How to Start and Facilitate a
SUPPORT GROUP *for*
VICTIMS *of* STALKING

Stalking
resource center

A program of

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

About the Authors

Stalking resource center

The **Stalking Resource Center**, a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime, was established in 2000 in partnership with the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) at the U.S. Department of Justice. The Stalking Resource Center's mission is to raise national awareness of stalking and encourage the development and implementation of multidisciplinary responses to stalking in local communities across the country. As the only national training and technical assistance center focused solely on stalking, the Stalking Resource Center has provided training to tens of thousands of victim service providers and criminal justice professionals throughout the United States and has fostered innovations in programs for stalking victims and those practitioners who support them.

The Stalking Resource Center provides training on stalking dynamics, legal remedies, multidisciplinary efforts, practitioner-specific practices (e.g., safety planning, investigation, prosecution), and the use of technology to stalk, and operates a Web site (*www.ncvc.org/src*) with continuously updated information. The Stalking Resource Center also collects and distributes materials for practitioners such as case law digests and model protocols from jurisdictions around the country.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR Victims of Crime

The **National Center for Victims of Crime** is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization dedicated to serving individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime. The mission of the National Center is to forge a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. Working with local, state, and federal partners, the National Center:

- Provides direct services and resources to victims of crime throughout the country;
- Advocates for laws and public policies that secure rights, resources, and protections for crime victims;
- Delivers training and technical assistance to victim service providers, counselors, attorneys, criminal justice agencies, and allied professionals serving victims of crime; and
- Fosters cutting-edge thinking about the impact of crime and the ways in which each of us can help victims rebuild their lives.

Since its inception in 1995, the **Office on Violence Against Women** (OVW) of the U.S. Department of Justice has handled the Department's legal and policy issues regarding violence against women, coordinated Departmental efforts, provided national and international leadership, received international visitors interested in learning about the federal government's role in addressing violence against women, and responded to requests for information regarding violence against women. OVW works closely with components of the Office of Justice Programs, the Office of Legal Policy, the Office of Legislative Affairs, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Immigration and Naturalization Office, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, United States Attorneys' Offices, and state, tribal, and local jurisdictions to implement the mandates of the Violence Against Women Act and subsequent legislation.

Under the violence against women grant programs administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office on Violence Against Women has awarded over $3 billion in grants and cooperative agreements, including the disbursement of more than 3,305 discretionary grants and 635 STOP (Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors) formula grants to states and territories. These grant programs help state, tribal, and local governments and community-based agencies, including institutions of higher education, address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking to enable communities to: enforce protection orders; provide legal assistance and other services to victims; provide intensive training to police officers, prosecutors, and judges; and support local efforts to respond to violence against women.

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Acknowledgements

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Purpose of This Guide

The purpose of *How to Start and Facilitate a Support Group for Victims of Stalking* is to guide victim service providers, volunteers, and other concerned community members on how to initiate and implement a stalking support group. This handbook provides recommendations on how to locate partners and community support, identify resources, and engage victims who would like to participate in a stalking support group. It offers guidance on how to choose a leader or facilitator, how to prepare the leader, and how to run support group sessions that help members cope with the impact of stalking.

The information and suggestions that follow were developed from interviews with stalking victim service providers, expert research on stalking, and the experiences of stalking victims and survivors. This guide is also based on feedback from several support groups who reviewed working drafts. The lessons learned from these "pilot groups" have been incorporated here.

How to Start and Facilitate a Support Group for Victims of Stalking is intended to be a guide and resource—not a "prescription" for how to conduct a group. Communities and stalking victims vary considerably. Effective support group facilitators are attuned to what victims in their community need, what local resources are available, and how these resources can be mobilized to help stalking victims. Group leaders can select what they find useful from the handbook and adapt those suggestions to the needs of the stalking victims in their community.

Although this guide may be most beneficial to individuals with experience and training in group facilitation, first-time facilitators may also find the information useful. However, as mentioned, this guide is not a comprehensive manual on running a support group. First-time facilitators and those seeking more detailed information about running a group are strongly encouraged to obtain additional training and resources on facilitating a support group.

SUPPORT GROUPS: A GREAT BENEFIT TO VICTIMS OF STALKING

Support groups are groups of individuals with a similar problem, need, or experience who meet to discuss how to better cope with their situations. Support groups can decrease a person's sense of isolation, provide emotional support, and encourage healthy coping strategies to deal with stressful life events.[1] By sharing their stories and feelings, group members learn that they are not alone and help one another to overcome feelings of frustration, loneliness, and despair. Perhaps for the first time, individuals in a safe and supportive group receive attention and non-judgmental feedback from other group members.

Stalking victims often feel alienated and fearful for their well-being. Stalking support groups can help alleviate this sense of isolation and provide victims with an opportunity to express their feelings in a safe and understanding environment. Victims of stalking often want to learn how to keep themselves and loved ones safe, as well as how they can minimize the impact of stalking on their lives. In a stalking support group, victims can learn about safety planning strategies and available community resources. The emotional support and practical information that a stalking support group provides can be invaluable resources for victims of stalking.

Groups that provide both an educational and emotional component are called psycho-educational.[2] The psychoeducational format appeals to many stalking support groups that aim to educate members on safety issues and provide emotional support to help them cope with the ongoing trauma of stalking. *How to Start and Facilitate a Support Group for Victims of Stalking* focuses on this support group approach.

Psychoeducational stalking support group topics include practical elements on how to secure one's home, obtain a protective order, access safe shelter, and document stalking incidents. The group can also help victims cope with the physical and emotional impact of stalking (e.g., isolation, depression, anxiety, exhaustion, poor concentration, or posttraumatic stress disorder).[3] An increased sense of security and trust helps individuals combat the fear and loss of control they feel when faced with unpredictable, threatening intrusions by stalkers.[4] By connecting members to others who listen, believe, and support them, the group helps diminish the damaging effects of being stalked.

Other benefits of this type of group include: bringing together victims at different stages of coping to explore their personal goals, financial flexibility (i.e., facilitators incur relatively few costs), and adaptability to victims' varied educational and emotional needs. However, if group organizers or leaders find that another format better fits the needs of their community, they are encouraged to seek additional resources and materials.

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1   Ronald Toseland and Robert Rivas, *An Introduction to Group Work Practice,* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 3-41.
2   Ibid., 202.
3   Michele Pathé, *Surviving Stalking*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51-57.
4   Paul E. Mullen, Michele Pathé, and Rosemary Purcell, *Stalkers and Their Victims*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38-51.

ONE COMMUNITY'S STALKING SUPPORT GROUP STORY

In December 2002, Barbara Givens and a small group of women from southern Maryland held an informal meeting at a local restaurant to discuss some common and troubling problems. During the meeting, the women told stories of being followed, watched, and threatened. One woman's ex-husband frequently followed her when she was in her car; another's ex-boyfriend called her friends and family for information about her; and another's ex-partner called her repeatedly, describing the clothes she was wearing at the time of his calls. The women shared feelings of fear, anxiety, exhaustion, and depression. Until this conversation, many of them had not labeled or acknowledged their experiences as stalking. The women walked away from this life-changing conversation both with a word—stalking—to describe their experiences and with a group of people who believed them and understood the fear they felt. The group not only validated feelings and experiences, but it also showed each woman that she was not alone.

The women kept in contact by telephone for several months until Givens organized a meeting time and place and invited other stalking victims to the group. While planning the logistics, Givens educated herself on stalking and support group facilitation. She also started to reach out to organizations in her community to raise awareness about stalking and the stalking support group. Since its inception, the group has had as many as 17 members and has featured several guest speakers, including chiefs of police, detectives, a psychologist, and a victim advocate. Members have benefited from the support group in myriad ways. Many of the women have gained self-esteem and confidence and have taken back some control over their lives. Many members have also increased their physical safety by using new safety planning methods they learned from each other and from local law enforcement.

Many communities—like Barbara Givens's southern Maryland community—do not provide services for the unique needs of stalking victims. Barbara Givens saw how these women could benefit from stalking-specific support and information, and she decided to develop a support group to fill the gap in services. Her actions both helped her fellow victims and raised awareness about stalking in her community. The Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime has developed this guide to help victim service providers and other stakeholders across the United States learn more about the resources and validation that support groups can uniquely provide to victims of stalking.

How to Begin

Chapter 2 offers important information about stalking and its impact on victims. Group leaders and facilitators who have a breadth of knowledge about stalking and stalking victims are best equipped to help group members who may have a broad range of stalking experiences. At a minimum, facilitators need to understand the basic facts about stalking and techniques to help victims increase their safety. This section suggests methods for identifying local community responses to stalking, conducting a needs assessment, and collaborating with community agencies.

STALKING: UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE

Stalking is a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalkers intimidate and threaten victims through actions that make victims fearful or cause them emotional distress. Stalkers terrorize victims where they live, work, and attend school. Stalkers' behaviors can include repetitive phone calling and other phone harassment, leaving unwanted gifts for the victim, following or spying, unwanted e-mailing and other Internet harassment, and other threatening or menacing actions.

Stalking is a crime that is pervasive, dangerous, and potentially lethal. A 2009 Bureau of Justice Statistics report demonstrated that 3.4 million people are stalked annually in the United States. About half of the victims in this study experienced at least one unwanted contact from their stalker per week, and 11 percent of the victims reported having been stalked for five years or more. Women were nearly 3 times more likely to be stalked than men, and people ages 18-24 experienced the highest rate of stalking victimization.[5] Stalking is frequently undetected because, in many cases, stalking behaviors (e.g., driving by the house, leaving unwanted gifts or letters, showing up unexpectedly) are not identified as criminal behavior.

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5   Katrina Baum et al., "Stalking Victimization in the United States," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 224527, January 2009).

Stalking is a crime under the laws of all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government. Yet the legal definition and penalties imposed for stalking vary greatly from one jurisdiction to the next.[6]

STALKING, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Stalking is closely linked to other power and control crimes, such as domestic violence and sexual assault. Intimate partner violence-related stalking is the most common type of stalking and the most dangerous.[7] The 1998 National Violence Against Women Survey found that more than three-fourths of female victims who had been stalked by an intimate partner had also been physically assaulted by that partner.[8] Stalkers will often use physical violence or the threat of such force against victims.

Former intimate partners who become stalkers have considerable leverage over their victims because they know a great deal about them. Such stalkers are likely to know the victims' friends or family members as well as where the victim works, shops, and goes for entertainment. If there are children in common, the victim may find it impossible to avoid all contact with the stalker. In fact, the legal system often inadvertently enables the stalker to gain access to the victim or to continue harassing and intimidating her or him; ongoing court dates or court-ordered visitations are two such occurances.

Stalking is also closely linked with sexual assault. Almost one-third of the women who were stalked by a current or former husband or cohabiting partner were also sexually assaulted by the same partner.[9] Additionally, some victims of sexual assault are then stalked with continued harassment or intimidation designed to prevent the victim from reporting the assault.

Most alarmingly, stalking also can be lethal. According to one study, 76 percent of women who were murdered by their current or former intimate partners were stalked by their killers within 12 months of the murder.[10] The same study found that 85 percent of women who were victims of attempted homicide by their intimate or former intimate partners were stalked within 12 months prior to the attempted murder.[11]

Unfortunately, stalkers elude definitive profiles. Stalkers are more often male than female,[12] but just as men can be stalked, women can also be stalkers. Stalkers are persistent and can be dangerous. Over three-fourths of stalkers use more than one means of approaching their victims, and almost one-third of stalkers have stalked before.[13] The average duration of stalking

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6   For information about stalking laws in each state, Indian Country, the U.S. territories, and the military, visit www.ncvc.org/src.
7   Nearly 75 percent of stalking victims know their offender in some capacity; approximately 30 percent of stalking victims reported being stalked by a current or former intimate partner. Baum et al., "Stalking Victimization in the United States."
8   Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey," (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 1998).
9   Ibid.
10   McFarlane et al., "Stalking and Intimate Partner Femicide," *Homicide Studies*, 3, no. 4 (1999): 311.
11   Ibid.
12   Ninety-four percent of stalkers identified by female victims were male, and 60 percent of stalkers identified by male victims were male. Tjaden, "Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey."
13   Kris Mohandie et al., "The RECON Typology of Stalking: Reliability and Validity Based upon a Large Sample of North American Stalkers," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* (2006).

is 1.8 years, but when the stalking involves intimate partners, the average duration increases to 2.2 years.[14] Intimate partner stalkers frequently approach their targets, and their behaviors can escalate quickly.

Stalking involves interactions that are often understandable only to the stalker and victim and that may seem harmless to someone not familiar with the situation. For example, a seemingly insignificant form of contact such as sending an e-mail may be part of a perpetrator's plan to monitor or frighten a victim. A letter left on the victim's doorstep may be a signal from the stalker that he is watching her or that he found her in her new home. Fully understanding the context of stalking behavior requires understanding the history between the parties and the range of behaviors directed at the victim.

THE IMPACT OF STALKING ON VICTIMS

Stalking can affect a victim's emotional, physical, and economic well-being. Many studies on victims of stalking have shown the adverse impact that stalking has on their lives. It is important for facilitators of a stalking support group to learn about the effect of stalking on victims to better understand their experiences and how to design a group that will meet their needs. While not all victims' experiences are the same, outlined below are several common reactions many stalking victims have reported.

