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## FOR WIDE DISTRIBUTION

### Cyberstalking

- A U.S. Department of Justice report estimates that there may be tens or even hundreds of thousands of cyberstalking victims in the United States.
- A 1997 nationwide survey conducted by the University of Cincinnati found that almost 25% of stalking incidents among college age women involved cyberstalking

#### DEFINITION

**Cyberstalking** can be defined as threatening behavior or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of online and computer communications.

#### OVERVIEW

Cyberstalking is a relatively new phenomenon. With the decreasing expense and thereby increased availability of computers and online services, more individuals are purchasing computers and "logging onto" the Internet, making another form of communication vulnerable to abuse by stalkers.

Cyberstalkers target their victims through chat rooms, message boards, discussion forums, and e-mail. Cyberstalking takes many forms such as: threatening or obscene e-mail; spamming (in which a stalker sends a victim a multitude of junk e-mail); live chat harassment or flaming (online verbal abuse); leaving improper messages on message boards or in guest books; sending electronic viruses; sending unsolicited e-mail; tracing another person's computer and Internet activity, and electronic identity theft.

Similar to stalking off-line, online stalking can be a terrifying experience for victims, placing them at risk of psychological trauma, and possible physical harm. Many cyberstalking situations do evolve into off-line stalking, and a victim may experience abusive and excessive phone calls, vandalism, threatening or obscene mail, trespassing, and physical assault.

#### IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF CYBERSTALKING

- Victims who are under the age of 18 should tell their parents or another adult they trust about any harassments and/or threats.
- Experts suggest that in cases where the offender is known, victims should send the stalker a clear written warning. Specifically, victims should communicate that the contact is unwanted, and ask the perpetrator to cease sending communications of any kind. Victims should do this only **once** and should under **no** circumstances ever communicate with the stalker again. Victims should save copies of this communication in both electronic and hard copy form.

- If the harassment continues, the victim may wish to file a complaint with the stalker's Internet service provider, as well as with their own service provider. Many Internet service providers offer tools that filter or block communications from specific individuals.
- As soon as individuals suspect they are victims of online harassment or cyberstalking, they should start collecting all evidence and document all contact made by the stalker. Save all e-mail, postings, or other communications in both electronic and hard-copy form. If possible, save all of the header information from e-mails and newsgroup postings. Record the dates and times of any contact with the stalker.
- Victims may also want to start a log of each communication explaining the situation in more detail. Victims may want to document how the harassment is affecting their lives and what steps they have taken to stop the harassment.
- Victims may want to file a report with local law enforcement or contact their local prosecutor's office to see what charges, if any, can be pursued. Victims should save copies of police reports and record all contact with the Nassau County Police Department or other law enforcement officials and the District Attorney's Office Complaint Bureau.
- Victims who are being continually harassed may want to consider changing their e-mail address, Internet service provider, a home phone number, and should examine the possibility of using encryption software or privacy protection programs. Any local computer store can offer a variety of protective software, options and suggestions. Victims may also want to learn how to use the filtering capabilities of email programs to block e-mails from certain addresses.
- Furthermore, victims should contact online directory listings such as [www.four11.com](http://www.four11.com), [www.switchboard.com](http://www.switchboard.com), and [www.whowhere.com](http://www.whowhere.com) to request removal from their directory.
- Finally, under no circumstances should victims agree to meet with the perpetrator face to face to "work it out," or "talk." No contact should ever be made with the stalker. Meeting a stalker in person can be very dangerous.

In order to locate local victim service professionals that may be able to offer assistance, safety suggestions, and information and referrals, please contact the Nassau County Police Department at (516) 573-7000, the Nassau County District Attorney's Office Complaint Bureau at (516) 571-3505 or the Helpline of the National Center for Victims of Crime at 1-800-FYI-CALL, 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or refer to [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)

*NCPD/SPIN*