

MEDIA GUIDELINES

On Reporting Stalking Incidents

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ABOUT ACTION AGAINST STALKING

Action Against Stalking (AAS) is Scotland's only charity dedicated exclusively to stalking victims. AAS was founded by Dr Ann Moulds CBE in 2014, following her recognition in Scottish law. We now provide a unique throughcare service for victims of stalking. We also deliver advocacy, campaigning, specialist advice, accredited training and a range of other activities to support victims and those working to challenge stalking behaviour.

Our work with the media is vital to raise awareness of the crime of stalking and its impacts to eradicate myths surrounding this crime, as well as giving victim-survivors a safe space to share their experience to help shape policy and services.



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

These guidelines have been created to ensure that the messaging around stalking is reported respectfully and that stalking support agencies and victim-survivors are reported in a way that empowers them. These guidelines will provide information on stalking, offer tips on how to report stalking, outline how we can support your enquiry, and include a list of useful resources.

WORKING TOGETHER

How stalking is reported can have a huge impact on how society acknowledges and understands crimes of stalking. We can work together to raise awareness around stalking, eradicate myths and encourage victim-survivors to report the abuse they are enduring whilst highlighting the legal landscape and what needs to change to better support victims of stalking.

How the media reports on stalking have improved throughout the years, with more awareness around this type of crime. However, some reports reinforce the narrative that stalking is romantic, and something done out of love, and others sensationalise the behaviours by only reporting on cases where the victim is physically assaulted, which preserves the myth that a physical altercation must happen for a crime to have occurred.

STALKING FACTS

11.8% of adults in Scotland are stalked and harassed annually, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men.

Stalking is a serious criminal offence under Section 39 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing Act (Scotland) 2010. There is a wide range of behaviours that can be classed as stalking under the Act.

The legislation states that if someone targets another person in a way that is repeated and unwanted, regardless of whether their actions are threatening or not, but where the intention or outcome is to cause distress, then they could be guilty of stalking.

In the absence of explicit threats, individual incidents on their own may appear harmless. But police and courts will assess them together and may conclude they form a 'course of conduct' that is intended to cause, or result in, fear and alarm.

Recognising the Behaviours

Stalking behaviours can often be identified by certain characteristics. A key question to ask is, are the actions of the person:

- **Fixated**
- **Obsessive**
- **Unwanted**
- **Repeated.**

Common stalking behaviours

Stalkers seek to intimidate their targets through one or more of the following:

- Sending unwanted letters or cards;
- Sending unwanted emails or text messages, or posts on social media sites;
- Making unwanted phone calls;
- Delivering unwanted gifts to a workplace or home;
- Waiting outside someone's home or workplace;
- Following someone or spying on them;
- Sharing intimate pictures of them without their consent, for example, by text, on a website, or on a social media site;
- Posting information publicly about someone, making public accusations or contacting someone's employer;
- Making threats.

However, stalking is highly individual, and certain actions may appear innocuous to others but hold significance to both the stalker and the person they are targeting.

Some stalkers will recruit other people to target their victim (known as stalking by proxy). Sometimes, these third parties don't understand the potential consequences; sometimes, they're manipulated into fulfilling the stalker's wishes, and sometimes, they're willing participants.

Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking has grown throughout the years as technology and apps advance, and stalkers weaponise these to target their victims. Stalking can be offline, online or a mixture of both. Online stalking, also known as cyberstalking (or technology-assisted stalking), can include:

- Contacting someone through social media and messaging apps;
- Tracking social media accounts;
- Hacking into a computer, including installing tracking apps or devices;
- Taking control of someone's social media profiles;
- Accessing a phone to view personal information;
- Making unwanted calls, sending unwanted texts or messages;
- Sharing or threatening to share photos, videos or personal information;
- Impersonating an online identity and attacking others;
- Using someone's image online;
- Creating a website to attack someone;
- Attacking someone's relatives online.

Care should always be taken in the digital world. Reduced inhibitions online have been linked to offending behaviour. People form relationships more quickly, causing them to disclose more information than they normally would, which can pose a risk if someone is being untruthful about themselves and their intentions.