Emotional. Stalking can take a great toll on one's emotional well-being. Victims report being most fearful of what the stalker would do next and that the stalking behaviors would never end.[15] The ongoing trauma of stalking can produce posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, panic, and other disorders in a victim. In one stalking study, more than 80 percent of victims reported increased anxiety in response to stalking, and 33 percent met the full DSM-IV-TR criteria for PTSD.[16] Twenty-five percent of victims in the study considered or attempted suicide, and one-quarter of victims increased their alcohol, tobacco, or other substance use.

Physical. Victims of stalking can experience nausea, fatigue, and also a worsening of any pre-existing medical conditions. Many stalking victims also report hypervigilance, insomnia, nightmares, and difficulty concentrating as a result of the stalking.

Economic. Stalking can take an economic toll on victims. Stalking victims may lose time at work and can even lose their jobs, as stalkers will often harass victims at their place of employment. In a recent study, 1 in 8 employed victims reported lost time from work; more than half lost five days or more.[17] Victims also purchase items in attempts to feel more safe (e.g., alarms,

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14   Tjaden, "Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey."
15   Baum, "Stalking Victimization in the United States."
16   *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR*, 4 Ed, (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
17   Baum, "Stalking Victimization in the United States."

cameras, home security systems). Some individuals find they need to relocate to keep themselves or their families safe, which can be a tremendous financial burden.

Social. Victims of stalking often feel isolated from family and friends. Many will alter their routines and avoid spending time with others to prevent endangering them. Victims may also cease activities such as going to the gym or other public places to avoid being followed. Some victims even abandon work, school, or other routine activities.

ASSESSING THE COMMUNITY

Individuals interested in organizing a stalking support group should begin with a clear understanding of the experiences of stalking victims in their community as well as the local responses to stalking. Knowing the community's capacity to respond to stalking may assist organizers in developing outreach strategies, choosing weekly discussion topics, planning group sessions, and preparing the facilitators to lead the group. Even a simple community assessment is a helpful way to begin to collaborate and partner with different community organizations that wish to better serve stalking victims.

A community assessment is essentially research that will help guide group organizers as they start up a stalking support group. Methods range from simple, informal discussions with service providers about their agencies' stalking services to more involved approaches, such as community-wide surveys, to find out about the actual experiences of victims in the community. Establishing a goal, including a purpose and anticipated outcome, can help direct the assessment content and method.

Gathering information for a community assessment can be accomplished in many ways. Discussions with local service providers and surveys may best answer questions about local stalking victims' needs. Consider assessing what resources are readily available by contacting local criminal justice services, crisis intervention agencies, mental health centers, domestic violence shelters, and rape crisis centers. Compiling this information will help highlight gaps and overlaps in available services and will also provide a basis for future outreach efforts. Additionally, this guide contains a wealth of general information about stalking (e.g., stalking prevalence, victim impact, stalkers' behavior), and users are encouraged to visit the National Center for Victims of Crime's Stalking Resource Center Web site at *www.ncvc.org/src* for a wide range of continually updated resources.

Some suggested places to contact and questions to ask when conducting a community assessment are outlined below.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Knowing how the local criminal justice system responds to stalking victims is essential. Many victims rely on law enforcement to respond to criminal behavior, investigate concerns, and en-

force protective orders. However, this system is complex and comprises many different departments, all with differing mandates and authority. Facilitators who have a good understanding of the criminal justice system and its role in protecting and responding to victims of stalking will be able to support those victims more effectively. Below are some of the questions that group facilitators may want to research regarding their community criminal justice system.

Law enforcement. First responders to stalking complaints can be critical allies in assisting victims of stalking.
- What information is needed by law enforcement to respond to complaints of stalking?
- What is law enforcement's role in responding to stalking?
- What are some effective law enforcement responses to stalking in the community?
- How can victims report an incident of stalking? Who will respond?
- What should victims do if the stalker does not cease his or her actions?

Protective orders. All states make available protective orders of some kind (sometimes called restraining orders, orders for protection, stay-away orders, etc.), many related to domestic or family violence. Some states also offer stalking protective orders.
- Are protective orders available to stalking victims in this community?
- How and where does a victim obtain one?
- What are the pros and cons of obtaining a protective order?
- For how long will an order be in effect?
- What happens if an order is violated?

System-based advocates. These advocates are usually employees of criminal justice agencies such as prosecutors' offices, police departments or domestic violence units, or family justice centers in local court houses. System-based advocates generally provide assistance with matters pertaining to criminal cases.
- What services are provided by court advocates?
- How does a victim obtain an advocate?
- What is your agency's policy regarding victim confidentiality?

Prosecution. All U.S. jurisdictions have a local public official who prosecutes alleged criminal charges. This official may be called a District Attorney, Commonwealth's Attorney, State's Attorney, County Attorney, or County Prosecutor.
- How do victims file a complaint with a prosecutor?
- If a criminal case is filed, what are the possible outcomes?
- What information do prosecutors need about victims and their cases?
- Is stalking a misdemeanor or felony offense?
- What rights do stalking victims have in the criminal justice process?

Parole, probation, and corrections officers. Parole and probation officers supervise offenders on parole or probation through personal contact with the offenders and their families. A corrections, prison, or detention officer supervises criminals in a prison or jail.

- What role do corrections officers play if the stalker is in jail?
- How can these officers help victims?
- How can a victim contact the stalker's probation or parole officer?

Victims' compensation. Every state and U.S. territory has a crime victim compensation program. These programs offer financial assistance to crime victims and their families.

- Is compensation available for stalking victims?
- How do stalking victims apply for compensation?
- What agency should a victim contact?

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Some victims of stalking may not have any interaction with the criminal justice system. Community-based services may be the only resources available to these victims. Group facilitators may want to research what services are offered by local community agencies.

Victim services. Most communities have several types of community-based organizations that offer victim assistance. These organizations can include domestic violence shelters, sexual assault crisis centers, and homeless shelters. These agencies, and the programs they offer, vary in each local area.

- What types of services are available?
- How do victims find specific services, such as shelter, counseling, and advocacy?

Counseling and therapeutic services. Victims of crime may wish to seek out counseling services to help address their feelings and experiences with stalking.

- Do any agencies have counselors trained to work with stalking victims?
- What low-cost or free counseling services are available?

CIVIL RESPONSES TO STALKING

Civil attorneys. Some victims of stalking may wish to seek legal advice from a civil attorney.[18]

- What services are provided to stalking victims by civil attorneys?
- When would a victim need to inquire about hiring an attorney?
- How do victims find and hire a civil attorney?
- What can a victim expect from the civil justice system?

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18   For more information about civil justice resources available to victims, see *Civil Justice for Victims of Crime*, which can be downloaded from the National Crime Victim Bar Association's Web site at www.victimbar.org.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Information gathered from a community assessment will significantly broaden a facilitator's understanding of the range of resources available to stalking victims. It can also assist group organizers in making decisions about the group (e.g., group purpose, location, or format)[19] or in identifying potential partnerships to help the group meet victims' needs. The information may also be used to educate the community on stalking or to design publications that encourage stalking victims to seek help. Additionally, data may be used to educate criminal justice system personnel and victim service providers on the importance of responding effectively to stalking.

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Stalking victims often need a broad range of safety and emotional support services from the community and from their support groups. No one agency or support group can provide victims with everything they need. Many support groups have formed alliances with agencies that offer additional services, such as counseling or shelter assistance. Such collaborations can help both the agencies, by improving their stalking services, and the support groups, by referring members to appropriate services.

The level of collaboration between groups and community agencies varies widely, from developing a one-time event such as a fundraiser to planning joint projects over a number of years. Groups and agencies can refer clients to each other, problem-solve challenging cases together, share resources, and co-sponsor events. Police departments, prosecutors' offices, and mental health service providers can help support group organizers by providing information, services, and support to both them and members of the group.

Below are some ideas for how to work with community partners:

- **Give potential partners clear, concise information about the group.** One stalking support group facilitator developed a brochure that described her group and explained how to join. She brought the pamphlets (along with cookies) to the police station and asked the officers to distribute the brochures to stalking victims.

- **Adapt approaches to the audience and their circumstances.** When one facilitator first began reaching out to law enforcement by distributing brochures and speaking at meetings, she found that some officers were well informed about stalking and others were not. She started sharing stories about stalking victims and the impact of the crime on their lives. The facilitator found that by consistently returning and patiently delivering this information, she was able to educate many officers. The officers, in turn, became better at identifying stalking and referred more stalking victims to the support group.

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19   See Chapter 3 for more information about defining a support group.

- **Find an ally at a potential partner agency.** A victim advocate who was facilitating a support group developed a strong relationship with a domestic violence unit detective who was especially interested in responding to stalking. The detective, in turn, reached out to the entire police department to educate other officers on stalking and help her supervisors improve the department's response to the crime. The facilitator also served as a liaison between this detective and group members who needed additional help on their cases.

  In another jurisdiction, a stalking survivor who started a support group enlisted a skilled prosecutor who had worked on her case to assist the group. As a result of the facilitator's initiative, the support group met in the prosecutor's office and involved a victim advocate from the prosecutor's office as a co-facilitator. This prosecutor and facilitator eventually trained the entire prosecutor's office on the needs of stalking victims and the impact of the crime on their lives.

- **Coordinate goals.** One organizer partnered with law enforcement by inviting the police chief to speak at group meetings. The partnership benefited both the group and the police department. The group gained information about the criminal justice system and additional assistance from the police. The chief benefited from gaining specific information on how to improve the agency's response to stalking. This collaboration helped the group meet its goal of educating and advocating for members and the chief's goal of adequately responding to stalking victims.

  In another community, a local domestic violence agency learned about the connection between intimate partner violence and stalking after surveying survivors who had used their services. The agency identified the need to better serve stalking victims on their annual programming plan and designated one advocate's time to conducting research and developing a stalking support group.

- **Swap resources with agencies or individuals.** One organizer reached out to local domestic violence shelter staff, who agreed to refer stalking victims to the support group. In return, the support group referred members to the shelter for housing and case management services. Another organizer partnered with a local police department, which donated free meeting space, security, and guest speakers to the group. In return, the organizer invited a representative from the department to join her when she was invited to speak on a local radio program about stalking.

To enhance the coordination of their services to victims, many communities have established collaborations in the form of domestic violence coordinated community response teams (CCR) or sexual assault response teams (SART). Support group organizers should consider the possibility of building upon these or other existing community efforts and partnerships. For more information on coordinated community responses, please see the Stalking Resource Center Web site at *www.ncvc.org/src.*

Group Preparations

Preparatory work is crucial to the outcomes and successes of a stalking support group. The planning stage offers time to determine membership criteria, the format of the group, and possible challenges. Careful planning and critical thought will greatly enhance support group members' experiences in the group.

DETERMINING GROUP PURPOSE

Once the group organizers have completed their community assessment, they can use their findings about victims and services in their community to establish a clear, defining purpose for the support group. Group organizers should ask themselves, "What will group members gain from participating in this group?" Articulate objectives as clearly as possible in a purpose statement. For example, one stalking support group stated its purpose was "to provide stalking survivors with emotional support and to educate them about available community resources." The purpose statement guides all other planning decisions, such as group type, membership, facilitators, and structure.

DETERMINING MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

All group members should have a similar purpose for joining the group, even if they bring a variety of experiences, resources, and perspectives to share. Consider how individuals' experiences, goals, and needs are (or are not) compatible with the group's purpose. Membership criteria that draw on common concerns will help create a supportive and effective group. Criteria to consider include age, gender, relationship to stalker, current level of danger, and the role of different cultures in shaping victims' responses to stalking.

Facilitators may choose to make membership criteria flexible. In one group, for example, the agreed upon purpose did not limit membership by gender. The organizer knew that more

females report being stalked than males and, therefore, assumed the group would consist of female participants. During the screening process, however, a male called to ask if he could join the group. The organizer discussed this prospect with the group members, and the women agreed to have the man join. Yet, in another location, a group's purpose was to provide services for female stalking victims. During the community assessment, organizers found that the women did not feel comfortable attending a co-ed group. In this instance, the facilitators limited group membership to females.

Gender is a particularly important criterion to consider when determining membership for a stalking support group. Many of the facilitators consulted for this guide ran support groups that were open to female and male stalking victims because their members—victims of both stranger and intimate partner stalking—shared common goals. The facilitators found that members could identify with and support one another based on their similar concerns about safety and emotional coping. For some groups, however, it may be necessary to limit membership to one gender for the emotional safety and cohesiveness of the group.

Group leaders should also consider limiting membership to those individuals who will benefit from the group process, whose well-being will be enhanced from the experience, and who will not be likely to jeopardize the success of the group. A well-designed screening process will help group organizers determine an individual's readiness to participate in a group. Some stalking victims may need more help than a support group can provide, and other victims may be in imminent danger from their stalker. In these cases, group leaders should work with local agencies to find other resources, shelter, or safety measures to meet the needs of these victims. For assistance in locating services in local areas, please contact the National Crime Victim Helpline of the National Center for Victims of Crime at 1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255 / TTY 1-800-211-7996).

CHOOSING THE FACILITATORS

Before starting a stalking support group, organizers should make basic decisions about how the group will be run: Will there be one or two facilitators? Will the facilitators need to have a specific background or training? What other characteristics should facilitators have?

Often, the individual who organizes the support group becomes the facilitator. Whether the organizer or another group member steps into that role, the facilitator needs to have (or be willing to acquire) specific, basic knowledge and skills to successfully lead the group. Depending on the purpose and membership of the group, facilitators should be familiar with the following:

- Group facilitation,
- Stalking rates and behaviors,
- Safety planning,
- Coping with stalking,
- Community resources,

- Crisis intervention, and
- Culturally appropriate services.

