

7 Minute Briefing: Stalking & Harassment

1. What is stalking & harassment?

Stalking is a pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour towards an individual. It can include harassment that amounts to stalking or stalking that causes fear of violence or serious alarm or distress.

Stalking can include;

- Following or watching a person.
- Monitoring a person's use of the internet, email, phone.
- Loitering in places a victim visits
- Breaking into a victim's home

Harassment often focuses on disputes

Harassment – Unreasonable and oppressive behaviour that is repeated and may cause alarm, distress, fear of violence in the victim.

Harassment might include anti-social behaviour, bullying at school/workplace, sending abusive messages / unwanted gifts

2. Victim considerations

Stalking - Does the victim feel physically/ emotionally and or psychologically affected by the behaviour?

Does the victim have persistent fear of what might happen?

Harassment - Does the victim feel oppressed but not seriously alarmed or distressed by the behaviour?

Is the victim fearful about certain acts but not in a constant state of fear?

Ongoing safety and security of the victim – explain to the victim the benefits of a Civil Order. At the earliest opportunity obtain the victim's views regarding applying for such orders. Provide information to support an application to the prosecutor as early as possible.

Have you provided full safeguarding support for the victim?

3. Suspect considerations

Stalking – consider the stalking mnemonic FOUR -
Fixated **O**bsessive
Unwanted **R**epeated

Is the amount of time/ effort/ resources the suspect is investing. Harassment – Is there evidence of repeated behaviour that is unreasonable but not fixated on the victim? Is the behaviour generally focused on addressing a dispute rather than targeted at an individual?

Is there evidence that this behaviour will stop should the underlying problem be resolved?

4. Assess the risk

Focus on risk first – your primary responsibility is to make people safe. Risk is dynamic and needs continual reassessment. Ensure the victim is part of a risk management plan.

Investigate fully – make sure you understand the full history and any escalation. Listen to the victim, particularly their view about changing risk.

The motivation of the suspect, the context and effect on the behaviour on the victim are all important factors to understanding and helping your decision making. Don't send the victim away believing that it is not a safeguarding matter. Don't suggest the victim talk/meet with the stalker to resolve issues.

5. Digital safety - cyber stalking

80% of offences involve online offences and includes, hacking social media, email, chat room accounts etc.

Do not advise victims to:

- Close their social media accounts
- Change their mobile number
- Block the perpetrator
- Avoid using email or internet.

Paladin, the National Stalking Advocacy Service and the College of Policing, report evidence indicates blocking the perpetrator from telephones, media sites etc. generally leads to an escalation in behaviour by the perpetrator

7. Support

If the victim is safe right now and with you, this is a good opportunity to get specialist help. Do not wait to refer until after they has gone. By then, the opportunity for them to get specialist support may be missed.

For support on risk assessment and safety planning contact Solace on 0203 198 4659.

Bexley one stop shop every Wednesday 12.30 -3pm at Central Library, Bexleyheath.

Refer to MARAC@bexley.gov.uk

6. Further information

Paladin National Stalking Advocacy Service
 0203 8664107
paladinservice.co.uk

National Stalking Helpline
 0808 802 0300
Stalkinghelpline.org