



CYBERSTALK-

FACT & FICTION DO'S & DON'TS

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Stalking is the unwanted, persistent, and menacing attention from someone you may or may not know. Tragically, stalking can escalate into terrible crimes.

What is cyber-stalking? Cyber-stalking is the use of computers and other computer-related technologies for the purpose of engaging in the same menacing behaviors discussed above. What distinguishes cyber-stalking from more familiar forms of stalking is the anonymity that shields the stalker from his victim. While your average stalker may choose to deliver his verbal or written threats in person, the cyber-stalker sends an often-untraceable email.

FACT: *It is extremely difficult for law enforcement to identify a particular individual who may be harassing you on-line. Computer programs such as Internet Protocol are readily available and are designed to conceal the identity of the person as well as the location from which a computer email or other communication may originate.*

FICTION: *Our legal system is well equipped to handle cyber-stalking. Given the cyber-stalker's ability to mask his identity, law enforcement officials are often frustrated in their efforts to identify and locate a cyber-stalker. Their problem is more easily understood when you consider that the unwanted computer messages you may be receiving can be coming from almost anywhere—the house next door or thousands of miles away.*

DO: *Use an email address that is gender-neutral. For example, instead of "susan__@[email server]", use your initials only for both the email address itself and any personal profile that may automatically be sent with it.*

DO: *Be careful who has access to your email address. If possible, avoid posting your email address on Internet newsgroups or bulletins. If you must use such services, use a third-party server such as Hotmail or Yahoo when posting your messages.*

DO: *If you find yourself being harassed via computer, **document** everything that is sent to you. Make hardcopies of all unwanted communication. Save everything to your hard drive. Keep this information on hand indefinitely. Cyber-stalkers sometimes choose to identify themselves to their victims. Proper documentation is of great value to the police.*

DON'T: *Never give your telephone number or address to anyone on-line unless you are absolutely certain of who you are communicating with. Even if the person on the other end of your cyber connection makes no effort to conceal his email address, you still do not know whose hand is on the keyboard. A cyber-stalker may be anyone from a former lover to a perfect stranger.*

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American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence

WARNING

Taking all of the actions on this page may not prevent an abuser from discovering your email and internet activity. The safest way to find information on the internet is to go to a safer computer. Suggestions are: a local library, a friend's house or your workplace. Other safety suggestions: change your password often, do not pick obvious words or numbers for your password, and pick a combination of letters and numbers for your password.

HOW AN ABUSER CAN DISCOVER YOUR INTERNET ACTIVITIES

email: if an abuser has access to your email account, he or she may be able to read your incoming and outgoing mail. If you believe your account is secure, make sure you choose a password he or she will not be able to guess.

If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing email messages, they may be printed and saved as evidence of this abuse. Additionally, the messages may constitute a federal offense. For more information on this issue, contact your local United States Attorney's Office.

history/cache file: if an abuser knows how to read your computer's history or cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he or she may be able to see information you have viewed recently on the internet.

You can clear your history or empty your cache file in your browser's settings.*

- **Netscape:**
Pull down Edit menu, select Preferences. Click on Navigator on choose 'Clear History.' Click on Advanced then select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache."

On older versions of Netcape [sic]: Pull down Options menu. Select Network Options, Select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache."
- **Internet Explorer:**
Pull down Tools menu, select Internet Options. On General page, under Temporary Internet Files, click on "Delete Files." If asked, check the box to delete all offline content. Still within the Temporary Internet Files section, click on Settings. (This next step may make it harder to navigate pages where you'd like your information to be remembered, but these remaining cookies do show website pages you have visited. Therefore, use your own judgment as to whether or not to take this next step). Click on "View File." Manually highlight all files (cookies) show, then hit Delete. Close that window, then on General page under History section, click on "Clear History."
- **AOL:**
Pull down Members menu, select Preferences. Click on WWW icon. Then select Advanced. Purge Cache.

Additionally, a victim needs to make sure that the “Use Inline Autocomplete” box is NOT checked. This function will complete a partial web address while typing a location in the address bar at the top of the browser.

If you are using Internet Explorer, this box can be found on the MS Internet Explorer Page by clicking on “Tool” at the top of the screen, then “Internet Options,” and then the “Advanced” tab. About halfway down there is a “Use inline AutoComplete” box that can be checked and unchecked by clicking on it. Uncheck the box to disable the feature that automatically completes an internet address when you start typing in the internet address box.

***This information may not completely hide your tracks. Many browser types have features that display recently visited sites. The safest way to find information on the internet, would be at a local library, a friend’s house, or at work.**

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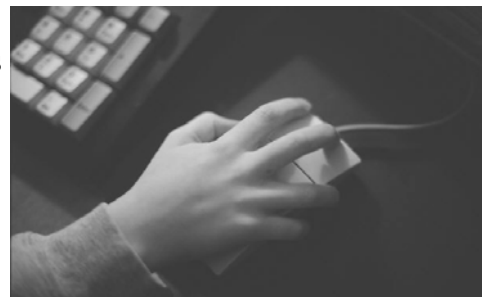
<http://www.abanet.org/domviol/internet.html>

Contact information:

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DON’T: *Never initiate any communication with a cyber-stalker.* While it may be tempting to believe that you can just “talk things out” with the individual, chances are that you will only encourage and escalate further unwanted contact. Stick to this policy even if the person is some one with whom you were once intimately involved.



DON’T: *Do not forget that Protection From Abuse [PFA] orders usually forbid an identified abuser from contacting you in any way, including the use of computers.* You may take comfort in the fact that the individual is many miles away, but do not allow this to provide you with a false sense of security. **No contact means no contact of any kind.**

Cyber-stalking is a relatively new problem. As computers continue to assume a more prevalent role in the lives of nearly everyone, the problem of cyber-stalking is almost certain to increase. Like most of the things we use on a daily basis, computers and the Internet can be either a great benefit to us or a source of trouble, depending on who is using it and for what purpose.

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