

Risk Identification Checklist for Stalking Cases (VS-DASH 2009)¹

There is still limited knowledge, awareness and education about stalking, even though the problem is getting bigger. Many people and agencies, including law enforcement, still do not fully understand stalking and harassment behaviours and the risks. We can assure you that most police officers want to help, but they sometimes lack the tools and training needed. They may not understand how frightening it is when it is happening to you. Many might say that unless there is physical violence it is not so serious. However, a lot of the stalking behaviour is about coercive control and jealous surveillance i.e. psychological abuse/violence and this does not make it any less dangerous.

A number of warning signs (or key behaviours of concern) have been identified as being associated with serious violence and murder through researching many cases. We cannot predict what will happen in your case. However, we would like you to be aware of what those warning signs are so you can identify whether they are occurring in your case.

The Stalking Risk Identification Checklist (VS-DASH 2009)

Complete the checklist if you want to understand what risk there might be to you or if you believe you are at risk. This can be used if you know your stalker, as well as if you do not.

If you answer positively to the questions then please report it to the police and take a copy of the risk checklist with you.

You can also contact Paladin, the new National Stalking Advocacy Service for victims of stalking. Once you have completed the checklist, and if you answer positively to any of the questions you can contact Paladin for advice as they have specialist staff to help you. E-mail:

info@paladinservice.co.uk www.paladinservice.co.uk

You can call the National Stalking Helpline or go to their website if you want further advice or want to talk through what is happening to you.

Phone: 0808 802 0300 E-mail: advice@stalkinghelpline.org Web: www.stalkinghelpline.org

THE CONTEXT AND DETAIL OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IS VERY IMPORTANT. TICK THE RELEVANT BOX AND EXPAND WHERE NECESSARY ☑	Yes	No
1. Are you very frightened?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking/harassment history? (involving you and/or anyone else that you know)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Has (insert name of stalker(s).....) ever destroyed or vandalised any of your property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up at your workplace, home etc unannounced or uninvited more than three times per week?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does (.....) follow you or loiter around your home, workplace etc?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Has (.....) made any threats of physical or sexual violence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Has (.....) stalking/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. your friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Has (.....) acted out violently towards anyone else within the stalking incident?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Has (.....) persuaded other people to help him/her? (wittingly or unwittingly)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is (.....) known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is (.....) known to have been violent in the past? (This could be physical or psychological)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other relevant information includes: duration of stalking/harassment, various stalking/harassing behaviours engaged in by stalker, details of threats and violence, your beliefs concerning the stalker's motives and when it started, weapons owned by stalker, nature of unwanted 'gifts'/items left or sent to you and attitude/demeanour of stalker including mental health issues.		

Risk Factor Definitions – What the Research Tells Us

Q1. Are you very frightened?

Research demonstrates that the victim is frequently the best assessor of risk posed to them (Weisz et al. 2000). Stalking often consists of behaviours that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g. walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition, however, these behaviours can become menacing, and the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases (even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence) it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Many victims state that it is the uncertainty of what the stalker will do next which causes them the most concern.

Q2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking/harassment history? (involving you and/or anyone else that you know)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour and stalkers are no exception. Research shows that many victims will suffer more than 100 incidents before reporting to the police (Sheridan, 2005). Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim (usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker), only to suddenly resume the harassment at a later date.

Q3. Does (insert name of stalker(s).....) vandalise or destroy your property?

A sizeable proportion of stalkers (up to two thirds) will damage their victim's property (Blaauw et al., 2002) and this includes stalking engaged in by adolescents (McCann, 2000). Property damage may be associated with rage or frustration (perhaps because the offender is unable to attack the victim directly), revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (i.e. destroying her wedding photographs), a wish to undermine her belief in a safe environment (i.e. by cutting brake cables), as a form of threat, or it may be connected with breaking and entering the victim's property or spying on the victim.

Q4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up at your workplace, home etc unannounced or uninvited more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place at a distance. Research tells us that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen et al., 2000). Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (i.e. on the victim's daily route to work). Others, particularly stalkers with an obvious mental illness, will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times (Sheridan and Boon, 2002). The research informs us that those stalkers who visit the victim's home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times in a week are those who are most likely to attack.

Q5. Does (.....) follow you or loiter near your home, workplace etc?

Most stalkers will be seen by their victims. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly

(even camping out on or in the victim's property), whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will share a belief that their behaviour is an appropriate response to circumstances. If they do follow you or loiter near you, please keep a log of stalker sightings and behaviour.

Q6. Has (.....) made threats of physical or sexual violence?

Stalkers frequently threaten their victim, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending dead flowers or wreaths or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats. Research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously. Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats.

Q7. Has (.....) stalked/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. your friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)

On average, 21 people connected to the victim will be affected (Sheridan 2005). Stalkers will involve third parties for a number of reasons. For example, to upset the victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's children), to obtain information on the victim (i.e. by approaching the victim's friends), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's partner), and/or to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (i.e. work colleagues who state that the victim is not available).

Q8. Has (.....) acted violently to anyone else during the stalking incident?

Secondary victims will be identified in a majority of stalking cases, and these can be a valuable source of evidential information. Research suggests that third parties will be physically attacked by the stalker in between 6% and 17% of cases (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, and Stuart 1999; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). Stalkers who attack those associated with the victim are more likely to also attack the primary victim. Persons perceived as preventing access to the victim or protecting the victim are at particular risk.

Q9. Has (.....) engaged other people to help him/her? (wittingly or unwittingly)

The ability of a stalker to pose as other persons and/or to draw information out of third parties should never be under-estimated. Many stalkers will devote hours each day to their stalking campaign, and are capable of stalking their victims for many years (Meloy, 1996). New technologies and social networking sites can facilitate harassment, enabling stalkers to impersonate another on-line; to send or post hostile material, misinformation and false messages (i.e. to Usenet groups); and to trick other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim (i.e. by posting the victim's personal details on a bulletin board along with a controversial invitation or message) (Sheridan and Grant, 2007).

Q10. Is (.....) abusing/misusing drugs/alcohol?

Substance abuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault on the victim in a significant number of cases (Rosenfeld, 2004). The abuse of various substances by stalkers can contribute both to the basis from which the stalking occurs and to individual violent episodes. Binge drinking or drug taking may directly precede an attack, fuelling obsession, yearning or angry thought patterns, or by lending the stalker the confidence to approach or attack the victim.

Q11. Do you know if (.....) has been violent in the past? (This could be physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour. It may not always be physical violence but could include the psychological impact as well. This might be in terms of coercive control and/or jealous surveillance of the victim (Regan, Kelly, Morris and Dibb 2007) if the stalker(s) feels a real sense of entitlement or ownership of the victim. Generally speaking, stalkers who have been violent before, whether as part of a stalking campaign or in relation to separate offences, are more likely to be violent again.