Many of the facilitators consulted for the development of this guide had gained the necessary knowledge from their professional backgrounds—social work, victim advocacy, counseling. However, such backgrounds are not necessarily required to lead a stalking support group. The group's purpose will assist organizers in determining the knowledge facilitators should have or acquire. For example, if the group purpose is to educate members on safety planning, the facilitator should have knowledge or experience in safety planning (e.g., have prepared safety plans or studied extensively on the subject).

Facilitators can acquire the necessary information and skills in a variety of ways. For example, to learn about the logistics of running a group, facilitators can observe (with permission) or participate in other support groups, read books and journal articles, and attend victim service volunteer training provided by a local agency.

CO-FACILITATION

Many group leaders opt for an additional facilitator in their support group. Co-facilitation allows each facilitator to draw on the other's strengths, and group members can benefit from the different perspectives and styles of co-facilitators. In one instance, a stalking survivor with knowledge of stalking and the criminal justice system co-led a support group with a social worker who had skills and training in group facilitation and dynamics. Together, these co-facilitators created and maintained an emotionally supportive group environment and provided excellent information on stalking and the criminal justice process.

Co-facilitators can also provide emotional support to one another. Co-leaders can discuss their thoughts and feelings about the group and work through group challenges together without breaking participants' confidentiality. Co-facilitators share responsibilities during group sessions, reducing the amount of emotional and intellectual energy each needs to facilitate a group. Shared facilitation responsibilities can also increase the safety of a stalking support group should any type of emergency arise. For example, if a stalker follows a victim to the group location, one facilitator can concentrate on getting outside help from law enforcement or other security while the other leader supports and directs the group members.

Selecting co-facilitators with complimentary skills is important. Leaders should discuss their styles, perspectives, goals, and objectives in running a stalking support group. Prior to the first group meeting, any differing opinions or preferences between co-facilitators should be resolved. Mutual respect and trust among the leaders will help provide a beneficial and supportive environment for participants.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

DECIDING ON AN OPEN- OR CLOSED-GROUP FORMAT

The duration of groups can be open-ended (open) or close-ended (closed).[20] An open group allows new members to join at any time and does not have a formal start or end date. A closed group has a specific starting date and duration (e.g., eight or 12 weeks) and allows new members to join only at the starting date. A stalking support group could follow either format. A community assessment that examines stalking victims' needs will help facilitators decide which type of group might work best in their community. The advantages of each type of group, as well as suggestions for overcoming disadvantages, are discussed below.

Closed groups. A closed-group format is usually defined by membership criteria and time limitation. Often, members are asked to attend all group meetings, and new members are not added during the course of the group. This format can reduce the need for facilitators to repeat information and for members to repeat their stories at a series of meetings. The information covered in previous sessions becomes a foundation for the sessions that follow. Additionally, closed groups allow facilitators to keep in touch with victims regularly and help them assess and address safety issues as the group progresses.

Facilitators who elect for closed groups may experience higher and more consistent membership than open groups. Working with the same group of people may help stalking victims feel more physically safe and more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. Such sharing increases the likelihood that the group will become a cohesive unit in which members develop more advanced coping and healing skills and increasingly rely on one another for support and advice.

Facilitators can increase the flexibility and accessibility of closed groups in a variety of ways. During intervals when the closed group is no longer accepting members, facilitators can meet individually with those who want to join the group or can check in with them frequently until another group opens. Facilitators can also offer an advanced group for individuals who have already attended an initial eight-week session. Facilitators may find that a previous group member is interested in and ready to begin co-facilitating the advanced group. This option empowers the potential co-facilitator and reduces the workload of the facilitators already running a group.

Open groups. Open groups—which accept members at all times and allow them to attend the group as frequently or infrequently as they wish—also have several advantages. Members may choose to "drop in" only when they need additional emotional support or when they see a topic that interests them. Victims of intermittent stalking (e.g., the stalking occasionally stops for a period then starts up again) may benefit from the flexibility this type of support group offers.

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20   Toseland, *An Introduction*, 89-90.

In open groups, long-term members may emerge as leaders who support and provide information to new group members.

Facilitators play a critical role in keeping an open group physically and emotionally secure. To keep sessions running smoothly, facilitators may briefly review the group guidelines at the beginning of each meeting. Facilitators may also choose to meet with new members separately prior to their first group meeting to review safety guidelines and goals. To foster group cohesion while welcoming new members, facilitators should develop positive relationships with all members and regularly acknowledge the overall progress of the group and individual long-term members.

Running open groups may be particularly demanding for facilitators because of the work required to constantly integrate new members and keep materials fresh and engaging for long-term members. To help prevent burnout, facilitators can plan a brief hiatus for the group on a regular basis. For example, every eight weeks the group can observe a two-week break and then resume group sessions.

CHOOSING A LOCATION

Safety is a primary concern when selecting a meeting space for stalking support groups. Many groups will likely include individuals who are currently being stalked and are very concerned about their safety. Organizers should select a support group location where group members feel safe and where they can implement safety planning precautions.

Secure locations for group meetings include buildings with professional security personnel, such as court houses and police stations. Groups can also hire or obtain donated security for meetings in less secure buildings, such as churches and community centers. Domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers, which have established their own building-security mechanisms, may also be sensible places to hold a stalking support group. Stalking support group organizers may be able to form a group under the umbrella of an agency by becoming a volunteer at the agency, asking to start a stalking support group as an agency service, or agreeing to have an agency employee co-facilitate the group. Ultimately, for stalking victims, ensuring that a location "feels" safe depends on both the physical security of the location and group members' perceptions about safety.

Because stalkers often follow victims, public places that people frequent in the normal course of their lives (such as hospitals, churches, or libraries) may be a better solution than more isolated locations. Benefits of using a public location include having other people around and the presence of on-site security—factors that may discourage stalking behaviors.

Several facilitators interviewed for this guide have faced difficulties in finding safe locations for their groups. One facilitator could not arrange for on-site security and attempted to keep the group safe by rotating the meeting location to different places each week. Despite the rotation, a stalker managed to find the group, and members had to leave the meeting immediately, in accordance with their safety plan. (See below for more information on safety plans.)

One organizer had considerable success holding a group at a local police station, where group members had positive interactions with the police and felt safe attending group sessions. Group members benefited from an immediate police response when stalkers appeared at the station during their meetings. Another group that held their meetings at a police station, however, faced problems with perceived safety. Although the location was physically safe, some members were uncomfortable because they were dissatisfied with how the officers had responded to their stalking cases. The group then began to meet in the prosecutor's office, which was acceptable to the group because some members had previous positive experiences with the prosecutor.

Some communities may explore online group meetings. Similar to distance-learning programs, groups may employ networking sites, message boards, or phone or video conferencing. Keep in mind, however that there is no way to completely secure virtual group meetings, and these types of technologies are often used by offenders to stalk their victims. While technology may offer useful mechanisms for conducting a stalking support group, these options should be explored with great caution.

DEVELOPING A GROUP SAFETY PLAN

Protecting the safety of group members is an important responsibility for organizers and facilitators. Stalkers may discover the location of the group and appear at the group session, jeopardizing the safety of all members. To reduce the risk of such dangers, organizers should develop an initial group safety plan before the group convenes and discuss the plan with members at the first meeting. The safety plan should be continually updated and assessed to help ensure members' and facilitators' safety.

Precautions facilitators should consider when constructing their group's safety plan include: never publishing where a specific meeting will be held; what members should do if a stalker shows up at a group meeting (e.g., leave quickly and call security or the police); and ways members can safely travel to the meeting site from their vehicle or public transportation (e.g., walking with each other, car pooling). The safety plan should also identify ways that members can help prevent a stalker from learning the location of the group meeting (e.g., varying the route they take to reach the meeting place or parking in a space not directly adjacent to the meeting room, such as a public parking lot across the street). Facilitators should also consider how to safely communicate with participants (and how members can communicate with one another). Stalkers may read victims' e-mails, listen to their phone messages, or open their personal mail. Facilitators should consider discussing these possibilities with members and identify ways to overcome these challenges.

RESEARCHING LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES: CONFIDENTIALITY, PRIVILEGE, AND MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS

Facilitators need to understand the laws and policies that may affect the operation of their group. In particular, they should be aware of laws on confidentiality, privilege, and mandatory reporting. If the support group is being hosted by a local agency, such as a domestic violence shelter or rape crisis center, the agency may already have policies in place regarding client confidentiality, privilege, and mandatory reporting. These policies may dictate how the facilitator and other employees of the agency will maintain victim confidentiality, including documentation of group members' identities, personal information, and issues they choose to share while in the group.[21]

Many agency policies also explain the mandatory reporting laws in their particular jurisdiction so clients will understand in which circumstances their information will not be held confidential by the agency. Mandatory reporting laws require some professionals to report certain crimes, such as child or elder abuse. For example, if a support group facilitator is a mandated reporter in their jurisdiction and a group member reveals a current incidence of child abuse during a group session, the facilitator may have to report that incident to child protective services, thus breaking the client's confidentiality.

Regardless of an agency's policy on confidentiality, criminal and civil judges may be able to order group facilitators or other agency employees to testify in court or submit their written documentation, such as progress notes, about a group member or statements made during a group session. This occurrence typically happens when a defense attorney requests that the court issue a subpoena against the facilitator of the group or the agency that hosts the group.

While courts seldom subpoena support group documents, and some courts may have set a precedent not to subpoena them at all, such documents are subject to subpoena in all communities under certain circumstances. Because of this possibility, facilitators should take steps to minimize any potential damage to their members' cases. Recognizing that too much record-keeping may be detrimental to a victim in court, but too little may be detrimental to the group, facilitators may want to consider keeping only necessary written contact information about group members and to refrain from recording and retaining information about group members or group meetings. Facilitators can also find out if courts in their community have ever subpoenaed these documents and how other social service agencies protect client information.

To protect the agency, the facilitator, and the client, it's important to determine whether the facilitator or other agency staff members hold a legal privilege to keep notes and information about clients out of court. Some states have laws granting victim advocates, social workers, doctors, and other practitioners this legal privilege (stating that information relayed during the course of a professional service to a client cannot be obtained by the courts). However, even if there is a law granting legal privilege to a profession, an attorney should be consulted on the strength of that law (e.g., if it has been upheld in an appellate case).

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21 Groups hosted by a local agency should have a clear, written agreement that the group is part of and legally protected by the agency, regardless of how and when the group started.

If the group operates as a stand-alone program, facilitators will need to obtain liability insurance and draft an informed-consent form for participants. If group members are harmed (for example, if a perpetrator gains access to the group or a participant attempts suicide), group facilitators may be liable.

Regardless of how the group is structured, either under the auspices of an agency or as a stand-alone program, facilitators will need to consider these issues. Group organizers may want to consult with an attorney to discuss these and other potential liability issues. To find legal help, groups might consider asking a local attorney to volunteer as an advisor. Additionally, programs can seek help from Legal Aid or legal services at a local college or university.

Facilitator Preparations

This chapter discusses how facilitators can prepare themselves for running a stalking support group, including obtaining necessary training, determining facilitator skill sets, and examining personal readiness to run a support group.

THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE

The term "facilitator" here describes an individual who leads a stalking support group. The facilitator's role depends on the group's purpose and goals. The role of facilitator could include organizing meetings, leading discussions, encouraging members to contribute, fostering group decision-making, and arranging for experts and partners to speak at meetings and contribute to the work of the group. Often the facilitator is the group organizer and may have been involved in assessing community resources for stalking victims, seeking out and screening group members, establishing formal community partnerships, raising any needed funds, and choosing a co-facilitator to help run the group meetings.

TRAINING

To conduct a stalking support group, even experienced facilitators need specific information on a variety of subjects. They need to be informed about stalking, community resources, and working with stalking victims who have different experiences. First-time facilitators need all this information, as well as training on group dynamics and facilitation skills.

Training on group dynamics, how to facilitate a group, and how to work with stalking victims with different experiences is available from a variety of sources. New facilitators can read books and articles about support groups, group processes, and group facilitation strategies. In addition to the information presented throughout this guide, facilitators with limited information on stalking and intimate partner violence may be able to attend a local domestic vio-

lence center volunteer training or trainings offered by local domestic and sexual violence coalitions. Such training provides information about domestic violence, a crime that often overlaps with and is similar to stalking, and may include tips on how to work with domestic violence survivors who are stalked.[22] Facilitators can also talk with local victim service providers about the unique challenges faced by stalking victims, and they are encouraged to read about stalking survivors' experiences, such as in Emily Spence-Diehl's *Stalking: A Handbook for Victims*[23] and *Surviving Stalking* by Michele Pathé about the emotional impact of stalking on victims and effective safety planning.

Ideas for exploring facilitator training and learning opportunities include:

- Contact local domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape crisis centers to inquire about upcoming volunteer trainings.
- Learn about Stalking Resource Center trainings offered in local communities (*www.ncvc.org/src*).
- Learn about the National Center for Victims of Crime National Conference and Training Institutes (*www.ncvc.org/education*).
- Search for local facilitator training. (Many are listed on the Internet and can be found through search engines such as Google.)
- Contact local colleges or universities. (Many have introductory facilitation skills classes.)
- Interview local victim service professionals.
- Discuss facilitation tips with experienced support group facilitators.
- Learn from stalking victims—look for local speaker's bureau events or read victims' accounts in books and memoirs.
- Discuss victims' needs with local criminal justice system professionals.
- E-mail Stalking Resource Center staff for additional tips and technical assistance (at *src@ncvc.org*).