WHAT TO INCLUDE WHEN REPORTING

Include a Range of Voices: Stalking can affect everyone and anyone and is individualistic to each victim-survivor, and even though they may have common threads, each of their experiences is different, and this should be reflected within reporting. In crimes of stalking, certain demographics are oftentimes missing from the discussion so including victim-survivors from various demographics is vital to ensure diversity and inclusion so that everyone's voice is being showcased. This can include male victim-survivors, young people, older people, disabled people, those from the BME community and those from the LGBTQI+ community.

Respect Victim-Survivors: It is important when reporting stalking cases, that victim-survivors voices are showcased in a meaningful way which is respectful, and that the victim-survivor has control of. This could be reporting on how their experience can help shape and improve policy, legislation and service delivery rather than asking them to disclose the trauma they experienced. The inclusion of stalking victim-survivors is important, as without their knowledge and willingness to speak, we would not fully understand the impacts of stalking and how to best support victims as well as how to advocate for them in a way that campaigns for change. Ensure that victim-survivors are kept anonymous (unless requested not to be) and that their safety is not compromised. It is also important to allow victim-survivors to read any questions ahead of time so that they can disclose what they are comfortable with sharing and allow them to guide the narrative.

Appropriate Language: Do not sensationalise storylines by adding clickbait titles and dramatic language that reinforces myths and stereotypes. It is important to know when it is best to use 'victim' or 'survivor', and the best way to do this is to ask the individual sharing their story what they feel most comfortable being called. It is important not to disclose any personal information that could put a victim-survivor in danger or interfere with any legal investigation.

Name the Crime: Stalking behaviours must be labelled as a criminal offence and not minimised with terms such as 'nuisance' or badged as harassment. Stalking is a serious offence, and behaviours can often escalate if not understood and addressed. Stalking is oftentimes linked with other serious offences such as sexual assaults, rape, vandalism, physical violence and even homicide so the behaviours must be labelled as stalking to highlight the seriousness of such an offence.

Use Professional Voices: As much as it is important to place victim-survivors at the centre of reporting, in an ethical and empowering manner, it is equally important to represent specialist/professional voices in the field. Ask stalking support services, such as AAS, for interviews or comments. Professionals are the advocates of service users, so they have vast knowledge of not only the subject area but also how it impacts those they support.

Relevant Data and Helplines: It is important to showcase stories, but these should be backed by statistics, as stalking is not a one-off event. It is important to reference relevant data and reports to highlight the prevalence of stalking in society. Some examples include policy documents such as The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, Police Scotland Recorded Statistics and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Reports. It is important to note that in Scotland, stalking of an ex-intimate partner may be recorded under domestic abuse legislation. Helplines must be included when reporting so that audiences are aware of where they can seek support.

You can view a list of helplines here – <https://www.actionagainststalking.org/useful-phone-numbers>

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOUR ENQUIRY

AAS Comment or Interview Request

We understand the importance of collaborating with the media to ensure that appropriate reporting of stalking is prioritised. If you have a media enquiry, you can contact us at press@actionagainststalking.org, and a member of the team will be in touch.

If you are seeking an interview, AAS would welcome the opportunity to share our knowledge. However, sending over the subject of the interview, along with any questions, would allow the team to prepare for the interview. Stalking is a vast and complex subject area, so having these materials allows the team to give the best possible interview.

If you are requesting a written comment or quote, please send over details regarding the story it will be contributing to, when it will be released, the length of the quote and any other requirements to allow us to give a meaningful response.

We are a small team with limited capacity, so we must be given appropriate time scales to send over any comments or be involved in any interviews so that we can prepare as best as we can and meet the time scales for all involved.

If you are requesting service data, then this may not always be possible as we must ensure data is anonymous and GDPR guidelines are followed.

Client Request

If you are requesting to speak with one of our clients, then this will not be possible. For AAS to create a trusting environment, anonymity and the well-being of our clients are primary to ensure a safe space for their recovery journey.

REFERENCES

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