALKING

Stalkers' motivations largely depend on the type of relationship you have with them before the stalking episode begins. If your stalker was somebody with whom you had a sexual or intimate relationship then their motivation could be to re-establish that relationship, or to exact revenge on you for breaking it off. If the stalker is an acquaintance or friend, their activities could be aimed at trying to start an intimate relationship with you, etc. Often, the stalker has no clear goal of what they are trying to achieve, or they lose/forget it as the stalking itself becomes an all-consuming activity and passion; they literally get lost in the stalking.

One thing to remember about stalking is that it is time-consuming. Writing notes, following someone, making and leaving gifts, emailing and phoning, etc., all take time. Someone with a full and active social life will find it very difficult to have or make the time to engage in a full-blown stalking campaign. Stalkers, like abusive partners, (most stalkers are former emotionally/physically abusive partners) have to invest fully in the relationship, and for there to be a relationship, somewhere along the line their behaviors and actions need to elicit a response or reaction, to keep feeding and fueling the relationship. Not giving them this reaction is the single most effective means of dealing with stalkers.

ACQUAINTANCE STALKERS

Although any stalking campaign, by definition, will make you feel uneasy and uncomfortable, this is not always the intention of the stalker. There are those individuals who have a certain level of immaturity regarding sexual and romantic relationships, who believe that if they show enough interest and demonstrate their feelings clearly enough, the person they are pursuing will realize who they are and fall in love with them, etc. They will convince themselves that their target will eventually realize that they are the "one", the perfect partner for them. They will spend a lot of their time baffled and confused as to why the gifts and the attention they give don't lead to some form of reciprocation of interest. Often, this will cause them to up the ante and make bigger gestures and give more expensive gifts that make the person who is the focus of their attention more and more uncomfortable.

These individuals will take encouragement and read meaning into every gesture or acknowledgement that is made towards them e.g. a friendly smile, a pleasantry such as saying "thank you" when they hold a door open for you, etc. These individuals are usually part of your social network, even if they exist on the periphery of it. They may be work colleagues, fellow students, loose acquaintances, friends of friends, or even people you share a commute with, etc. They are rarely complete strangers.

Most stalkers will try to find information about you, using social media, the internet, and mutual friends/acquaintances, etc. They may attempt to get your phone number, email address or other contact information through a friend or work colleague. If someone you know, who you haven't provided your details to, suddenly starts to phone, email or contact you, be very, very suspicious - especially if this happens soon after your initial meeting with them. Not everyone who engages in this type of information-gathering will turn out to be a stalker, however it is something that those who stalk engage in. It may not just be your contact information that they try and obtain, they may also look to gain other information about you such as your interests, the activities you engage in, and information about your family, etc. If somebody seems to know too much about you - and or has too much in common with you - this can be a sign that they have been information gathering. These types of stalkers want to convince you that they are your perfect partner, and will need as much information as they can about you in order to create the perfect profile for themselves.

It is worth remembering that people who are romantically interested in others will often express an interest in the things which that person is interested in e.g. if someone regularly goes dancing, a person may state that they really enjoy dancing, in order to create an opportunity to spend time with that person. This in and of itself does not constitute stalking. However, if a person keeps turning up at the same social gatherings and functions (which they didn't do before) over a period of time, and this behavior makes you uncomfortable, then this would meet the criteria of stalking.

Such stalkers rarely become violent or offer a threat to your personal safety, however their actions or behaviors, though not their intention, will make you feel uncomfortable and uneasy, as you will always be waiting for the next thing they do, and wonder when, where and if, it will stop. Sometimes, these stalkers will grow "bored" and find a "new" person to be interested in, leaving you alone - they may come back to you at a later date, when they lose interest in the person they are stalking, at that particular time. Doing nothing is always an option, however it is leaving the timing and control of a situation to your stalker and there is always the possibility that the final outcome of their campaign is more emotional, dramatic and bitter than might be necessary - and could have possibly been avoided if you had done something to actively end it; it is also possible that your stalker could change the nature of their campaign to one that is motivated by a desire to "punish" and "teach you a lesson" for leading them on, as they see it.

If you can take control of the situation away from your stalker by confronting them and dealing with the situation on your own terms, this will be to your advantage.