FACILITATION SKILLS

Group facilitation is the process of guiding the progress of the group and its members. Facilitators foster trust and create environments where participants feel comfortable sharing personal experiences.[24] Effective group facilitators often possess a broad range of personal attributes and leadership skills including sensitivity toward others, an understanding of group processes and dynamics, excellent listening skills, flexibility, and dedication. Facilitators can use non-verbal communication such as eye contact and body language to convey respect, trust, and empathy, or

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22   Tjaden, "Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey."
23   The author has graciously permitted the Stalking Resource Center to make this out-of-print handbook available for free download from its Web site at www.ncvc.org/src. Emily Spence-Diehl, *Stalking: A Handbook for Victims*, (Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, 1999).
24   Toseland, *An Introduction*, 96-110.

they can use verbal skills—responding empathetically, paraphrasing members' perspectives, and summarizing group discussions.[25]

Facilitators encourage sharing and understanding among participants and invite all members to actively participate.[26] Facilitators can help members identify and assess which particular problems they wish to address, and they can ask clarifying questions to ensure that individual members and the group at large focus on specific concerns and experiences with stalking. For example, if a member says she can't make friends the way she used to, the facilitator might ask how the member used to make friends and help her discover what particular aspect of her life has been affected by the stalking (e.g., she is less willing to trust strangers or she no longer goes to social events for safety reasons). Further discussion can help clarify what about the stalking has caused such a change and can assist in determining which actions will best help the individual address the situation.

As they lead the group through the process of coping with difficult issues and conflict, facilitators should take care to stay calm and reinforce ground rules, such as respecting one another and allowing only one person to speak at a time. Facilitators must remain impartial and keep the process safe for all members. At the end of each session, many facilitators summarize the issues discussed that day and the responses offered by the group. Some facilitators, with their group's permission, use the summary to begin the next session's work. Supporting members, guiding the group's discussions, helping members resolve conflict, and summarizing the issues and solutions discussed are among the skills that facilitators use to help group members cope with the impact of stalking and achieve the goals they have set for themselves. (First-time facilitators are encouraged to read other resources and receive additional training on these skills.)

EMOTIONAL READINESS

Any person wishing to facilitate a support group for stalking victims should assess their emotional preparedness for taking on this important role. Victims and survivors of stalking can be effective facilitators and can find the experience personally rewarding but should consider whether they are emotionally ready for this responsibility. Some questions potential facilitators can ask themselves include:

- Do I have the time and energy to run a group?
- Will my own experiences with stalking victimization interfere with my ability to run a group?
- Can I offer support to members consistent with their level of recovery from the crime?
- Do I have adequate perspective and emotional distance from my own stalking situation so that I can avoid inappropriately interjecting my own story and needs into group discussions?

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25   Ibid.
26   Ibid.

These questions can help potential facilitators examine their own progress in recovering from stalking. Being a stalking victim can be profoundly traumatic, with long-term emotional impact. Individuals who become emotional or anxious when they think or speak about their stalking experience are probably not ready to facilitate a support group; neither are those who feel the need to regularly discuss their reactions or experiences. Facilitators who have been victims can serve as powerful role models by demonstrating that there is "life after stalking." If potential group leaders are still emotionally volatile, however, they will not be able to fill the important function of group facilitator.

Emotionally ready facilitators should know when and how to talk about their own experience or tell their story—not to receive help from the group, but rather to share information that will benefit other members. For example, facilitators may encourage members to talk about their feelings on support systems by sharing how they felt when family members did not support them. Such self-disclosure may help validate the experiences of group members and give them the courage to share their own personal and often painful stories.

An important question survivors must ask themselves is whether they have the time and energy to do the job well. Facilitating a group may not only require time and energy for group meetings but also for setting up the group (e.g., conducting a community assessment or finding funding). It requires preparing for upcoming group sessions (e.g., confirming members' participation or researching a topic) and providing information or resources to individual members as needed between sessions. Potential facilitators who still need considerable time and energy for their own stalking cases, or for other commitments, will not likely have sufficient time and energy to run a stalking support group.

Group leaders who have trouble judging for themselves whether they are ready to facilitate a support group can solicit feedback from an experienced co-facilitator, mentor, or outside facilitator. Facilitators who ask for and seriously weigh such honest feedback regarding their readiness can approach their role with confidence.

SELF-CARE

Facilitators who take care of their own emotional health have more energy to effectively help group members. Taking care of oneself includes assessing personal needs and monitoring "warning signs," including: feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, or indifferent; dreading or feeling overly anxious about group sessions; becoming frequently annoyed with group members; or having no interest in new ideas for upcoming meetings.

Many self-care activities can help facilitators maintain their emotional health. These activities can include reviewing a group's progress with a mentor or co-facilitator, spending time with friends, seeking support from a counselor or clergy member, gardening, or exercising. One support group facilitator found that planning a hiatus for her open-ended group was essential to maintaining her own emotional health. She reported that the facilitating responsibility was more manageable and she had more energy and motivation to continue facilitating the group when she knew that a two-week break was approaching.

Getting Started

This chapter suggests several ideas for safely publicizing information about a stalking support group as well as tips for how to screen potential support group members.

GETTING THE WORD OUT SAFELY

Most stalking victims are aware that stalking jeopardizes their safety, and they will not take risks to participate in a support group that they perceive as unsafe. In fact, many victims significantly limit or reduce their own mobility (where they go, what they do) for fear of being followed and harassed by the person stalking them.

If potential members believe that stalkers might easily discover where the group meets or if the meeting location is announced to the entire community, they may conclude that the risk of joining the group is too great. However, if potential members know that the group itself and the method the facilitators use to publicize it are safe, they will more likely feel comfortable joining. If they learn about the group from someone they trust and are assured that no unscreened individuals have access to information about the group, they are likely to see the group as less risky.

It is possible to maintain both the confidentiality and safety of a group location, and publicize the group itself. Outreach methods such as posters can inform the public that the group exists without identifying the group's meeting day, time, location, or sponsoring organization. Routing inquiries through local victim service programs, such as shelters, prosecutors' offices, courts, or sexual assault programs may help reduce safety concerns related to reverse lookup capacity (in which a service such as 411.com identifies an individual or organization by its phone number).

To address the safety concerns of stalking victims while reaching as many potential group members as possible, facilitators may develop partnerships with allied agencies, such as criminal justice and victim service agencies. These agencies agree to refer stalking victims to the

group on a confidential basis, ensuring that information about the group will not be released to the general public and that stalkers will be less likely to learn about the group. Regardless of outreach method, new members should be informed of the group's location only after a screening process.

SCREENING POTENTIAL MEMBERS

Screening potential group members can be as simple as a meeting between the potential member and the facilitator to assess whether that person is an appropriate candidate for the support group and if the group can meet the needs of the individual. This meeting, which should be face to face, can be an informal conversation focusing on several key issues or a structured interview covering a list of prescribed questions. Both types of meetings should provide potential members with information about the group and allow plenty of time for questions.

During the screening process, the facilitator should provide both oral and written information about the group that will help potential members determine whether they might benefit from joining. This information includes the facilitator's qualifications and experience as leader, the group purpose, the possible benefits of the group, the limitations of the group, the structure and activities of the group, group confidentiality requirements, and the rights and responsibilities of the group members and leaders.[27] Such information helps potential members decide if the group will be a good fit for their needs.

The facilitator should seek information about an individual's stalking experience, perception of her or his current safety level, coping techniques, methods of staying safe, personal goals, and expectations of the group. This information helps the facilitator determine whether the potential member will be a good fit for the group or whether the candidate should be referred to another service agency that better suits her or his needs.

This critical exchange of information during the initial meeting also begins the process of developing a trusting relationship between the facilitator and the potential group member. This relationship helps stalking victims, who often are distrustful of others because of the stalking, to feel more comfortable and safe attending a group. To build upon this emerging trust, facilitators might ask how to safely follow up with potential members to see if they have more questions or concerns about the group. This additional precaution and concern can help potential members feel welcome and much more at ease attending the support group.

SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR SUPPORT GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Discussing the following subjects can help assess participants' readiness and appropriateness for the support group. These questions may be given to the participant in written form or discussed in person.

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27   Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey, *Groups: Process and Practice,* 4 Ed., (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2002).

- Please talk about your experience being stalked. Are you currently being stalked? How often? In what ways?
- How well do you know your stalker?
- How dangerous do you think the stalker is? Does the stalker have access to weapons?
- How do you cope with the stalking?
- What is your support system? Who does it include?
- Have you previously sought any other help for stalking? What was that experience like?
- Do you have any type of protective order against your stalker?
- How would you describe your current emotional state?
- Why are you interested in attending this group?

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions. They serve primarily as a way for the facilitator to assess how the victim may fit in the group, what special considerations the victim might have, group safety issues related to the stalker's behavior, and if the victim might be better served by a different program.

REFERRALS TO OTHER GROUPS AND AGENCIES

Not everyone who inquires about membership will be appropriate for the stalking support group. Sometimes, a group can't meet an individual's specific needs, or a person's participation might prevent other members from reaching their goals. Facilitators can best serve these individuals by referring them to other service providers in the community for one-on-one or other group support. (Organizers can refer to their community assessment for a list of agencies and organizations for referrals.) Some potential members may have additional conflicts that prevent them from attending groups (e.g., lack of adequate transportation, childcare, scheduling conflicts). Facilitators can help them find transportation or childcare or, if the problem cannot be resolved, provide information about other available services and resources. An individual whose expectations or goals differ significantly from the group's may need to be referred to a different agency.[28] For example, someone seeking to improve stalking laws would likely not benefit from a support group that has not included legislative advocacy as part of its group purpose. Facilitators can provide such individuals with contact information for agencies or organizations involved in political advocacy.

Individuals who need more extensive mental health services than the group can provide also need referrals to other community services. Individuals in emotional crisis may speak of suicide or homicide, or have mental health problems that the group cannot address. For example, one group facilitator interviewed a potential member who described being stalked by someone who was sending "electrically transmitted messages to her brain." While the facilitator recognized the possibility that this person was a stalking victim, she knew that no technology exists for this type of stalking. Because the group was not set up to address mental health problems, the facilitator explained that the group would not be able to help the potential member

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28   Toseland, *An Introduction*, 161-64.

and gave her phone numbers of the local mental health center and victim service agency for safety planning.

Individuals with such problems may become upset when offered referrals instead of group membership, particularly if they have had negative experiences with other service providers who did not believe or help them. Facilitators can stress that they do believe the individual is being stalked but that their circumstances suggest one-on-one assistance would be more beneficial than group support. Facilitators should provide both mental health and victim service referrals to such individuals.

Finally, facilitators may find that they cannot invite certain individuals to join the group because their participation would jeopardize the group's safety. One type of safety risk would be an individual who is currently in a particularly dangerous stalking situation that might endanger other group members. Facilitators also need to watch for potential stalkers trying to access a group member. Gathering information about the stalkers of current group members and listening for odd or inconsistent information and evidence during the screening process can help screen out perpetrators.

The Work of the Group

This chapter provides suggestions for creating welcoming group environments, ideas for first meeting sessions, and information about common group phases. Additionally, a section on evaluation and facilitator challenges is included.

CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE GROUP ENVIRONMENT

Safe and supportive stalking support groups are welcoming to all members, are predictable and stable, encourage group interaction, and make physical and emotional safety a high priority.[29] All groups should have a preliminary safety plan before the group begins, and members and facilitators should work to enhance the plan throughout the duration of the group. (See Chapter 3, "Developing a Group Safety Plan.")

Facilitators value and welcome members by acknowledging and validating each member's distinct experiences and strengths. Although group members come together around a shared issue, each group member's experiences, feelings, thoughts, and responses to the stalking will be unique. Facilitators also help members feel valued and welcomed by providing opportunities for all members to share their experiences and responses. This kind of support is particularly important because stalking often isolates victims from friends and family. Encouragement from facilitators and the rest of the group can help reduce isolation by engaging and empowering group members.[30] When planning the group's curriculum and evaluating group dynamics, facilitators should consider how the group can foster trusting relationships among members and how members can be encouraged to participate to the extent that they are comfortable.

Because stalking victims often face unpredictable, dangerous intrusions by stalkers, they benefit from a predictable, stable group that is a protected area of their lives.[31] Facilitators foster

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29   Ibid.
30   Ibid.
31   Ibid.

this predictability and stability by developing and following group guidelines, providing group agendas, and developing rituals for the group (e.g., beginning the group with each member sharing the week's developments and closing with an upbeat message about the power and success of the group). Group members are likely to feel safer sharing thoughts and feelings when guidelines require confidentiality and respect and are enforced. Facilitators should also take care to consistently follow the agenda that they have provided to group members.

Following support group guidelines is also an important way to build trust between facilitators and support group members, and among the members themselves. Initially, stalking victims may hesitate to trust one another because their friends and family may not have believed or supported them. However, a trusting, supportive environment is essential for an effective support group. The importance of fostering trust should factor into decisions about the group facilitators, the format (open versus closed), and membership criteria.

A safe and supportive environment is physically safe as well. Stalking victims attending a group are likely to have their safety at risk and bring this risk to the group. When planning the location, format, and criteria for group membership, facilitators should make decisions that enhance group safety.

THE FIRST MEETING

The first tasks of the initial stalking support group meeting are for the facilitator to welcome those present and introduce members.[32] During the introductions, the facilitator can invite members to briefly discuss their stalking experience, what they hope to gain by attending the group, how they know their stalker, and how long they have been stalked. Consider following introductions with an "ice breaker" exercise or other low-risk, introductory activity.

