

# INFORMATION/SAFETY TIPS ON CRIMINAL HARASSMENT

## RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

Criminal harassment can take over your life. It is a pattern of threats and actions that can frighten you and take away your feeling of self-worth. Stalking destroys your sense of security and personal safety...it can lead to physical harm or even death.

### *The stalker or harasser can be anyone:*

A spouse/partner, a person you lived with, someone you dated, a client, a former employee, a co-worker, a fellow student, a peer or a total stranger.

It is **usually** women who are stalked, however children, adolescents and men can also be victims of criminal harassment.

Are you concerned, worried or afraid because someone is:

- . threatening you;
- . threatening your children, grandchildren, family or friends;
- . following you;
- . following your children, grandchildren, family or friends;
- . waiting and watching - tracking you, your children, grandchildren or others close to you;
- . threatening or damaging your property or pets;
- . calling you over and over, hanging up or not speaking when you answer;
- . calling your children, grandchildren, family, friends or co-workers and asking about you;
- . sending you things you don't want.

If anything like this is happening and you feel that:

- . your emotional or physical safety is being threatened;
- . you can't do what you want or go where you want;
- . you've changed your lifestyle to avoid this person.

You may be dealing with Criminal Harassment

***Get emotional support and tell the Police. Don't wait, your safety and peace of mind are important.***

## TELL THE POLICE

- . Use an emergency police number if you are in a dangerous or threatening situation
- . Report criminal harassment to the Police. Your information is critical for investigations and prosecution.
- . You may find it more helpful if you take a friend with you and go directly to the Police station. Bring a written statement with you and include a detailed description or a photograph of the stalker.
- . Take threats seriously. Use the emergency police number for your community
- . Ask to talk to a Victim Services worker

- . Ask for a police file number and use it every time you call the Police to report anything that could be part of the harassment.
- . Keep emergency numbers, and your police file number with you at all times
- . If you found one Police Officer particularly helpful, ask for that person every time you make a report. If that Officer is not there don't wait - report it now, use your police file number and ask when the Officer you found helpful will be available. You can call and talk to that particular Officer later.
- . In some communities you may be able to get a specialized personal safety alarm/panic button that signals the Police station. Ask the Police, Victim Services or Transition House workers if this type of alarm is available to you.
- . If you move to another area, and you have an active police file, tell the Police in your new community about the stalking. Tell them where you moved from, your file number and the name of the Officer who was helping you.

### **KEEP A WRITTEN RECORD OF EVERYTHING**

- . If you haven't kept notes, start now. Write down what you remember and ask others you trust to do the same.
- . Write down the time, date and place of every contact or event with the stalker. Note what happened and your reactions to it, beginning with the first incident. Even if an event seems trivial, or unrelated, write it down as it may help show a pattern of criminal harassment
- . Copy and save any messages left on your answering machine, and make notes of times when you answered the phone and the other person either hung-up or didn't speak.
- . Keep your record book handy, make a copy of it and keep the copy in a safe place, outside of your home.

### **TELL OTHERS**

- . Tell friends, family, trusted co-workers, employers and neighbours about what is happening to you. Ask them to write down any contact they may have with the stalker and to note the time, date, place and what happened. It may help to give them a copy of this pamphlet.
- . If you're getting child support through the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program, tell your worker about your situation.
- . Tell your children's caregivers, school principal and teachers about your situation. Show them a photograph of the stalker if you have one. Make sure they understand that your child/children **must not leave with anyone except yourself or someone you designate**. Tell the school of any Apanic codes@ you have with your children
- . Be **clear** and **direct**, ask them to help you keep safe. Ask them to keep all information about you private and to let you know if the stalker is making contact with them. Add their reports to your record book.

### **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY**

A stalker may try to track you down at home, work and other places. Here are some steps you can

take to keep your personal information private.

- . Be aware of where you are and who is close by when talking about family, social and travel plans. Someone could be listening.
- . Avoid giving out your social insurance number, it is only legally required at banks and on employers tax forms. You may need to ask for the person in charge in order to explain that the number can be used to track you, and that you don't have to give your social insurance number for other purposes.
- . Get a post office box. Put in a change of address card at the post office and notify all personal and professional contacts of your new postal address. Make sure your name is not on anything that is delivered to your residence. If you have a mail slot in your door, seal it closed.
- . If you live in an apartment building, remove your name from the door buzzer/intercom, use an alias or code name if a name other than occupant is needed.
- . Consider cancelling your home telephone and get a cell phone. Don't give the number out to anyone you don't trust. Use the post office box as your address. If possible remove your home (Civic) address and telephone number from anywhere there is a record, including the following:

