

Stalking Awareness Month: Know it- Name It- Stop it

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LEHIGH VALLEY - January marks National Stalking Awareness Month (NSAM), with Stalking Awareness Day of Action on January 18th. We urge you to join us in recognizing and addressing the very serious crime of stalking.

Nearly 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men in the U.S. experience stalking, but too often it is unrecognized, downplayed, or ignored. Unfortunately, there is a real and frighteningly significant connection between stalking and intimate partner abuse. Stalking can be a way for an abusive partner to exert power and control during and/or after an abusive relationship. It takes all of us – advocacy and support services, legal systems, and communities– to effectively support survivors and collectively respond to stalking.

Know It: Stalking is a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, or contact directed at a specific person that causes them fear or emotional distress. As fear is highly personal, so is stalking; stalkers often engage in behaviors that seem harmless, or maybe even appear romantic to outsiders, but are terrifying in context.

Most stalkers target people that they know: 40% of stalkers are intimate partners and 42% are acquaintances who are aware of the survivor's vulnerabilities and fears. While stalking tactics may or may not be criminal acts on their own, they commonly include unwanted and/or frequent communication through calls or messages, unwanted gifts, showing up uninvited, spreading rumors, and following or monitoring the survivor, both online and in person.

Name It: Stalking impacts every aspect of a survivor's life, with 92% of stalking survivors reporting psychological impacts, such as anxiety, social dysfunction and isolation, and severe depression as a result. Many lose time from work and/or relocate.

For many stalking survivors, nowhere feels safe.

Most stalking survivors confide in friends or family first, yet the severity and danger of stalking behaviors is often underestimated by those around them. It is important to not underestimate the urgency of a stalking situation. Ultimately, how we respond and address the survivor's concerns can make a huge difference and influences whether they will seek further help.

Stop It: While every case is different, people who stalk can be very dangerous. If you are a concerned friend of a survivor, or if you yourself are concerned you are being stalked, here are some general tips to consider:

Trust Instincts: Survivor safety is paramount, and stalking poses a real threat of harm, even if others may downplay its impact. Trust and believe the survivor's fear response and take it seriously. Remember: It is not the survivor's fault.

Involve Law Enforcement: Make it clear to the stalker that you wish to stop contact, and do not respond to any further communication attempts. If you feel you are in immediate danger, contact the police and explain why the stalker's actions are causing you fear.

Document Everything: Keep a detailed log of each contact with the stalker. Include police reports, and save all evidence of contact from them, including emails, text messages, photos, social media posts, and any records of in-person contact attempts.

Plan for Safety: Reach out to trusted friends, family, or service providers for support. Vary your daily routine and identify any specific threats or vulnerabilities that may occur. Keep an emergency bag handy with a change of clothes, important documents, and/or medications. Regularly check in with your support network using safe communication methods and consider using a code word to use when you may be in danger.

Connect with an Advocate: Contact your local victim service provider- such as Turning Point of Lehigh Valley's 24/7 Helpline (610-437-3369), or Crime Victims Council's 24/7 Helpline (610-437-6611) to assist you in exploring your options and planning for your safety. Both helplines are confidential and offered at no cost.

We all play a role in identifying, intervening when necessary, and supporting survivors of stalking. Join our efforts to Know It, Name It, Stop It, and learn how to get involved with NSAM and the Stalking Awareness Day of Action of January 18th at www.StalkingAwareness.org.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.thehotline.org/resources/stalking-safety-planning/>

<https://rainn.org/articles/stalking>

<https://techsafety.org/>

<https://victimconnect.org/>



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