After introductions, the facilitator can describe the purpose of the group, including what members can and cannot expect from the meetings and each other. Discussing and developing group guidelines can also take place during the initial meeting. Facilitators may wish to draft preliminary guidelines and present these to the group. Members should then have an opportunity to add other guidelines to the list. Guidelines usually include maintaining confidentiality, being courteous, refraining from criticism of other members, taking turns to speak, not interrupting other members, remaining non-judgmental, supporting other members, accepting people's accounts of their experiences, helping others value themselves, and providing everyone with an opportunity to contribute. (Some groups agree on a 10-minute limit for each speaker.) Developing these guidelines, encouraging members to contribute to them, and then adhering to them during sessions will help members feel safe when sharing their feelings and experiences with the group. Once the guidelines are established, it may be helpful for the facilitator to display them during each group meeting. (See sample Support Group Guidelines on following page.)

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32   Ibid.

In addition to group guidelines, members are encouraged to draft a group safety plan that addresses what members will do in case of an emergency (e.g., a stalker follows a member to group; a member is missing). All stalking support groups should have a group safety plan and review it often with members.

Finally, the first few meetings should include a discussion of topics planned for the group so that members may request additional information or topic changes. At the end of the first meeting, the facilitator can introduce a closing ritual that will bring each group meeting to an end.

Example of Stalking Support Group Guidelines*

The purpose of our stalking support group is to:
- Provide information and hope, and to share successes and hardships.
- Provide a safe place to express feelings openly in a non-judgmental environment.
- Learn from each other.

In our group:
- All participants have the opportunity to speak, but no one is required to do so.
- All participants agree that any and all information disclosed in this group is completely confidential.
- All expressions of emotions, including laughing and crying, are allowed, with the exception of physical violence.
- All members agree to only share first names of non-participants (as this may unfairly undermine a current relationship between another group member and that individual, e.g., doctor, hospital, or social service organization).
- All participants have control over what happens with their personal information, and no information will be released to any outside agency or individual, without the written consent of the member.
- All participants should do what they need to do to take care of themselves during the group (including standing up, moving around, or taking a break).
- Participants may exchange phone numbers and call each other between meetings if they feel comfortable doing so.
- All participants will respect each other's personal space and situation.

Additional guidelines can be added as determined by the group.

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*Adapted from "Ground Rules," Feel Safe Again, Inc. 2007

EVERY MEETING

Facilitators may wish to create standard rituals for opening and closing meetings. Opening rituals can include: asking the group to share any lingering thoughts or questions about the previous meeting; letting the group know what the facilitators observed and thought about the last session or the group's progress; "checking in," or asking group members to report on how they feel and what has happened since the last meeting; discussing how it felt to come to group today; or discussing what members hope to get out of this session's topic.

Similarly, having a closing ritual can be a good way to end each session. Some facilitators leave the last 10 minutes for a check-in so members can share any feelings that arose during the meeting. Facilitators may choose to offer feedback about any changes or progress that members are making during this time. Some facilitators use the time to inquire if there are any areas that need more attention (for example, referrals or additional information on a topic). Other facilitators choose a poem or story to share or lead the group in a relaxation activity. It is important to end by letting members know about the next session's topic and the support systems available to them until the next session.

GROUP STAGES

From the outset, facilitators need to understand and be prepared to manage the phases through which support groups typically evolve. These include an initial stage, transitioning stage, middle or working stage, and the ending stage.[33]

INITIAL AND TRANSITIONING STAGES

The initial and transitioning stages of a support group are usually marked by participants' worries and expectations about the group. Members may be "testing the water" during this time to see if the group is a good fit for them and at some point may feel comfortable sharing their personal stories. During this stage, facilitators may need to take a more active role than other stages to engender trust and openness among the group members, model how to provide feedback, offer sensitive validation and suggestions, and clarify members' goals and expectations. Ongoing assessment is important during this stage.

Problems, challenges, and conflicts are also common during the initial and transitioning stages of a group. Facilitators will need to address any conflicts early on in a supportive and gentle manner to help the group remain safe and productive. (See page 35 for more tips on dealing with challenges and conflicts.)

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33   Corey, *Groups: Process and Practice*.

MIDDLE STAGE

The middle stage of a group can be characterized as the working stage. Trust has likely been established among members and facilitators, and the group may feel like a cohesive unit. Conflicts, when they arise, may be more easily dealt with, and members may be willing to take risks to explore issues in depth.

ENDING STAGE

Bringing the group to a successful finish is an important part of the work of the group members and facilitators. The last few sessions can include opportunities to review what the group has learned and how members' behaviors or perspectives may have changed during the course of the group. Participants may express feelings of anxiety or concern that the group is ending as they sort out how they will apply what they have learned to their lives. It is important for facilitators at this stage to highlight the successes of the group and note the personal growth of individual members. Group facilitators may also want to make sure members have access to further resources if they should need them.

EVALUATION OF THE GROUP

Evaluation is an important part of bringing the group to an end (or brief hiatus). During evaluation, facilitators can remind members of their accomplishments, and learn how to improve the group for any future sessions. Evaluations can take place during a group meeting or during individual meetings between the facilitator and members. These sessions include members' feedback on how they benefited from the group and areas in which the group could improve. Feedback can be given orally or facilitators can hand out evaluation forms if members would like an anonymous way to provide comments and suggestions.

Evaluation questions can include (but are not limited to):

- Did the group meet your expectations? Why or why not?
- Did the facilitator(s) prepare you adequately for the group process?
- Did the facilitator(s) keep the group running smoothly?
- Were there any additional topics you think the group should address?
- What would improve the group?
- What part of the group was most helpful?
- Would you recommend this group to others?

FACILITATOR CHALLENGES

Knowledge of group dynamics is essential for running a stalking support group. Group dynamics include interaction patterns, group cohesion, norms, roles, and group culture.[34] While this handbook does not discuss group dynamics in detail, it does describe some challenges that facilitators may face when leading stalking support groups and strategies that may help members get the most out of the support group.

Problems with group dynamics can affect a group's ability to support and help members. For example, one stalking support group facilitator noticed that her group members had begun to compete with one another by making comparisons among the various levels of danger and trauma they had experienced. The facilitator overcame this problem by reminding the group that such competition violated the group guidelines, which required members to respect one another's experience and remain non-judgmental with one another. This facilitator found that directly addressing the conflict and facilitating an open conversation about the problem was an effective strategy to resolve the conflict in an open, safe manner.

Another facilitator found that group members occasionally intensified each other's fears about their physical safety, creating an emotionally unsafe group. To overcome this problem, the organizer refocused the group on how to combat feelings of fear and hopelessness. She also ended each group on a high note by telling an uplifting thought, joke, or story.

Below are some challenges that stalking support group facilitators may face and the techniques they can use to address the issue.

MEMBERS WHO NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND REFERRALS

After a few group sessions, facilitators may learn that there are individuals who may not be appropriate for a stalking support group. These members may have greater needs than the support group can address. The facilitators must handle this difficult situation sensitively and professionally. Have a plan in place for how to address these issues and how to work together with these individuals to help them obtain the support they need. Facilitators are encouraged to be aware of any participants who:

- Become overly emotional when sharing their story over a period of many meetings.
- Decline to share their story even after several meetings.
- Demonstrate increased anxieties or fears over time.
- Acquire new phobias that interfere with typical daily activities.
- Make consistent references over several meetings to loss of sleep or appetite, unclear thinking, or low self-esteem.
- Speak of suicide in any manner (e.g., plans, jokes, wishes).
- Increase use of alcohol, drugs, or other self-destructive habits.

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34   Toseland, *An Introduction*, 70-88.

Challenge	Facilitator Tips
Group member monopolizes conversations	Acknowledge participant's contributions; invite other members to share.
Group member share incorrect or false information about stalking	Avoid directly challenging misinformation; let group members know that this person's perspective is important but that there are other ideas, beliefs, and facts about stalking; offer to speak with that member outside of the group setting to learn more about their ideas.
Group member doesn't participate or is reluctant to share	Invite participants to share their perspectives; encourage group members by telling them how important their perspectives are to the learning and healing of the group; ask members outside of the large group if there is something they aren't comfortable sharing.
Group member interrupts facilitators or other members	Gently suggest that everyone wait to share their point until others have finished talking; update guidelines with a "no interruptions" policy; use a "talking stick" (any common object that someone holds when it is their turn to talk).
Group member acts as the "expert" on stalking	Offer validation and recognition of participant's experience and knowledge about the topic; encourage participant to ask others about their experiences.
Group member competes with other participants	Remind group members that everyone's experience with stalking can be frightening in different ways; assure everyone that all perspectives may be shared.
Group member expresses high levels of hopelessness and negativity	Acknowledge the participant's feelings; provide validation; check in frequently to see if further resources or referrals are needed.

- Have an increase of panic or anxiety attacks, or exhibit acute grief reactions that increase rather than decrease over time.
- Indicate they're experiencing hallucinations or delusions.
- Display sudden rages toward other members in the group.

Addressing the needs of participants who display these behaviors will be critical both for their well-being and for the ongoing progress and success of the group. Facilitators will benefit from having a list of available referral services for these participants and should discuss with co-facilitators how these types of cases will be handled.

Sample Curriculum

The following curriculum was written for stalking support groups that address both the emotional and educational needs of group members. The majority of the curriculum topics relate to the group's educational function. The group fosters emotional support through facilitators encouraging members to connect every topic to her or his individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The facilitator encourages members to think about and discuss how stalking affects them physically and emotionally. This approach helps facilitators develop group continuity while addressing topics in a way that is meaningful and relevant to individual members.

The sample curriculum is available for facilitators to draw from as needed; they can adapt any sections that seem useful to their communities. Some groups may add other topics, such as stalking in diverse communities, stalking and mental health, or stalking in communities with special needs. Facilitators may also find that some group sessions require changing the agenda entirely because the group wants to focus on a recent high-profile stalking case or a current event that occurred in the community. The sample curriculum is meant to be a flexible tool that facilitators can use in any way they find helpful.

SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

Review Group Guidelines and Safety Plan & Introduce Group Topic and Activity	10 Minutes
Check-Ins (Each member reports on his or her current status and shares any important life events.)	15 Minutes
Discuss Group Topic and Activity	50 Minutes
Closure and Check-Ins	15 Minutes
Total	**90 Minutes**

SAMPLE WEEKLY TOPICS

WEEK 1   *GROUP INTRODUCTIONS*

Goal: Members will understand the overall purpose of the group and discuss their individual reasons for joining the support group. Members will participate in establishing group ground rules and a group safety plan.

Discussion:
- Facilitators introduce themselves and present information about their experience, qualifications, and education.
- Members introduce themselves and are asked to share their relationship to the person stalking them, how long they have been dealing with the stalker, and any other information they wish to disclose.
- Facilitators describe the purpose of the group and hand out a list of suggested group topics for each week. Members are encouraged to suggest additional topics or request that certain topics be discussed at an earlier (or later) time.
- Facilitators describe what members can (and cannot) expect from them and the group. Additionally, facilitators express what will be expected of group members.
- The group creates a group safety plan detailing what it will do if an emergency occurs (e.g., a stalker shows up at group, a member is missing).
- The group discusses the timeline of the start and end of the group.
- Each member checks in, or reports how he or she is doing.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: The group creates ground rules covering confidentiality, respectful communication, listening, and other operating procedures by having each member take turns suggesting a rule. The group then discusses each rule and comes to a consensus on the list of ground rules.

For the next meeting: Review the group topics and decide if anything is missing or if any guidelines should be changed.

Handouts:
- Stalking Fact Sheet (available for download from *www.ncvc.org/src*)
- Myths and Facts about Stalking (available for download from *www.ncvc.org/src*)
- Stalking Support Group Guidelines (page 31)

WEEK 2   OVERVIEW OF STALKING: PREVALENCE AND IMPACT

Goal: Members will review the best available information about stalking and the prevalence of stalking. Participants will have an opportunity to see how society portrays stalking and discuss how these portrayals affect them.

Check-in from Week 1: Members read over the group topics discussed during the previous session and decide if any items should be added or changed. Members may also discuss any changes they would like to make to the group ground rules and safety plan.

Discussion:
- The group reviews ground rules and makes changes if necessary.
- The group discusses the group topics and makes changes if necessary.
- The group discusses the definition of stalking and the range of behaviors that stalkers use.
- The group discusses the similarities and differences between intimate partner and stranger stalking. Facilitators can hand out the domestic violence "Power and Control Wheel," a graphic representation of the patterns of intimidation and abuse that play a role in domestic violence. (To view the wheel, visit *www.domesticviolence.org/violence-wheel.*) Facilitators ask members how stalking fits into the patterns depicted on the wheel.
- Facilitators may also give members the "Stalking Power and Control Wheel" (available at *www.ncvc.org/src*).
- Facilitators share information on the prevalence of stalking in the community and in the United States.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Members may discuss their feelings about the stalking information shared during this session. Members may also watch a movie clip or listen to a song that portrays stalking in a comedic or romantic way. Facilitators can ask members to share their personal experiences with the stalking behaviors discussed. Members may also discuss how the social minimization of stalking has affected their efforts to get assistance from their family, friends, and community.

For the next meeting: Members are given copies of Emily Spence-Diehl's *Stalking: A Handbook for Victims* (available for download at *www.ncvc.org/src*) and are asked to read it for the next session.