POST-RELATIONSHIP STALKERS

Post-Relationship Stalkers are perhaps the most common type of stalker, and these are the most likely to resort to violence. Many people find it difficult to accept when a relationship is over, and may engage in activities that they believe will win the person back e.g. making romantic gestures and/or threatening to cause themselves harm, etc. More often than not, these activities and/or threats subside over time, when the person realizes that they are not getting the response they want. Sometimes though, the person either doesn't get the message, or they simply won't accept it. Sometimes this is down to continued infatuation, sometimes for revenge/punishment. If the individual was controlling and abusive in the relationship they may simply not accept that you have the right and the control to end it. It can also be that what was infatuation and the desire to rekindle the relationship eventually turns into rage and the need to punish and seek revenge.

The problem with post-relationship stalkers is that they act as if they are entitled to continue to communicate with you, whether that communication is desired or not. Often the targets/victims of such stalkers feel or believe that they have a responsibility to answer their stalker's questions, to talk to them and to try to explain why the relationship didn't work; even after they have repeatedly done so. When somebody engages in stalking behaviors and activities, they are not thinking or behaving rationally i.e. they cannot be reasoned with. However much the victim believes that they'll be able to explain their position and the situation, the person they are communicating with will not be able to understand what they are saying - they are living in an alternate reality. The more communication they receive, the more convinced they will be that their stalking activities are bearing fruit and yielding success. They will take any communication as encouragement - even if it is a friend of the victim telling them that their ex-partner no longer wants to see or talk to them.

This can be one of the problems with getting a restraining order against an ex-partner (or any stalker for that matter), as it acknowledges that the actions of the stalker have been able to provoke a response from their target. Oftentimes, restraining orders fail to have the desired or expected result. The restraining order is a promise of future action, if the stalking continues - not a punishment or reprimand for whatever has happened. The stalker may take the restraining order as evidence that this is the most powerful action that their victim could take against them, and nothing has actually happened e.g. they haven't been fined, locked up or had anything taken away from them. It must be remembered that these individuals are not thinking rationally or operating in the real world and the promise of future action may seem very unreal and unlikely to them. It may also convince them that they must be more surreptitious and subtle in their activities. People respond to warnings in very different ways, and although restraining orders can be effective, they are not silver bullets (not

everybody respects the law) and must be considered carefully before attempting to obtain one. It should be understood that they may even escalate the stalker's activities, as they may judge engaging the authorities in your "relationship" as crossing a boundary, and giving them the moral right to exact revenge on you.

As with all types of stalkers, not communicating with them, is the most effective way to end a campaign of stalking. This can be difficult, after having had an intimate relationship with them, however if somebody can't accept your decision and continues to try to engage with you, using methods that intimidate you and/or make you fear for your safety, continuing to communicate with them is not going to change their behavior, rather it is just going to reinforce and encourage it.

If you believe your stalker is dangerous and violent, you will have to both pursue legal action, and up your own personal and home security. If you don't believe your stalker will actually assault you - and you should have a good idea from the way they behaved and acted in your relationship - closing off ALL means of communication and not responding is the best strategy. Not responding means exactly that - no communication at all.

STRANGER STALKERS

Stranger Stalkers make up the smallest percentage of all stalkers however they are the group which understandably scare us the most - we have no information about them and have no clear idea of what their motivation and/or end goal may be.

Oftentimes the stranger who stalks you, knows you or of you, even though you may not have been aware of them. They may have been the person you held a door open for at the local coffee shop, they may have attended the same school as you, you may have dealt with them through your work, etc. To you, your interaction would have been insignificant, but to them it will have been meaningful and important. The smile you gave them, the way you looked at them, the way you said "hello", etc. will have been infused with meaning and significance. The stalker will have read so much into it that they will have been able to create and develop a relationship based on it. This will have been the start of their fantasy, and all it will take to further it and put some missing details and pieces into place, is their imagination.

Many times, such stalkers will have had previous victims, and will go on to have future ones. They may leave you for awhile and then come back and return to stalking you. Different events in their life may cause them to switch between different people e.g. receiving an invitation to a high school reunion, seeing a TV program etc. as these events become significant reminders of their previous victims. Their stalking may also be triggered by various stressors they experience, such as losing a job, having their car re-possessioned, etc.