Driver=s License	Personnel file at work
Car Registration	Doctor=s office
Medical Services Plan	Credit Card records
Utility bills	Medical records
Telephone bills	Credit Bureau
Car Insurance	Veterinarians
Land Registry	Bar Association
Voting Records	Luggage tags
Libraries	Cheques
Internet Server	Universities
Schools	Subscriptions
Auto Mechanics	School Records
Florists	Church/Club records
Dry Cleaners	Pharmacies
Photo Developers	Couriers
Law Society	Children=s sports & rec. files
Business Cards	

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR HOME SAFETY**

- . Ask the Police or a Victim Services worker to help you do a home security check
- . Install a security alarm, have it monitored. In some cases a surveillance camera, Panic Buttons and Priority Response Codes can be used.
- . When you are going to enter your home have your key in your hand and ready before you reach the door.
- . Avoid distractions such as fumbling for your keys
- . Keep all doors and windows locked, even when you=re in the house, frequently check to see they remain locked.

- . Keep emergency numbers and your Police file number near your telephone or cell phone. Program these numbers into your home phone and cell phone if possible.
- . Install extra lights outside at a height where they cannot be easily removed. Keep lights on inside your garage and outside of your front and back doors. Keep shrubs trimmed. If possible, install motion detector lights and security alarms. If you have an outside fuse box keep it locked. If you rent, consider asking your landlord to provide some of these items.
- . Place lamps near windows to reduce shadows on the curtains/blinds.
- . Consider changing the locks. Use deadbolt locks and keep track of all keys. If you lose a key get the locks re-keyed and have new keys made.
- . Keep the garage locked at all times.
- . Drill a hole for metal stoppers in the frame of sliding windows and doors so they can't be pushed open. Consider having metal bars placed on basement or ground floor windows.
- . Put in a wide-angled peep-hole in the door and be sure you know who is at the door before you open it.
- . Ask repair people for identification. Refuse to accept packages or deliveries you did not order.
- . Make sure your name and address and any personal details are removed before you recycle or throw out mail. Consider getting a paper shredder.
- . Tell trusted neighbours, landlords or building managers about your situation and ask them for help in watching your home. If you have a photograph of the Astalker@ show it and ask them to tell you or the Police if the person is seen in the area. If you can, describe the Astalkers@ car, and give them the license plate number. Have them tell you if they see anyone on your property or hanging around, taking photos etc.
- . Internet - No personal photos, no family Web Page, no photos of kids on any site (including school or sports teams). **Do not enter Internet contests.**

**Have an emergency plan. Make sure your children or other family members know about the emergency plan and where to go for help. Keep an emergency bag packed with extra clothes, medications, identification and cash or credit/debit cards. Include toys, books and any special items your children might want or need. You may want to keep this bag in your car or your workplace, or at a neighbours or friends home.**

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR TELEPHONE SAFETY**

- . Use \*67 then dial the phone number you are calling in order to block your name and number from appearing on a call display. You may want to check with the phone company to see if this and other privacy protection services are available in your area. Refuse Ablocked@ calls.
- . Use \*69 if you require an immediate trace of an unknown caller
- . If you are getting harassing calls, talk to the phone company, ask about \*57 call trace service
- . Get a new phone line with an unlisted phone number. Keep your old phone number on a second line and connect it to an answering machine. Keep all messages that may be related to the criminal harassment.

- . Be aware that conversations on cellular and cordless phones can be traced by a scanner.
- . Protect your privacy by not making 1-900 calls on your phone. Only use 1-800 numbers for police and justice system information.

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR SAFETY AT THE WORKPLACE**

You may need to make special arrangements at your workplace for these safety precautions.

- . Tell trusted co-workers and employers about what is happening to you. It may help to show them a copy of the wallet card or this pamphlet.
- . Ask others to screen your calls and ask them to take names and messages.
- . Remove your name from the in/out board and tell people never to say where you are or when you're expected. Remove your name plate from your desk and/or your office door.
- . Remove any personal information from your files, time sheets, locker, desk or computer. Secure all personal information that **can not** be removed, in a locked desk, and lock your computer.
- . Do not keep pictures of your family on your desk or where someone might see them.
- . Do not accept any packages you are not expecting.
- . If you have a photograph of the person harassing you, show it to other staff members or on-site security; make them aware of your safety needs.

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR SAFETY WHEN WALKING**

- . Look around, be aware of where you are and what's going on.
- . Avoid distractions such as wearing headphones or digging in your purse or backpack.
- . Wear your purse strap on your shoulder NOT hooked around your neck and shoulder.
- . Wear comfortable shoes such as runners.
- . Stay on a well-lit street, in the centre of the sidewalk, away from doorways, bushes and parked cars. Cross the road if necessary.
- . If you think you're being followed, turn around and check, show that you're aware. Immediately go to a safe place such as a store or café, or get on a bus or in a cab.