WEEK 3   EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF STALKING

Goal: Members will discuss the multiple ways in which stalking affects a person's emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Members will learn coping mechanisms as well as relaxation techniques. Members will also identify several options for self-care.

Check-in from Week 2: Members were asked to read Emily Spence-Diehl's *Stalking: A Handbook for Victims*. Facilitators solicit feedback and comments from members regarding the reading.

Discussion:
- The group discusses the handbook.
- Members describe what they have done to emotionally cope with the trauma of being stalked.
- Members explore the results of these coping techniques.
- Members discuss how they can maximize their emotional and physical health and maintain healthy relationships.
- Members describe relaxation techniques.
- Members explore how they will continue to develop their coping skills after the group ends.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Facilitator leads the group in several relaxation and breathing exercises, followed by a discussion. Members can also brainstorm additional activities for relaxation that they can do on their own.

For the next meeting: Practice one type of relaxation technique two times before the group meets again. Read the handout on safety planning (available for download from *www.ncvc.org/src*). Optional reading for next week could also include *Stop the Stalker—A Guide for Targets* by Betsy Ramsey.[35]

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35   Betsy Ramsey, *Stop the Stalker: A Guide for Targets*, (Morrow, GA: Securus House, 2000).

WEEK 4   SAFETY PLANNING STRATEGIES

Goal: Members will learn about safety planning tools available to them. Members will begin to develop a safety plan for their individual stalking situations by using a threat assessment tool. Members will also discuss how to emotionally cope with the stalking.

Check-in from Week 3: Members share which relaxation technique they tried and if it helped them relax. Members were asked to read the handout on safety planning and bring it to this meeting for discussion. Optional reading was *Stop the Stalker—A Guide for Targets* by Betsy Ramsey. Members can discuss any thoughts about the readings.

Discussion:
- Facilitators explain the importance of safety planning and threat assessment. Members are given handouts on these topics.
- Members explore where and when they are safe and why.
- Members explore where and when they are not safe and how they can make these environments safer or avoid them.
- Members discuss where and when their children are and are not safe and how they can make these places safer or avoid them.
- Members talk about the advantages and disadvantages of relocating. If members are interested in exploring this option, facilitators are encouraged to connect members with additional resources and materials. (The group may also wish to dedicate more time to discussing this option in depth.)
- Members discuss the importance of trusting their intuition when safety planning and how to adjust their safety plans based on their personal changing circumstances or any changing circumstances of the stalker.
- Members discuss when their anxiety and fear responses are most likely to occur and how they respond. Members discuss healthy options for responding.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Members may prepare initial personal safety plans and share them with others in the group. Members can provide feedback and suggestions for each other.

For the next meeting: Review the handout on stalking logs.

Handout:
- Stalking log (available for download at *www.ncvc.org/src*)

WEEK 5   STALKING LOGS AND PROTECTIVE ORDERS

Goal: Members will learn about stalking logs, how to use them, and with whom to share their logs. Members will also learn more about protective orders and how to obtain one in their community.

Check-in from Week 4: Members were asked to review the stalking log handout.

Discussion:
- Members discuss the stalking log materials and share ideas for logs they might have used or seen.
- The group discusses the essential information they should include in their log and where and when is the best time to fill out a log.
- Members discuss whom they should share the log with.
- Facilitators and members explore how the information in the log might jeopardize their safety if it were to be admitted as evidence in court and how to protect themselves by planning how they present the information.
- Members describe any experiences they've had obtaining protective orders. Members also discuss the advantages and disadvantages in obtaining a protective order against their stalker.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Invite a guest speaker to discuss the protective order process and how local law enforcement enforces protective orders. Possible speakers include victim advocates, advocates from a local prosecutor's office, or other professionals who work with victims.

For the next meeting: Research local and Internet resources available for victims of stalking.

WEEK 6   *LOCAL STALKING SERVICES AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM*

Goal: Members will obtain information on stalking services available in their community and learn how to access them. Members will process feelings about their experiences—both positive and negative—in receiving assistance from various community services and the local criminal justice system.

Check-in from Week 5: Members can review any materials on stalking services in the community that they have brought to the group meeting.

Discussion:
- Members and facilitators share information on community stalking services and how to access those services.
- Members and facilitators share information on the criminal justice system and ways to obtain assistance from local law enforcement and the court system.
- Members review their state stalking statute, and facilitators address questions about the law. (If facilitators are unclear about a section of the law, they should consult a local prosecutor or visit *www.ncvc.org/src*.)
- Members discuss their experiences with community stalking services and the criminal justice system.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Invite a guest speaker to provide information and answer questions on stalking services. Speakers can be police officers, prosecutors, civil attorneys, advocates, therapists, or anyone in the community who provides stalking services. After the speaker departs, members may want to consider the following questions: Would members feel safe asking for help from this organization? What other services in the community do stalking victims need? Who else would members like to invite to the group to share information?

For the next meeting: Read *Boy Gets Girl: A Play* by Rebecca Gilman.[36] When reading, members are encouraged to consider how the stalking affects the main character's life and the different responses she received from the people around her.

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36   Rebecca Gilman, *Boy Gets Girl: A Play* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000).

WEEK 7   *RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS AND TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF*

Goal: Members will learn how the stalking has changed their relationships with family members, friends, co-workers, and intimate partners. They will also explore how others can help them stay safe and ways to approach others for help.

Check-in from Week 6: Members were asked to read *Boy Gets Girl* by Rebecca Gilman and to consider how the stalking affects Theresa's life.

Discussion:
- Members explore who they can tell about the stalking and how these individuals can help them stay safe.
- Members discuss how people have responded to them when they share information about being stalked. They explore how these responses affect them.
- Members look at how the stalking has affected their ability to maintain close relationships, including with friends, family members, and intimate partners.
- Members discuss who they can trust and how the stalking affects their ability to trust.
- Members discuss *Boy Gets Girl* by Rebecca Gilman. Possible discussion questions include: How did Theresa's co-workers initially respond to Tony's actions towardher? Did their response help Theresa? How did Theresa's co-workers support her after they realized that Tony was stalking her? Did the stalking change the way Theresa interacted with others? How?
- Members will discuss the final meeting and plans for any celebration.
- Closing ritual.

For the next meeting: Write a letter to someone who is not being supportive. Describe how this lack of support affects you, and request the support that you would like. Members do not need to send the letter.

WEEK 8   *GROUP CLOSURE AND ASSESSMENT*

Goal: Members will share feelings about the stalking support group ending or, if appropriate, the group taking a break. Members will reflect what they learned and how they changed since the beginning of the group. Members will receive information on services in the community they may need while not attending group.

Check-in from Week 7: Members were asked to write a letter to someone who is not being supportive, describing how the lack of support affects them and requesting the support that they would like. Members did not need to send the letter.

Discussion:
- Members share feelings on the group ending or taking a break.
- Members describe individual successes as well as the group's successes.
- Members discuss what needs the group did not meet and how to improve the group the next time.
- Facilitators provide information on where individuals can go or call if they need services or information.
- Members discuss whether they will stay in touch with one another after the group has ended or during the break.
- The group discusses options on how members can continue to develop their coping skills, including attending another group, attending individual therapy, becoming politically active, helping stalking victims, or writing or painting.
- Closing ritual.

Activity: Group stands in a circle with a ball of string. One member holds on to the end of the string and throws the ball to another member. While throwing the ball, the first members says one thing that she or he has learned from the second member. The second member then repeats this with a third member, and so on, until all members have had a turn. The end result is a web that connects all members.

Older victims experience unique barriers that prevent them from seeking help and further complicate the process of addressing the abuse once it has been reported. Understanding older victims, abuser tactics, and existing systemic barriers is critical when developing effective responses to abuse in later life cases.

Understanding Older Victims

- **Values:** Older victims may be reluctant to report abuse because of their love for the perpetrator or the belief that the perpetrator will change his or her behavior, especially with help. This sentiment may be influenced by generational, cultural, and/or spiritual values that stress the importance of commitment to family, particularly to spouses or partners (Brandl et al., 2007). These values can also contribute to a sense of guilt, self-blame, or embarrassment on behalf of older victims, which may further discourage them from disclosing the abuse.

- **Protectiveness:** Older victims may feel a sense of protectiveness for an abuser, especially an adult child. The older victim may worry about a spouse or adult child going to prison or becoming homeless (Beaulaurier et al., 2012).

- **Fear:** Older victims may fear being killed or seriously injured if they try to leave. They may also fear being alone or losing independence (e.g., being placed in a residential care facility, such as a nursing home, or having decisions made for them by family members) if they reach out for help.

- **Hopelessness:** When abuse has occurred throughout the duration of a relationship, the patterns of abuse and victimization have likely become well established, making change seem virtually unimaginable for the victim (Beaulaurier et al., 2012). Furthermore, victims may be reluctant to reach out if prior experience wasn't helpful (Beaulaurier et al., 2007).

- **Economic Concerns:** Some older adults are unable to work due to age or disability while others may lack the job skills necessary for finding employment. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or Social Security is available to some, yet many do not qualify for financial assistance. These victims of abuse in later life may lack the financial means to live independently, separate from their abuser. A shortage of affordable or transitional housing for older adults compounds this problem. Further, some older adults may need medical care or long-term support services and may not have the means necessary to cover these expenses.

- **Health Issues:** Some older victims may need more time to heal physically and emotionally. Older adults may be more likely to have vision, hearing, or mobility limitations that can impact safety planning or limit options to live independently. Victims who have dementia may be at increased risk for future abuse (Wiglesworth et al., 2010).

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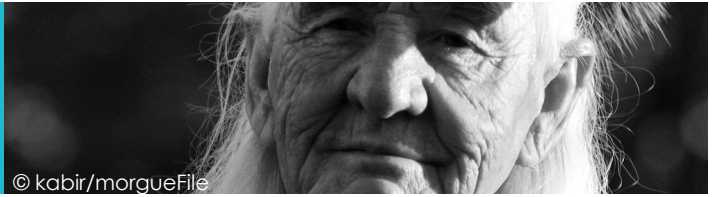
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Abuser Tactics

While it is common in abuse in later life cases to find many of the same abuser tactics used by perpetrators to prevent younger victims from seeking help or reporting abuse (e.g., intimidation, stalking), it is important to identify the unique abuser tactics used against older victims.

- **Target Vulnerabilities:** When perpetrators target victim vulnerabilities, they deny access to supports vital for daily living. Examples include: breaking or hiding glasses, dentures, or hearing aids, moving a walker or wheelchair out of reach, or refusing to translate material written in English to the victim's native language.

- **Isolation:** Perpetrators may isolate victims from family members, friends, or others in the community so that they have less knowledge of what is occurring in the relationship and to minimize the victims' opportunities to disclose the abuse. Isolation may be achieved by preventing victims from using the phone or driving a vehicle, as well as by refusing to allow them to go to church or participate in volunteer or community activities. Forced isolation can often be more easily accomplished with older adults because they may already have a smaller social circle, due to a lack of mobility or transportation options and because many of their friends and/or family members may have already passed away.

- **Manipulation:** Perpetrators may use psychological or emotional abuse to manipulate older victims into thinking that they have less mental capacity than they actually do. This may be accomplished by name-calling or playing mental tricks on the victim (e.g., moving or hiding items so that the victim begins to doubt his or her own memory and judgment). Playing to a common fear among older adults of losing their home or independence, perpetrators may also scare victims into thinking they will be unable to make it on their own and that their only alternative to the current, abusive situation is a nursing facility.

- **Co-Occuring Issues:** Caregiver stress, anger management, and substance abuse issues may also be present in cases of abuse in later life. Generally, addressing these issues may alleviate some problems. Although often given as an excuse, caregiver stress is not the primary cause of elder abuse. Thus, often until the abuser is held accountable through criminal justice sanctions or abuse-focused counseling and the entitlement thinking is confronted and changed, the older victim may not necessarily be safer or have an improved quality of life. For more information on the implications of caregiver stress NOT being a primary cause of elder abuse, please see the article: "Policy Implications of Recognizing that Caregiver Stress is Not the Primary Cause of Elder Abuse," *Generations,* 36(3), 32-39.

Systemic Barriers

Service organizations and agencies can unknowingly create additional barriers for older victims reporting abuse or continuing with services.

- **Ageism:** In this youth-orientated society, ageism permeates our views about older adults, often resulting in inadequate service delivery to older victims. Service providers may wrongly assume older victims are incompetent or helpless and treat them accordingly. For example, a service provider may speak to an older victim in a loud, baby voice when the

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victim's hearing is just fine or he or she may assume the role of "protector," rather than treating the victim as a person capable of self-determination. This treatment can be humiliating and insulting to older victims and may cause them to withdraw from services.

- **Inaccessibility and Lack of Tailored Services:** Older victims often have less information about services and resources than younger people and also have less access to them (Wilke & Vinton, 2005). Some victims may feel shut out from services because they require special accommodations they assume are not available such as: a means of transportation, interpretation services, assistance with reading or writing, Deaf services, or assistive devices (e.g., communication boards). Older victims may also feel that the services do not meet their needs (e.g., support groups that focus discussions on finding a job or child custody may not seem relevant for older victims).

- **Silos:** In seeking services, the victim may come into contact with a number of community organizations or agencies. A lack of system awareness and multidisciplinary collaboration can lead to an abuse in later life case falling between the cracks, which can ultimately result in a devastating outcome for the victim.

Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

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STALKING OF ELDER ADULTS: AN OVERVIEW

Stalking Resource Center and
National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)

Presenter Information

Elaina Roberts, J.D.
Program Attorney
Stalking Resource Center/NCVC
eroberts@ncvc.org
(202) 467-8745

Shelly Fox, J.D.
Justice System Coordinator
NCALL
sfox@ncall.us
(608) 237-3457

Stalking
resource center

ncall

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Learning Objectives

☐ As a result of attending this session, participants will be able to:

1) Understand stalking behavior: what stalking behavior is, why it matters, and the role of technology in aiding/abetting stalking behaviors.

2) Identify stalking behaviors within the context of elder/vulnerable adult abuse, particularly with reference to domestic/sexual violence.

3) Apply their understanding of stalking in elder abuse cases. Using a hypothetical fact pattern, participants will work to identify specific facts and behaviors of concern.

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Overview

- Elder Abuse: An Overview
- Define stalking
  - Prevalence
  - Dynamics
- Intersection of elder abuse and stalking
- Implications
- Case scenario
- Resources

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Right Issue, Right Time: Intersection of Elder Abuse and Stalking

SRC and NCALL, 2015

The Elder Justice Roadmap

The Elder Justice Roadmap
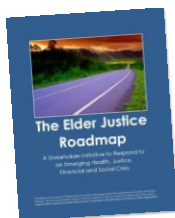
- Released in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Justice
- A strategic planning resource created by the field, for the field.

SRC and NCALL, 2015

The Elder Justice Roadmap Definition of Elder Abuse

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Elder abuse is:

- □ physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, as well as neglect, abandonment, and financial exploitation of an older person by another person or entity,
- □ that occurs in any setting (e.g., home, community, or facility),
- □ either in a relationship where there is an expectation of trust and/or when an older person is targeted based on age or disability.
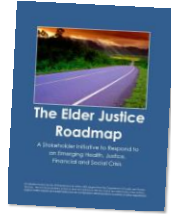
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The Elder Justice Roadmap: Policy Priorities

8
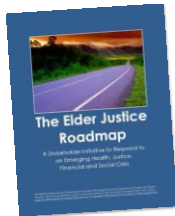
Priority 107: "Ongoing multi-disciplinary training (bringing together professionals from various disciplines) about effective approaches, collaboration, and other matters, at the local, state and national levels."

SRC and NCALL, 2015

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1 in **10** community-residing older adults reported experiencing elder abuse in the past year.

Acierno, R., Hernandez, M. A., Amstadter, A. B., Resnick, H. S., Steve, K., Muzzy, W., & Kilpatrick, D. J. (2010). The National Elder Mistreatment Study. *American Journal of Public Health.*

9   SRC and NCALL, 2015

Elder Abuse: Under the Radar

For every one case of elder abuse that comes to the attention of a responsible entity…

1

another twenty three cases never come to light.

23

Source: Lachs et al., Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc. (2011) *Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study.* Slide courtesy of Life Long Justice.

10   SRC and NCALL, 2015

U.S. POPULATION AGE 65 AND OLDER IS ON THE RISE (1990-2050)

U.S. Census Bureau population estimates. Slide courtesy of Life Long Justice.
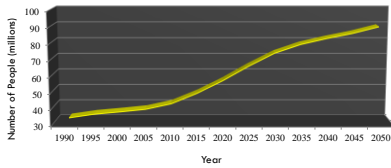
11   SRC and NCALL, 2015

10,000 Americans turn **65** every day.

Acierno et al. (2010). The National Elder Mistreatment Study. *American Journal of Public Health.*

12   SRC and NCALL, 2015

Three international studies found overall rates of abuse of people with dementia by their caregivers ranged from **34 – 62%.**

NCEA (212) Research Brief: How at Risk are People with Dementia? NCEA website.

13 SRC and NCALL, 2015

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14 Discussion

☐ When you think of elder abuse what do you typically think of?

☐ How many of you have worked with an older adult victim who has experienced stalking?

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Defining Stalking

15

Behavioral definition

Statutory

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Criminal Charging

16

- Federal
- State
- U.S. Territories
- District of Columbia
- Tribal Codes
- UCMJ
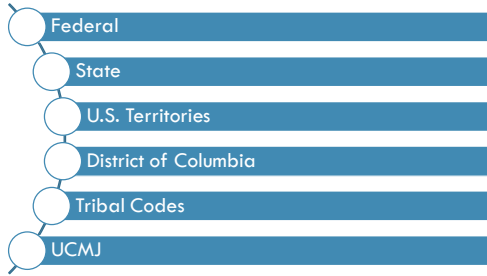
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Behavioral Definition of Stalking

17

A **pattern of behavior** directed at a specific person that would cause a **reasonable person** to feel **fear**.

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Stalking

18

A pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

Context is critical!

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Understanding Stalking – Context

19

- Something may be frightening for the victim but not to you
- Stalking behaviors often have specific meaning that is only understood between offender & victim
- Stalking criminalizes otherwise non-criminal behavior

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Age of Stalking Victims

20

Age	Percent
65 or older	4%
50-64	10%
35-49	17%
25-34	20%
20-24	28%
18-19	30%
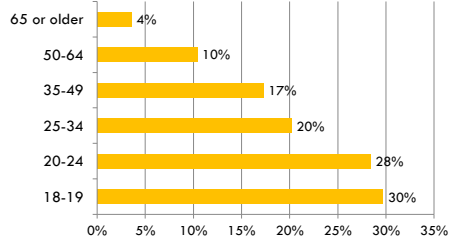
Stalking Victimization in the United States, BJS (2009)

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Older Stalker & Victim Relationship

21

23.9% Stranger
52.2% Acquaintance
23.9% Ex IP
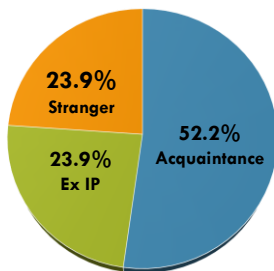
Stalking and Age, Sheridan et al. (2015)

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Stalker Tactics

22

MOST COMMON

- Sent unwanted emails, instant messages, & messages through social media
- Left strange or threatening items
- Left victim unwanted cards, letters, flowers, or presents
- Sneaked into victim's car/ home; did things to scare
- Watched, followed, or spied on victim
- Left unwanted text or voice messages
- Made unwanted telephone calls & hang-ups
- Approached victim/showed up places where victim was.

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The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2011

Forms of Technology Used to Stalk

23

- Phones – calls, messages, texts, pics, video
- Cameras
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS)
- Computers
- Social networking sites
- Email & IM
- Spyware
- Assistive technologies

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Older Adult Tech Use

24

77% of older adults have a cell phone

59% of older adults go online

Of these, 29% use SNS

Older Adults and Technology Use, Pew Research Center, (2014)

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25 Stalking and Other Crimes

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Intersection with Other Crimes

26

- ☐ Domestic violence
- ☐ Sexual assault
- ☐ Sexual abuse
- ☐ Stalking
- ☐ OP violations
- ☐ Assault
- ☐ Harassment
- ☐ Home invasion
- ☐ Attempted murder

- ☐ Kidnapping
- ☐ Vandalism
- ☐ Wiretapping or utility theft
- ☐ Burglary
- ☐ Theft
- ☐ Identity theft
- ☐ Child Abuse
- ☐ Hate Crimes

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Stalking and Other Crimes

27

- ☐ Among stalking cases…
  - ☐ 24% involve property damage
  - ☐ 21% involve a direct attack on the victim
  - ☐ 15% involve an attack on another person or pet

- ☐ Identity theft

Charged items to credit card — 30%
Took money from accounts — 52%
Opened/closed accounts — 54%

0% 20% 40% 60%

Stalking Victimization in the United States, BJS (2009)

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Power and Control Wheel

28
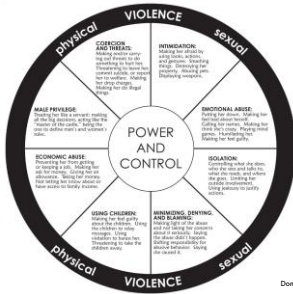
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN

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ALL and Domestic Violence: Similarities

29

□ Use of threats

□ Isolation

□ Use of privilege

□ Use of family member

□ Power and control in the center of the wheel

□ Physical and sexual abuse on the outer rim

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ALL and Domestic Violence: Differences

30

□ ALL targets vulnerabilities and neglect opportunities unique to later life

□ Frequently committed by intimate partners, adult children, siblings and caretakers

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Stalking and Domestic Violence

31

81% of stalking victims who were stalked by an intimate partner reported that they had also been physically assaulted by that partner.

National Violence Against Women Survey (1998)

SRC and NCALL, 2015

ALL and Sexual Violence: Similarities

32

- Emotional impact of abuse
- Need for advocacy support
- Use of threats
- Isolation
- Use of privilege
- Denying, blaming and minimizing
- Power and control in the center of the wheel
- Physical and sexual abuse on the outer rim

SRC and NCALL, 2015

ALL and Sexual Violence: Differences

33

- Elder victims of sexual violence face a heightened risk of serious physical injury
- Forms of sexual violence can look different for older adults
- Healthcare providers and others frequently do not recognize physical symptoms of sexual abuse in older victims

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Abuse in Later Life Power and Control Wheel

Wheel adapted by NCALL with permission from Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN in 2006.

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Intimate Partner Stalkers: Increased Risk for Victims

- More likely to physically approach victim
- More insulting, interfering and threatening
- More likely to use weapons
- Behaviors more likely to escalate quickly
- More likely to re-offend

The RECON Typology of Stalking, Mohandie et al (2006)

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Discussion

36

- ☐ Thinking about what we just discussed, how many of you now think you have worked with an older victim of stalking?
- ☐ What are some of the challenges older stalking victims may face?

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37 Offender Accountability

Do Most Stalking Victims Report to Law Enforcement?

38

Reporting to Law Enforcement

39

37% of male stalking victims

41% of female stalking victims

Stalking Victimization in the United States, BJS (2009)

8/28/2015

Stalking is Rarely Charged

40

Between **5 and 16%** of stalking cases are actually charged as stalking when police already have all the information they need to charge.

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Reaction to Older Stalking Victims

41

77% of older victims were told they are overreacting

66.7% of older victims were not taken seriously by the police

Stalking and Age, Sheridan et al. (2015)

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42

☐ Are there also reasons why an older adult victim may not disclose to <u>anyone</u> the abuse and/or stalking?

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14

Reasons For Non-Disclosure

43

- Victim is minimizing or is uncertain of the behaviors

- Victim did report to someone but had a negative response

- Victim is isolated

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Reasons For Non-Disclosure

44

- Fear of loss of independence

- The offender is a family member, intimate partner, or care-taker

- Lack of understanding technology

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45 **Victims of Stalking**

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Victim Help Seeking

Enlisted help of friends/family — 43%
Talked to boss/employer — 22%
Talked to an attorney — 20%
Obtained a restraining, protection, or stay-away order — 16%
Talked to a mental health professional — 12%
Contacted building/office security — 9%
Talked to clergy/faith leader — 9%
Talked to a doctor or nurse — 9%
Contacted victim services, a shelter, or a help line — 7%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

- Stalking Victimization in the United States, BJS (2009)

Older Stalking Victims

47

Least likely to be aided by family and friends

Less likely to access sources of support

Stalking and Age, Sheridan et al. (2015)

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48

□ What effect(s) have you seen abuse and/or stalking have on older adults?

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Impact of Stalking

49

- Decreased ability to perform at work or school, or accomplish daily tasks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Sexual dysfunction
- Fatigue
- Fluctuations in weight
- Self-medication with alcohol/drugs
- Feeling on guard most of the time - hypervigilance

- Minimization; Self-blame
- Guilt, shame or embarrassment
- Frustration, Irritability, Anger
- Shock and confusion
- Fear and anxiety
- Depression
- Emotional numbness
- Flashbacks
- Isolation/disconnection from other people
- Difficulties with concentration or attention
- Feeling suicidal

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Impact on Stalking Victims

50

Afraid of:

- 46% not knowing what would happen next
- 30% bodily harm
- 29% behavior would never stop
- 13% harm or kidnap a child
- 10% loss of freedom
- 9% death
- 4% losing one's mind

Stalking Victimization in the United States, BJS (2009)

SRC and NCALL, 2015

Elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation victims are three times more likely to die prematurely than non-abused older adults.

Lachs, et al. (1998). The Mortality of Elder Mistreatment. *Journal of the American Medical Association.*

51   SRC and NCALL, 2015

17

Implications

52

- □ Are we recognizing stalking in older adults?
- □ *Or, are we calling it elder abuse?*
- □ Are there disadvantages of labeling it as elder abuse?

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Documentation Log

53

STALKING INCIDENT LOG

Date	Time	Description of Incident	Location of Incident	Witness Name(s) (Attach Address and Phone #)	Police Called (Report #)	Officer Name (Badge #)

Free to download at www.victimsofcrime.org/src

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54   Case Scenario

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Case Scenario

55

☐ Please take a few minutes to read the 'Case Scenario' fact pattern that has been placed on your table. Review the facts, then look up when you are finished.

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Case Scenario: Challenges

56

☐ What challenges are presented to Sylvia under this scenario? If she asked you if you thought she was safe, what would your response be?

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Case Scenario (Read Behind)

57

Challenges
☐ Older offenders may not be perceived as dangerous
☐ Extensive network of family, friends, loved ones in common
☐ Proof/Documentation
☐ Lack of social media savvy – is 'Tim' an actual former classmate? Could this be a fake account that Tom is using to track Sylvia's activities?
☐ Traditional options may or may not work
  ☐ Shelter
  ☐ Relocation

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Case Scenario: Options

58

☐ What else could you do in this scenario?

