

What is Cyberstalking?

Protection from Cyberstalking

Computers and the Internet are becoming indispensable parts of America's culture, and cyberstalking is a growing threat.

What is Cyberstalking? Cyberstalking can be defined as threatening behavior or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of online and computer communications. Cyberstalking occurs when electronic mediums such as the Internet are used to pursue, harass or contact another in an unsolicited fashion. Internet CyberStalking is used to slander and endanger victims, taking on a public rather than private dimension.

Cyberstalking is the term used to describe stalking behavior undertaken by way of computer. Although no universal definition exists, cyberstalking occurs when an individual or group uses the Internet to stalk or harass another. Essentially cyberstalking is the act of stalking using the Internet, e-mail, or other electronic communication devices. Everyone who receives e-mail or uses the Internet is susceptible to cyberstalking.

In order to address cyberstalking, it is critical to understand stalking in general. The fact that cyberstalking does not involve physical contact may create the misperception that it is less threatening or dangerous than physical stalking. In many cases, cyberstalking is simply another phase in an overall stalking pattern, or it is regular stalking behavior using new technological tools. Essentially, cyberstalking is an extension of the physical form of stalking.

The anonymity of online interaction reduces the chance of identification and makes cyberstalking more common than physical stalking. The ease of use and non-confrontational, impersonal, and sometimes anonymous nature of Internet communications may remove disincentives to cyberstalking. Although cyberstalking might seem relatively harmless, it can cause victims psychological and emotional harm, and occasionally leads to actual stalking. More disturbingly, pornographers and pedophiles have begun to use cyberstalking as a way of locating new victims.

It is commonly assumed that cyberstalking is not as serious or harmful as real world stalking. It is true that cyberstalking bears little physical resemblance to traditional stalking methods such as following and loitering.

Cyberstalking is a relatively new phenomenon. The stream of data is sketchy, but some insights into cyberstalking trends are emerging. As with regular stalking, cyberstalking often begins when you attempt to break off a relationship. Anecdotal evidence from law enforcement agencies indicates that cyberstalking is a serious, and growing problem.

While cyberstalking has become a worldwide problem, most cases originate in the United States, making Americans the most vulnerable group of targets. It is estimated that there may potentially be tens or even hundreds of thousands of cyberstalking victims in the United States. A common area regarding cyberstalking is at the "edu" sites, which are educational institutes, such as colleges and universities. While, historically, cyberstalking has mostly been men stalking women, the reverse is happening more often as well.

In many instances, cyberstalking is simply another phase in an overall stalking pattern, or it is regular stalking behavior using new, high-technology tools. Keep a record of contact made (in relation to the cyberstalking event) with website administrators, victim support organizations and law enforcement personnel. Often, cyberstalking ventures offline and the cyberstalker may attempt to track down the victim physically. These things are important because online cyberstalking and bullying is increasing, and further, is grossly underreported.

By the use of new technology and equipment which cannot be policed by traditional methods, cyberstalking has replaced traditional methods of stalking and harassment. The investigation of cyberstalking and other computer crimes can be complex. The lack of adequate statutory authority also can limit law enforcement's response to cyberstalking incidents. Out-of-date and missing account, subscriber, and user information, as well as anonymizing tools, presented problems for law enforcement during cyberstalking investigations.

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