Stranger Stalkers, like Acquaintance Stalkers, have difficulty in forming normal relationships and may express similar social immaturities, such as not being able to express themselves directly, and trying to force the target of their interest to initiate communications for them, through the use of gifts, notes and other activities/behaviors.

THE STALKERS TOOLBOX

Stalking takes time. To fixate on a person and engage in a certain set of activities over a period of time means that the stalker has ample free time to devote to these activities. It is therefore no surprise to find that the majority of stalkers are either unemployed, or underemployed, or have a job that allows them a certain degree of flexibility - students also represent a segment of society that can manipulate their time commitments, etc. For somebody to launch a stalking campaign against you takes time. If a person has other commitments that get in the way of this, then it reduces the intent shown towards you e.g. if a person is concerned about their grades and/or the way they are perceived by others in their work environment, you are part of their overall focus, rather than being the sum total of it.

STALKING & STALKERS - NOTES, COMMENTARIES & POINTED GIFTS

Stalkers want to know that you're thinking about them - in fact, this is what every action and behavior of the stalker is aimed at e.g. they want you to think that every time the phone goes or the doorbell rings, it's them - that every time you look out of your office window you'll see them, etc. A cryptic note left under the wiper of the windshield of your car, will get you thinking about and analyzing whatever has been written, with every spare moment that you have. The note doesn't even have to contain a threat, in fact the more cryptic, bizarre and indirect the message is, the more you'll be thinking about it, and the stalker.

Sometimes the notes, or gifts, will refer to things that the stalker thinks you have in common, or that they believe will be relevant to you, and/or get you to think about them. Post-Relationship Stalkers may leave gifts or items that were significant in your relationship e.g. if there was a particular chocolate bar they knew you liked, they might leave a wrapper under the windshield wiper of your car, just to let you know that they were near you, or that they may have been watching or following you.

Some stalkers will go to great length to produce collages, scrapbooks and pieces of art, which contain information and observations about you - these may be directly threatening in nature, containing explicit or veiled threats, or they may be "innocent" expressions of infatuation and obsession. These "homages" are designed to let you know of the effort and seriousness of their intent towards you - whatever that intent is. Something they may not know themselves.

Sometimes these gifts are specifically designed to cause distress, such as packages containing dead

animals or feces etc. Stalking is largely an activity of control, and if the stalker can start to control the way you see or feel about yourself then they are setting the roles for the that relationship you are, unwillingly, engaged in. If they can make you feel disgusting and worthless i.e. why else would anyone send you something so revolting, there must be something about you that makes someone want to behave towards you this way etc. then they are defining who they are - the person in control - and who you are, the worthless person, who deserves to be treated this way.

STALKING & STALKERS - SURVEILLANCE

Stalking has a large element of control about it. By definition, it is a one-sided, non-consensual relationship that is being pursued and driven by a committed individual. They are forcing and driving the relationship. Although they may not be able to directly control where you go and who you see, a stalker will want to be fully aware of what you do in your life - they may take great delight in making you aware of this. This allows them to feel a degree of control in your life. If they can affect a change in your behavior, then they will be starting to have an influence on your life e.g. if you stop going to a particular bar you used to regularly frequent because you know your stalker will be there, then they are starting to dictate how you spend your time - not all of their surveillance will be done out of sight. Some stalkers may seriously believe that you will be flattered by this attention.

If every time you look out of a window at work, and can see your stalker standing/waiting outside, you may stop going out to lunch and/or socializing with your colleagues (out of embarrassment) and so the stalker is beginning to control your life.

If you receive a note that says, "I'm watching you" and/or a photograph that has been taken of you, you will naturally feel that your life has somehow been violated. If there is no explanation as to why the person is watching you, then your imagination will obviously run riot. There is certainly a great deal of difference between a post-it note left on your desk at work that states how good you look today, and lets you know you have a secret admirer, to an email or letter you receive that simply has the goal of demonstrating that a person has knowledge of your movements and whereabouts.

