

Checklist for Stalking Cases(2009)

Risk identification is not a predictive process and there is no existing accurate procedure to calculate or foresee which cases will result in homicide or further assault and harm.

The research questions contained in this Stalking Risk Checklist were developed by Drs Lorraine Sheridan and Karl Roberts. The questions were operationalised using practice guidance and training by Laura Richards on behalf of ACPO.



PLEASE DO NOT CHANGE THIS CHECKLIST

Risk Identification for Stalking Cases

This risk identification can be used in ALL cases of stalking. It should be completed by trained professionals if there are two or more incidents of stalking (reported or unreported) and/or if the victim is extremely frightened. These questions direct you to specific areas that will give you an indication of the victim(s) risk of future violence/harm, as well as where to collect evidence and will help inform the risk management/safety plan. Most the behaviours will be about coercive control. Do not think it is any less serious if there has been no physical violence. Please be aware that research shows that those who are at highest risk of assault are ex-intimates who have been threatened (Mullen, Pathe and Purcell, 2009).

Please ensure that you write the additional notes about the behaviours and context of what is going on and link the risk identification responses to a risk management/safety plan.

THE CONTEXT AND DETAIL OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IS VERY IMPORTANT. THESE ARE ALL RISK FACTORS OF SERIOUS HARM. TICK THE RELEVANT BOX AND ADD COMMENT WHERE NECESSARY TO EXPAND <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Name of Victim:	Date form completed:	
Name of Stalker:	Date of birth:	
Name of Professional:	Reference number:	
	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1. Is the victim very frightened?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking or harassment history? (this victim and/or other victims)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does (insert name of stalker(s).....) vandalise or destroy property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up unannounced more than three times per week?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does (.....) follow the victim or loiter near the victim's home, workplace etc?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Has (.....) made threats of physical or sexual violence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Has (.....) stalked/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Has (.....) acted violently to anyone else during the stalking incident?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Has (.....) engaged other people to help her? (wittingly or unwittingly)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is (.....) abusing/misusing drugs/alcohol?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is there a history of previous violence in the past? (This could be physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)	x <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other relevant information/additional observations made by Practitioner (e.g. level of fear in victim, details of threats and violence, duration of stalking/harassment, various harassing behaviours engaged in by stalker, victim's beliefs concerning stalker's motives, weapons owned by stalker, nature of unwanted 'gifts'/items left for victim, attitude/demeanour of stalker including mental health issues and whether victim has responded in any way to the stalker)

Risk Factor Definitions

Q1. Is the victim very frightened?

Research demonstrates that the victim is frequently the best assessor of risk posed to them (Weisz et al. 2000). Stalking often consists of behaviours that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g. walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition, however, these behaviours can become menacing, and the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases (even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence) it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Many victims state that it is the uncertainty of what the stalker will do next which causes them the most concern.

Q2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking or harassment history? (current victim and/or other victims)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour, and stalkers are no exception to this general rule. Research shows that many victims will suffer more than 100 incidents before reporting to the police (Sheridan, 2005), hence there is likely to be a history. Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim (usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker), only to suddenly resume the harassment at a later date.

Q3. Does (insert name of stalker(s).....) vandalise or destroy property?

Various studies have identified that a sizeable proportion of stalkers (up to two thirds) will damage their victim's property (Blaauw et al., 2002) and this includes stalking engaged in by adolescents (McCann, 2000). Property damage may be associated with rage or frustration (perhaps because the offender is unable to attack the victim directly), revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (i.e. destroying her wedding photographs), a wish to undermine her belief in a safe environment (i.e. by cutting brake cables), as a form of threat, or it may be connected with breaking and entering the victim's property or spying on the victim. Property damage has been identified by researchers as preceding or co-occurring with physical attacks on the victim (Harmon et al., 1995, 1998).

Q4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up unannounced more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place at a distance. Research tells us that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen et al., 2000). Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (i.e. on the victim's daily route to work). Others, particularly stalkers with an obvious mental illness, will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times (Sheridan and Boon, 2002). The research informs us that those stalkers who visit the victim's home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times in a week are those who are most likely to attack.

Q5. Does (.....) follow the victim or loiter near the victim's home, workplace etc?

Most stalkers will be seen by their victims. The positive aspect of this is that evidence can be collected, particularly if the victim keeps a log of stalker sightings and behaviour. Stalkers who loiter around places frequented by the victim tend to be those who are most likely to attack their victim. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Alternatively, an attack may be prompted by the stalker's frustration at not achieving his or her aims (such as a relationship with the victim), despite devoting a great many hours to the harassment. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly (even camping out on or in the victim's property), whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will share a belief that their behaviour is an appropriate response to circumstances.

Q6. Has (.....) made threats of physical or sexual 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, however, and research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously. Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats. A review of eight studies by Rosenfeld (2004) revealed that the strongest predictors of stalker violence were threats to the victim. Threats have been found to be even stronger predictors in cases of very serious violence (James and Farnham, 2003). 1 in 2 of domestic stalkers who make a threat, act on it (McEwan et al. 2009).

Q7. Has (.....) stalked/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)

On average, 21 people connected to the victim will be affected (Sheridan 2005). Therefore secondary victims will be identified. Stalkers will involve third parties for a number of reasons. For example, to upset the victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's children), to obtain information on the victim (i.e. by approaching the victim's friends), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's partner), and/or to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (i.e. work colleagues who state that the victim is not available).

Q8. Has (.....) acted violently to anyone else during the stalking incident?

Secondary victims will be identified in a majority of stalking cases, and these can be a valuable source of evidential information. Research suggests that third parties will be physically attacked by the stalker in between 6% and 17% of cases (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, and Stuart 1999; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). Stalkers who attack those associated with the victim are more likely to also attack the primary victim. Persons perceived as preventing access to the victim or protecting the victim are at particular risk.

Q9. Has (.....) engaged other people to help him/her? (wittingly or unwittingly)

The ability of a stalker to pose as other persons and/or to draw information out of third parties should never be under-estimated. Many stalkers will devote hours each day to their stalking campaign, and are capable of stalking their victims for many years (Meloy, 1996). New technologies and social networking sites can facilitate harassment, enabling stalkers to impersonate another on-line; to send or post hostile material, misinformation and false messages (i.e. to Usenet groups); and to trick other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim (i.e. by posting the victim's personal details on a bulletin board along with a controversial invitation or message) (Sheridan and Grant, 2007).

Q10. Is (.....) abusing/misusing drugs/alcohol?

Substance abuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault on the victim in a significant number of cases (Rosenfeld, 2004). The abuse of various substances by stalkers can contribute both to the basis from which the stalking occurs and to individual violent episodes. Binge drinking or drug taking may directly precede an attack, fuelling obsession, yearning or angry thought patterns, or by lending the stalker the confidence to approach or attack the victim.

Q11. Is there a history of previous violence in the past? (This could be physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour. It may not always be physical violence but could include the psychological impact as well. This might be in terms of coercive control and/or jealous surveillance of the victim (Regan, Kelly, Morris and Dibb 2007) if the stalker(s) feels a real sense of entitlement or ownership of the victim. Generally speaking, stalkers who have been violent before – whether as part of a stalking campaign or in relation to separate offences – are more likely to be violent again. It should be noted, however, that some of the most seriously violent stalkers identified in the past had no recorded criminal history (James and Farnham, 2003). This does not mean they have not offended in the past – just that staff may not have seen it as serious if they did not understand it was a pattern of behaviour and they may not have been convicted through the courts.