

Coping With Stalkers: A Safety Checklist

Adapted from *Broadcast Voice Handbook* by Ann S. Utterback, Ph.D.

The Hidden Crisis

One of the best-kept secrets in every newsroom involves stalkers. Everyone knows it's a problem, but no one talks about it. Stalkers create a hidden crisis for people because the stress is tremendous, but it is often suffered alone.

A stalker is defined as a person who intentionally and repeatedly harasses or follows another person causing that person fear. This unwanted contact can be in the form of phone calls, letters, gifts, or personal contact. These contacts are normally not hostile in the beginning. But what begins as a nuisance can quickly escalate into a threat.

Dr. Park Dietz, one of the country's foremost forensic psychiatrists, said on "48 Hrs. Investigates" (4/23/03) that it's "how many" stalkers a television person has, not "if" they have any. He reported that, "Nobody knows right now how many news anchors get stalked. The likelihood is that for good-looking females on the news nightly, it's 100%." This segment of the program, directed by Martin Zied, focused exclusively on broadcasters who have been stalked.

The Justice Department estimates that more than one million women are pursued and harassed by stalkers every year. Dietz says in *Currents in Affective Illness* (1992), "The nicer one appears to be, and the more approachable, the more one will attract the serious and persistent and deluded subjects." He believes that the perceived approachability and the high visibility of broadcasters make them prime targets for stalkers. His company sees a couple of dozen cases of stalking involving broadcasters every year.

I have had many clients tell me about being stalked. There is nothing more stressful than thinking your life is in danger. The mental anguish this creates can be

paralyzing. It's like living in a house with no curtains when you are the victim of a stalker. Simply by turning on the television, the stalker can watch you.

Linden Gross, in her book, *Surviving a Stalker*, says, "Stalking is like a long rape. The stalker's objective is to force you into surrender." Broadcasters have left the business because of stalkers and, unfortunately, some have been killed by stalkers.