The stalker may not at the time realize why they are gathering information about you; they might not understand what relevance a piece of information has, in fact most times they are trying to find relevance in their observations of you. It may be that they go through your trash without any real idea of what they're looking for, but find that you eat the same breakfast cereal as them, and use this to further develop their fantasy.

Ex-Partners who stalk, may engage in surveillance to confirm or prove suspicions about you that they had when they were in a relationship with you. If they believed you were cheating on them, or that you left them for someone else, etc., even if this wasn't the case they may want to prove and

convince themselves that you were lying, and that their suspicions were correct. They may want to do this to validate and justify their right to stalk you.

VANDALISM

Stalkers engage in vandalism to not only punish you, but to show you that they can touch you or do something against you, without you being able to have any recourse against them. If they slash the walls of your tires they know that it will ruin your day, get you thinking about them, and at the same time know that it is unlikely that you'll be able to prove who did it, or that the police will be particularly interested in it (unless you can demonstrate a catalog of events, that constitutes a campaign against you). It is this feeling of powerlessness that your stalker wants to demonstrate to you. That they can do what they want to you without recourse. This confirms to them that they are in control of the relationship.

If they can cause damage to something that they know you treasure or hold valuable, all the better - as they will know that the psychological trauma that they put you through is that much greater than if they'd simply destroyed or vandalized something you cared little for. We hold and define much of our identity by the things that we possess; if you have a car that you saved up for over a long period of time and somebody runs their keys over the paintwork, you will feel significantly distraught at the absolute unfairness of this act - if a stalker's motivation is one of revenge and punishment, the more they can hurt you, the more they will.

Pets sometimes become the targets of stalkers. There are few things more distressing than having your cat or dog poisoned, and such an act can never be reversed - unlike the paintwork of your car being scratched and vandalized (this can always be touched up and the paintwork redone).

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

Stalkers continually communicate with their victims, either through email, telephone calls, or letters and notes, etc. Just as they are constantly thinking about you, they want to make sure that you're thinking about them, and one of the most effective ways to do this is by constantly communicating with you. If you know that every hour you will receive an email or phone call from your stalker, you will be counting the minutes until that time arrives.

If your stalker uses email, texts, Facebook messaging, etc., every time you see you have a new message you will be thinking of them. This is how the stalker maintains a relationship with you. Just as they define who they are by the relationship they have with you, they will start to get you to define yourself in the same way. You will stop being you and start to define yourself in response to the stalking actions and behaviors you are subjected to - your life will start to become all consumed by your thoughts and responses to the torture you are subjected to. When you start to do this, you will

lose friends, and people who want to spend time with you, as you will be miserable and self-involved. This is what your stalker desires. They don't want you to have a relationship with anyone else, only them.

STALKING & STALKERS - BREAK IN'S & BURGLARIES

Stalkers often don't know when to stop. When they're able to send gifts to you, communicate with you, follow you, vandalize your property and suffer no consequences, they will often become emboldened. Some stalkers are trophy hunters, wanting articles of clothing or items that belong to you in order to help them maintain and focus on their relationship with you. Others, especially those who you were once intimate with, may want to find evidence against you concerning infidelities they believed you carried out when you were still with them. They may be seeking letters, gifts etc. or other pieces of evidence that they can use to confront you with. They may not have any particular goal or end in mind as they look for such proof, however they probably understand that it would be something you would be compelled to answer or justify, should they have the proof to make such an accusation.

They may break in to your house or property to simply prove that they can, to show to you that there is no place where they can't have access to you. It is one thing to convince yourself that a string of emails or phone calls mean nothing, another to ignore or put aside that someone you want no contact with has been in your house/home. It may be that all they do in your house is move some things around, etc., to let you know someone has been there - not enough evidence that you feel you can alert the authorities, but enough to know you're not safe anywhere.

STALKING & STALKERS - RUMOR MONGERING & LEGAL HARASSMENT

Stalkers want to isolate you, for many (especially Post Relationship Stalkers) they want to convince everybody you know that you're the bad guy and they're the good guy. This isn't simply a case of them trying to adopt the role of the victim/offended party, or make it look like you are the one who is persecuting/stalking them, but rather to deny you any social interaction or relationship outside of the one you have with your stalker - they want the rest of the world to hate you, just as they hate you. Stalking shares many characteristics with rape; both are about exhibiting power/control and expressing anger, though with stalking it may lack a sexual component. Many stalkers will want to humiliate and embarrass you, causing you social anguish.

