

Coping with Stalking & Repeated Rape

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Recognizing the signs

The legal definition of stalking will vary depending on where you live, but it is generally considered to be the obsessive, repeated harassment of an individual, and may include phone calls, text messages, emails, threats, physical intimidation, or other types of contact.

A stalker's actions are often designed to make you feel crazy. They may stop for a period of time and start up again, leaving you unsure of what will happen. You may feel minimized by people around you, who may tell you that you are overreacting, or that it will stop on its own. Trust yourself and your feelings. Repeated unwanted contact is not normal and you should not have to accept it. The sooner you are able to recognize the warning signs, the better your chances will be to find a way to make them stop.

Consider taking steps to ensure your safety. This may include changing your routine, asking friends to accompany you, carrying a cell phone and avoiding giving out personal information. There are many things you can do to protect yourself, and there are resources out there for stalking victims. Often, speaking out is one of your best defences. Stalkers thrive on secrecy, and if you are able to speak out and inform your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours, you can take away a lot of the stalker's power. For more information, look at our "[Stalking: Facts and Resources](#)" article.

Taking legal action

Stalking is a serious crime, but although laws in most areas are starting to catch up, victims can still encounter problems. You may be told that nothing can be done until the perpetrator does something "worse". This can be incredibly minimizing, and you do not have to give up. Keep trying and ask to speak to someone else if you feel they are not doing everything they can to help you.

Stalking remains a difficult crime to prove, so it is important that you document everything as much as possible. This will also help you when you speak to the police. Consider keeping a journal, where you keep track of dates, times and locations of the stalking, and anything that was said. If you receive phone messages, text messages, emails or letters, save those to pass on to the police. Although it depends on the laws in your area, the police will likely have to prove that there is a pattern of unwanted contact, and any evidence you can provide will be helpful.

It may be possible for you to get a restraining order. Talk to the police to determine whether this is the best option for you, as there are many things to consider. People often believe that a restraining order will fix things, but it is not always the best solution in every case.

Living with fear

One of the most difficult things you will deal with is the constant fear. Things that other people take for granted suddenly become incredibly difficult. It is recommended that you change your routines, but that in itself can make the situation more difficult. Your life has already been turned upside down, and changing a routine can mean that

you no longer have the comfort of familiarity. It is important to find some constants in your life that will help you focus on your safety. Try to establish as many small routines as you can, while still varying your activities. Simple things such as eating regular meals, reading before bed or watching your favourite television show every week can help make your life feel more stable.

You may end up feeling very isolated, because it is difficult for others to understand what it is like to live with this kind of fear. Try not to push away your friends and loved ones. Though they may not understand, you deserve to get all the support you can. Ask them for help, and give them tangible things they can do to support you. This can be anything from doing things to protect you physically, to giving you a shoulder to cry on. Consider reaching out to other victims of stalking. You can seek out a support group in your area or look for online resources. Although you may feel isolated, you do not have to suffer through this alone.

Aftermath

Stalking can affect the lives of victims in many ways, and you will likely experience a wide range of emotions. It can feel as though your stalker has taken control over your life. You can no longer do what you want, when you want, and the constant fear can take an emotional toll. It is important to find ways to cope with these feelings. Consider finding a therapist who can help you.

You may feel guilt, anger, fear and confusion. Whatever you feel is normal. This is an impossible situation and you are not alone. If you have found a therapist, these feelings and concerns are things you can address with them. You may also consider talking about this with a friend or family member. Remember that you have done nothing wrong, and that no one deserves to be treated this way.

One challenge of coping with stalking is that it is difficult to find ways to heal when you constantly have to deal with new things. Make sure you have a support system in place to help you through. Talking about your fears and your experiences can be important as you cope with feeling helpless. Since others cannot fully understand how difficult it is to live with constant fear, and how difficult it is to stop your stalker's behaviour, you may encounter people who think you are not doing enough. Try not to let this discourage you. Only you can determine whether you are taking the right steps, and often there is simply nothing more you can do. You can, however, continue to work on your healing and find ways to cope.

Stalking and repeated rape

When the stalker's actions progress to sexual assault, there is an added layer of confusion for the victim. Not unlike stalking, repeated rape by the same perpetrator can leave the victim feeling afraid, guilty and unwilling to reach out for help, for a number of reasons.

If they choose to reach out to others, they are often met with questions such as, "how did you let it go this far?", "why don't you do something to stop it?", "what are you doing to provoke him?". It is important to remember that you have done nothing wrong, and no one deserves to be treated like this. Victims may also hesitate to seek help because of the intense fear that has been instilled as a result of the stalking. Perpetrators prey on this fear, and may threaten retaliation or further assaults if the victim tells anyone.

In addition, many survivors struggle with the shame of multiple assaults, which can also make them unwilling to ask for help. Know that this is not your fault and that you are not alone. Like with stalking, perpetrators thrive on

secrecy, and your best defence is to speak out. Consider speaking to your local rape crisis centre. They can help you decide whether to contact the police and can support you through the process. Stalking and sexual assault are serious crimes; keep trying until you get the support you need and deserve.

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