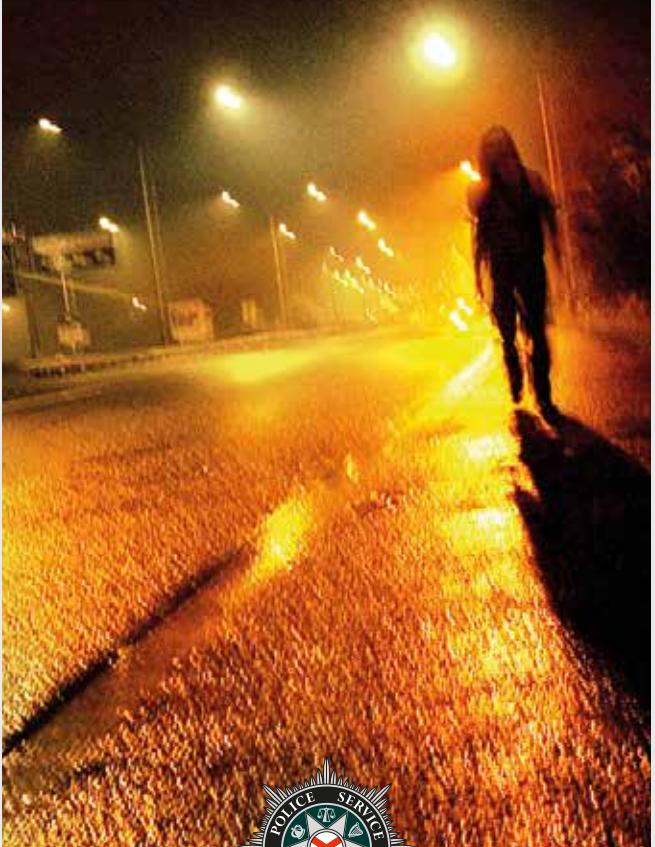


Stalking and Harassment

Advice and information



Keeping People Safe

What is harassment?

Under the Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997 it is necessary to prove a course of conduct amounting to harassment OR fear of violence of another, which the alleged perpetrator knows or ought to know amounts to harassment or fear of violence. A course of conduct is conduct that occurs on at least two occasions.

What is stalking?

There is no legal definition of stalking in Northern Ireland. However, it is generally accepted that it includes repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and/or contacts on another in a manner that could be expected to cause distress and/or fear in any reasonable person.

Taken in isolation behaviours might seem unremarkable, but in the particular circumstances and with repetition, they take on a more sinister meaning. Unwanted communications may include telephone calls, letters, emails, faxes, sms text messages, sending or leaving unsolicited materials/gifts, graffiti, and/or messages on social networking sites.

Unwanted intrusions include the following: waiting for, spying on, approaching, accosting and going to a person's home. In addition to unwanted communication and intrusion, the stalker may engage in a number of associated behaviours including ordering or cancelling goods/services, making vexatious complaints (to legitimate bodies), threats, property damage and violence.

Stalkers frequently threaten their victims, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending wreaths or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats and have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats.

Stalking/harassment checklist

The following is a checklist that police officers will complete in order to determine the extent of the behaviour:

- Are you frightened?
- Has the alleged perpetrator(s) engaged in harassment on previous occasion(s)?
- Has the alleged perpetrator(s) ever destroyed or vandalised your property?
- Does the alleged perpetrator(s) visit you at work, home, etc, more than three times per week?
- Has the alleged perpetrator(s) loitered around your home, workplace, etc?
- Has the alleged perpetrator(s) harassed any third party since the harassment began (ie friends, family, children, partners)?
- Has the alleged perpetrator acted out violently towards other people within the current stalking incident?
- Has the alleged perpetrator persuaded other people to help him/her (either wittingly or unwittingly)?
- Is the alleged perpetrator(s) known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?
- Is the alleged perpetrator(s) known to have been violent in the past (either physically or psychologically)?

**CALL THE
POLICE**

101

IN AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS CALL 999

Cyber stalking (Internet related harassment)

Harassment can occur in a range of situations. The legislation does not limit the scope of the offence to that committed by direct contact. Increasingly, people interact with others through social networking sites, chat rooms and other online methods. This is sometimes known as 'cyber stalking'.

Cyber stalking is a relatively new phenomenon and is sometimes used to describe the use of the internet for purposes of harassment and is a technologically based tactic used against victims.

Examples of cyber stalking include sending manipulative or threatening emails; hacking into another's accounts and changing settings; posting messages and personal information on online bulletin boards; creating false profiles and sending 'friend requests', etc.

If you are being harassed by the internet or other online means, you should consider suspending your social networking accounts until the situation has been resolved. If you continue to use these accounts:

- Immediately block the person harassing/stalking you and report the abuse to the Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- Block emails – many ISPs offer tools that filter or block communications from specific individuals
- Save all email, postings or other communications electronic communications. Print off the offending material if possible and where possible, save the header information from emails, etc
- Consider changing your social network privacy settings
- Do not accept 'friend requests' from strangers. If possible, verify the authenticity of the person sending a 'friend request'
- If you are under 18 years of age, please tell your parents or another adult you trust about any threats/harassment

Criminal Prosecution

In order to assist police in gathering evidence, where possible:

- Keep a record of what happened – when and where you were followed or telephoned; when you received post or email messages; and details of people who may have witnessed these events
- Record information as soon as possible when the events are still fresh in your mind;
- Download onto disk and print out a hard copy of email messages (including the full header), but do not delete the original, which should be kept for the police to examine
- Do not tamper with or dispose of a mobile phone or its SIM card without first consulting the investigating officer
- Record how the individual looked or sounded, what they were wearing and the make, number plate or colour of their car;
- Tell the police if any neighbours or others saw or heard what happened
- Keep letters and parcels as evidence and, if you recognise the handwriting, retain those items as evidence without opening them and reading the contents
- Record telephone conversations and keep the recording
- Keep any stored messages (including text messages) or telephone numbers that have been received on a mobile phone or called ID unit
- Use 1471 on the phone and write down details of calls received including the time received and the telephone numbers, even unanswered calls
- Tell trusted neighbours, visitors, trade visitors, friends and work colleagues what is happening and ask them to keep notes of anything they see and hear ie if others answer your telephone at work or at home

Support Agencies

National Stalking Helpline

Tel: 080 8802 0300

Web: www.stalkinghelpline.org

Protection Against Stalking (PAS)

Web: www.protectionagainstalking.org

Network for Surviving Stalking (NSS)

Tel: 07501 752741

Web: www.nss.org.uk

Suzy Lamplugh Trust (SLT)

Tel: 020 7091 0014

Web: www.suzylamplugh.org

Citizens Advice Bureau (Belfast)

Tel: 02890 261970

Web: www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

Tel: 0870 000 3344

Web: www.ceop.police.uk

NSPCC

Tel: 0808 800 5000

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline

Tel: 0808 802 1414



IN AN EMERGENCY ALWAYS CALL 999