It is not uncommon for stalkers to phone your place of work and inform your manager of some misdemeanor or irregularity concerning you. They may lodge formal complaints against you, or get someone else to do this, if your job has a customer-facing component. If you have common friends and acquaintances, they may project many of their behaviors and actions onto you, making out that you are harassing them and won't leave them alone. Even if these friends don't believe these rumors, they may stop associating with you, in order to appear that they are not taking sides, or because they

don't want to be involved in the drama.

In certain cases, they may bring petty lawsuits against you, and use the legal system to harass you. They may claim that you "stole" the gifts they gave you and bring a claim against you or try and make a case that you are defaming them. These suits will probably never come to anything or even be heard in a court of law, however they will require the victim to spend time and money defending them - and this is all attention that the stalker feeds off of.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE BEING STALKED

The first thing you can do is not to respond to your stalker's calls for attention. Not acknowledging emails, phone calls, etc., is a great first step. This may cause them to escalate their campaign, to sending letters, gifts, etc., however if you do respond, you will be creating a greater rod for your own back, as you will send a message to your stalker that you do want to communicate with them, and that this form of harassment yields results. You may believe that you'll be able to reason with them, and convince them that they should stop, but this would be to mistake your stalker for someone who thinks rationally and who has an interest in stopping their behaviors and actions. You will never be able to deal with a stalker on your own terms, and it is worth realizing this. Every great idea you have for stopping a stalker is likely to fail e.g. if you send someone round (such as a family member) to threaten them into stopping, they will have a grievance that they can use to emotionally fuel their campaign, and something you may regret later and feel you have to explain to them why you pursued such a course of action. You should never do anything that gives your stalker a reason to claim a "moral" right against you.

If you were previously involved in an intimate relationship with your stalker, you should make your "No" be a strong and firm "No", with no room for interpretation. If you tell them that the reason the relationship ended was because you don't want to be involved in a serious relationship at this time, your stalker will only hear the words "at this time" - everything else will be ignored. You may think that you're being kind to your partner and letting them down gently, but if the truth is told, you don't want a relationship with them and that should be the focus of your conversation. It's much kinder to the person to tell them this than to give them the hope of a future relationship, even if this wasn't your intention. You may want to avoid a socially awkward interaction with them, but telling them straight is much more likely to prevent them fixating on and attempting to continue a relationship with you.

Start to gather evidence, from the very moment you start to believe you are being stalked. Keep a log of every event, however small or insignificant it may seem e.g. if you sight them in a place you go to, log it, it doesn't matter if they have or appear to have a legitimate reason, that doesn't involve you, to be there - note it down. Better still get a photograph - use your phone to record the event. If you do this try and get a defining landmark or item that can tie them to that particular location. The more

evidence that you can get, the stronger your case will be should you need to use the legal system as a means of stopping your stalker. At the start of a stalking campaign you may believe that it will end quickly and feel reluctant to start documenting things however after a few weeks - if their campaign continues - you will regret waiting to have started.

Simple things you can do involve changing your email address; don't get rid of your old one, simply get a new one and inform your friends and family that this is the one they should now use. You can regularly check your old email address, to see if there is mail you need to check and respond to, as well as people you may need to inform concerning your change of email address, however that email box should eventually become a "drop box" for your stalker's correspondence.

You can do the same with your phone. Transfer your old SIM card, to a cheap pay as you go phone, and then get a new number. The old number that your stalker has will appear active and receive calls, and take messages, whilst you can circulate your new number to people you want to have it. It's a good idea to keep all of your old contact details/methods active, as if they go dead, your stalker will know you have changed numbers and email addresses and try to find the new ones out.

SEPS (Situation Effective Protection System) is a framework, for understanding how violent situations occur and evolve, along with the motivations behind them, so that it is possible to predict, identify and avoid them. The system was created and developed by Gershon Ben Keren and Andy Rallings. This handout is part of the SEPS free women's personal safety program developed by Gershon Ben Keren. For more information and other course modules, please go to www.womensselfdefense-seps.com.

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