## **HOW TO INCREASE YOUR SAFETY ON THE TRANSIT/BUS SYSTEM**

- . Carry a schedule. After dark, arrive just before the transit vehicle is due.
- . Wait in well-lit areas.
- . On the bus, sit near others. If you feel unsafe, ask the driver to call for help.

- . A Special request stop@ service to let you out closer to your street or home is available on some bus routes. Call BC Transit for more information.
- . Don't get into cabs if you feel uneasy about the driver.

## HOW TO INCREASE YOUR SAFETY IN THE CAR

- . Lock car doors and windows at all times, including when you're in it.
- . Use a locking gas cap. Try to use a car with a hood that can only be opened from the inside.
- . When you approach your car, look in and under it, do a quick check of the tires and wipers, make sure hood/hatchback/trunk is closed.
- . Have your key ready. Look inside before opening the door. Close and lock the doors as soon as you board the car.
- . Do not identify your car keys with a name, car model or license plate tag. Keep your car registration hidden in the trunk/hatchback of your car.
- . Park in well-lit places, or near attendants in parking lots. Use extra caution in parkades. Never give your car keys to a parking valet.
- . If someone is waiting around your car, leave. If a van is parked on the driver's side of your car, enter from the passenger side of your car or leave. Vans are often used in abductions.
- . Tell the people who service your car to keep all information private and to keep your keys safe.
- . If you're being followed in your car, drive directly to a Police, Fire or gas station. Stay in your car and honk your horn until someone comes out.
- . Try to make note of the license plate number of any car following you. Keep a pen, paper and flashlight in your car. If possible buy a PDA/Cell phone or tape recorder to keep voice notes.
- . Change your routine-drive on different roads. Know where to find **Police, Fire and Gas stations**. Plan ahead for trips. **Know your routes and exits**.

## TAKE ACTION

- . **ASK ABOUT A COURT ORDER**
- . Ask the police to help you get a Peace Bond (legally called a recognizance). You will need to ask for a Peace Bond under Section 810 of the Criminal Code. It may give you extra protection.

## WHAT A PEACE BOND DOES

- . It orders the person to keep the Apeace@ and be of A good behaviour@. It can also direct the person to have A no contact@ with you or your family and to A keep a certain distance@ away from you, your workplace or your home.
- . It gives the Police the right to arrest the stalker if the order is broken

## **HOW TO GET A PEACE BOND**

- . You must have a reason to fear for your own safety or that of your family or property.
- . Ask the Police Officer who is working your file to start the process for a Peace Bond.
- . If you have children ask if they should be mentioned, and tell the Police Officer what you want included in the order.
- . Your Peace Bond is enforceable anywhere in BC. If you leave the Province discuss the order with the Police in your new community.

## **HOW TO USE A PEACE BOND**

- . When you get your order, ask the Police if it has been registered on the central registry.
- . Make copies of the order, keep one with you at all times. If the stalker breaks the conditions of the order, call the Police immediately.
- . If the order includes your children, give a copy to the Principal at your child=s school or day-care, sports coaches and recreation instructors, etc.
- . You may want to show the order to others who need to know how to help keep you safe.

## **CONTACT AUTHORITIES**

If the stalker has been charged and convicted on this or any other crime, keep in contact with Parole and Probation Officers and treatment centres, they will tell you about the stalker=s whereabouts and any upcoming day passes or release. If you know that the stalker has violated any court orders, tell the authorities.

## **YOUR SAFETY MUST COME FIRST**

### **Tell the Police**

- . Ask for a Victim Services worker and a police file number. Use your file number to report all contact, and any event that could be part of the pattern harassment.
- . Keep good records of all contact right from the start. Go back as far as you can remember, note all of the details and ask trusted friends, family, and others close to you to do the same.

### **Get Support: Keep seeking help**

- . You may not get information or help you need on the first call. Keep checking, call all the people or places that have been suggested and keep calling until you find someone who can help you.

### **Ask about Legal Assistance**

- . If you have a custody order, you should contact a lawyer to discuss any changes to your situation.
- . If your situation would permit, consideration should be given to changing your name.

**Awareness**

- . You are responsible for your own safety. Security is an active process (ie: not passive). This includes family members.

**CRIMINAL HARASSMENT IS NOT A SIGN OF LOVE; IT IS ABOUT POWER AND CONTROL; IT IS ABUSE. *TRUST YOURSELF. TAKE ACTION***