☐ What other options or resources would you provide to Sylvia?

☐ Would you encourage Sylvia to make a police report regarding her concerns? Why or why not? If so, what details would you want her to mention? Who, if anyone, should follow up? And, if not, what next steps (if any) would you recommend to her?

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59 Resources

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How to Start and Facilitate a
SUPPORT GROUP *for*
VICTIMS *of* **STALKING**

Available for download at:
www.ncvc.org/src

Stalking resource center
A program of
THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime
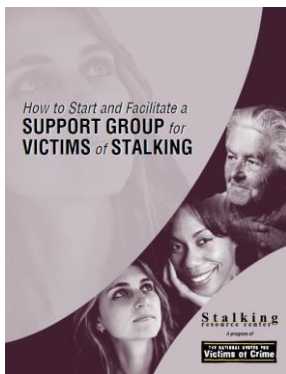
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Stalking
resource center

Training	□ In person training
	□ Webinars
Technical Assistance	□ Individual & organizational assistance
	□ Fact sheets, brochures, manuals, guides
Resources	□ Policy/protocol development & consultation
	□ Videos
	□ Online resources
	□ Stalking Awareness Month materials

Victims of Crime

www.victimsofcrime.org/src

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Technical Assistance and Consultation

The National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) provides technical assistance on elder abuse and abuse in later life. Staff respond to questions by phone, email, or in person and are also available to review materials and participate on state and national advisory committees. NCALL provides information on programming, outreach, collaboration, and policy development.

ncall

www.ncall.us

Training

NCALL provides training to many audiences, including domestic violence and sexual assault programs, aging bureaus, adult protective services, health care providers, criminal and civil justice system agencies and representatives, and other legal personnel.

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OVW Abuse in Later Life Program

63

□ 8 – 9 communities a year

□ $400,000 for 3 years

□ Projects

  □ Provide training and cross training

  □ Create or enhance a CCR team

  □ Develop victim services

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OVW Abuse in Later Life Program Grantees

FY 2006 Awards
FY 2007 Awards
FY 2008 Awards
FY 2009 Awards
FY 2010 Awards
FY 2011 Awards
FY 2012 Awards
FY 2013 Awards
FY 2014 Awards

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65   SRC and NCALL, 2015

stalking
fact sheet

Stalking resource center

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR Victims of Crime

WHAT IS STALKING?

While legal definitions of stalking vary from one jurisdiction to another, a good working definition of stalking is *a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear*.

STALKING VICTIMIZATION

- 7.5 million people are stalked in one year in the United States.
- 15% of women and 6% of men have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetime in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed.
- The majority of stalking victims are stalked by someone they know: 61% of female victims and 44% of male victims of stalking are stalked by a current or former intimate partner, 25% of female victims and 32% of male victims are stalked by an acquaintance.
- About half of all victims of stalking indicated that they were stalked before the age of 25. About 14% of female victims and 16% of male victims experienced stalking between the ages of 11 and 17.
- Approaching the victim or showing up in places when the victim didn't want them to be there; making unwanted telephone calls; leaving the victim unwanted messages (text or voice); and watching or following the victim from a distance, or spying on the victim with a listening device, camera, or global positioning system were the most commonly reported stalker tactics by both female and male victims of stalking.

[Matthew J. Breiding et al., "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization - National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011", *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Morality Weekly Report*, Vol. 63, No. 8 (2014)]

- 46% of stalking victims experience at least one unwanted contact per week.
- 11% of stalking victims have been stalked for 5 years or more.

[Katrina Baum et al., "Stalking Victimization in the United States," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009).]

STALKING AND INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

- 76% of intimate partner femicide victims have been stalked by their intimate partner.
- 67% had been physically abused by their intimate partner.
- 89% of femicide victims who had been physically assaulted had also been stalked in the 12 months before their murder.
- 79% of abused femicide victims reported being stalked during the same period that they were abused.
- 54% of femicide victims reported stalking to police before they were killed by their stalkers.

[Judith McFarlane et al., "Stalking and Intimate Partner Femicide," *Homicide Studies* 3, no. 4 (1999).]

RECON STUDY OF STALKERS

- 2/3 of stalkers pursue their victims at least once per week, many daily, using more than one method.
- 78% of stalkers use more than one means of approach.
- Weapons are used to harm or threaten victims in 1 out of 5 cases.
- Almost 1/3 of stalkers have stalked before.
- Intimate partner stalkers frequently approach their targets, and their behaviors escalate quickly.

[Kris Mohandie et al.,"The RECON Typology of Stalking: Reliability and Validity Based upon a Large Sample of North American Stalkers," *Journal of Forensic Sciences,* 51, no. 1 (2006).]

IMPACT OF STALKING ON VICTIMS

- 46% of stalking victims fear not knowing what will happen next.
- 29% of stalking victims fear the stalking will never stop.
- 1 in 8 employed stalking victims lose time from work as a result of their victimization and more than half lose 5 days of work or more.
- 1 in 7 stalking victims move as a result of their victimization.
  [Baum et al.]

- The prevalence of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than the general population, especially if the stalking involves being followed or having one's property destroyed.
  [Eric Blauuw et al., "The Toll of Stalking," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 17, no. 1 (2002):50-63.]

STALKING LAWS

- Stalking is a crime under the laws of 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories, and the Federal government.
- Less than 1/3 of states classify stalking as a felony upon first offense.
- More than 1/2 of states classify stalking as a felony upon second or subsequent offense or when the crime involves aggravating factors.
- Aggravating factors may include: possession of a deadly weapon, violation of a court order or condition of probation/parole, victim under 16 years, or same victim as prior occasions.

For a compilation of state, tribal, and federal laws visit www.victimsofcrime.org/src.

Last updated January 2015

THE STALKING RESOURCE CENTER

The mission of the Stalking Resource Center is to enhance the ability of professionals, organizations, and systems to effectively respond to stalking. The Stalking Resource Center envisions a future in which the criminal justice system and its many allied community partners will effectively collaborate and respond to stalking, improve victim safety and well-being, and hold offenders accountable. Visit us online at *www.victimsofcrime.org/src*. Contact us at 202-467-8700 or *src@ncvc.org*.

Working with Victims of Abuse in Later Life

A Victim-Centered Approach

Victim-centered advocacy restores control to victims. No matter the age of the victim, service providers should maintain a victim-centered approach when planning services. The advocates' role is to explore options with older victims, to help them identify and remove obstacles, and to honor and support their decisions, taking into account age-related generational and cultural values.

When there are concerns about an older adult's cognitive capacity, a victim-centered approach includes working with health care providers to assess the individual's situation. In some cases, what appears to be limited or diminished cognitive capacity can be a temporary condition that is the result of trauma, inappropriate medications, infection, or lack of sleep, food, or fluids.

For more information on victim-centered advocacy, please see the book, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*.

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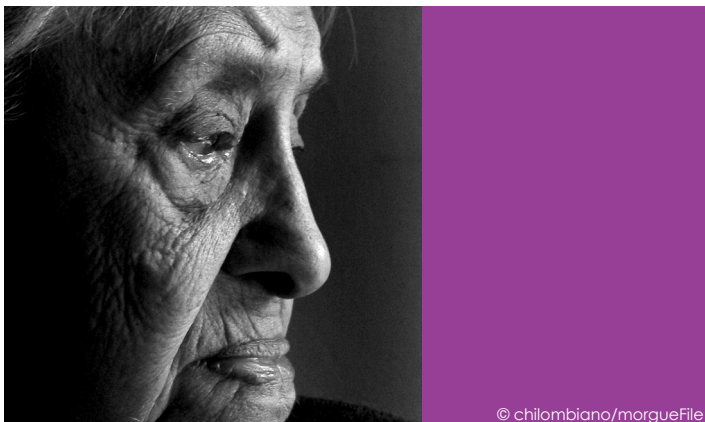
Guiding Principles for Working with Older Individuals

Focus on victim safety.

- Recognize that victims are resilient and have often engaged in strategies to keep themselves safe. Advocates should build on the strategies older victims are already using.

- Create a safety plan with older victims, taking into consideration any physical and cognitive limitations. For safety planning tips, please visit:
  www.ncall.us/gethelp/safetyplanning.

Be aware of and avoid assumptions about what is best for victims.

- Avoid succumbing to ageism. Don't assume all older adults are frail, mentally incompetent, and/or asexual. Approach older victims with the same respect, sensitivity, and open-mindedness afforded to all victims.

- Identify and build upon older victims' strengths and skills.

- Respect cultural and religious traditions and recognize the importance of these values and rituals in shaping older victims' lives and decisions.

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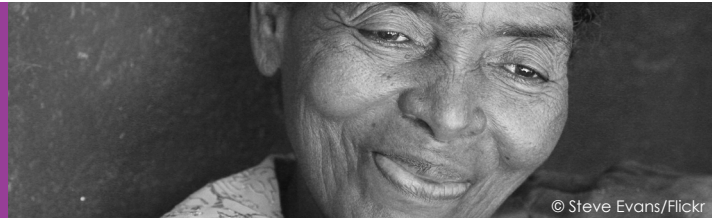
Respect victim confidentiality and privacy.

Confidentiality statutes and guidelines govern advocates' responses. These legal requirements include federal and state laws mandating advocates to have a fully informed, signed, and time-limited release of information before any discussion may occur regarding the victim's situation. For more information on confidentiality, please visit: **www.ncall.us/content/confidentiality**.

Know your state's mandatory reporting law for elder abuse.

Most states have mandatory reporting laws for elder abuse. Reports are commonly made to adult protective services or law enforcement. To learn more about mandatory reporting considerations, please go to: **www.ncall.us/content/mr**.

Acknowledge and address victims' challenges and fears.

- Many older victims want to maintain a relationship with their abuser. The abuser may be an intimate partner, adult child, other family member, or a caregiver. The victim may want help ending the abuse while still finding a way to have a connection with the abuser. Advocates should consider these views when safety planning.

- Some older victims have vision, hearing, or mobility challenges and may need help addressing medical or disability issues as they evaluate their options. Consider working with health care providers, local Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).

- Some older victims may have cognitive limitations such as dementia, developmental disabilities, or a traumatic brain injury that make it difficult or impossible for them to determine what they want to do and to follow-through with their plans. For more information, please see: "Screening for Abuse and Neglect of People with Dementia." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 58, 493-500.

- Older lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) individuals may be concerned about how others will react to their choice of a life partner or their gender identity if they talk to someone about the abuse. For more information about providing support for LGBT victims, please consult: **www.centeronelderabuse.org/docs/ResearchBrief_LGBT_Elders_508web.pdf** and visit: **www.sageusa.org/resources/publications.cfm**.

- Older immigrants may fear deportation and need information about specific legal remedies such as U Visas. For more information, please visit the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project at: **www.wcl.american.edu/niwap/**.

> **The most important thing was they never gave up on me, they never judged me for what I said. They were just really great...it helped me just to be there with them. It seems like whenever I needed someone the most there was a little knock on my door.**
>
> – An older survivor on her experience with a support group and shelter for older women

Provide a safe, accessible environment for older victims.

- Consider the need for transportation assistance, access to mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, or canes, and other medical or assistive devices.

- Be aware of the physical needs of older victims. Ensure they have access to their medication and food and are able to rest when needed. Ask if they need glasses to see printed materials or if they need material printed in larger font. Ask if they need to meet in a quiet space to hear and to have a conversation.

- Shelters and transitional housing programs should be prepared to house service animals. For information about service animals, go to: **www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/up-loads/2011/10/Service-Animals-Paper-2011.pdf** and visit: **www.animalsandfamilies.org**.

> **" All of a sudden I find this group… that's how I found a big difference, a huge difference. I felt alone, I'm not alone anymore. "**
> – An older survivor on her experience with a support group for older women

- Create or obtain a list of certified/qualified interpreters (foreign language and American Sign Language) to contact **in advance** of meeting with a victim. Persons for whom spoken English is their second language may require interpreters to understand their options. **Never** ask family members or individuals who are bilingual but not trained interpreters to translate.

- Use resources that are accessible to older victims. Printed materials and web pages should have large, readable fonts and feature pictures of older adults. When possible, maximize the contrast of web pages, including graphics, fonts, and backgrounds. For more information, please visit: **www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/**.

Work collaboratively.

- With the older victims' permission, refer to appropriate agencies for support and assistance.

- Consult with professionals in a variety of fields on complicated cases to expand available options and ensure that victims don't fall through the cracks.

Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

References

Davies, J., Lyon, E. & Monti-Catania, D. 1998. *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wiglesworth A, Mosqueda, L., Munard R., Liao, S., Gibbs, L. & Fitzgerald, W. 2010. "Screening for Abuse and Neglect of People with Dementia." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 58:493-500.

Stalking
resource center

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

The Stalking Resource Center, of the National Center for Victims of Crime, offers many products to professionals working with stalking victims and offenders. This sheet contains some of our frequently requested products. Please visit our website, **www.VictimsofCrime.org/src**, to download available resources and view more publications and materials.

Outreach Tools

Are You Being Stalked? Brochure *
This brochure provides stalking victims with information about stalking and steps they can take to feel safer. It also provides space on the back for contact information for local organizations. *Available in English and Spanish.*

Stalking Fact Sheet *
This one-page fact sheet provides statistics and information about stalking victimization.
Available in English, Spanish, and Polish (electronic copy only).

National Stalking Awareness Month

www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org

January is National Stalking Awareness Month
Visit **www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org** for resources to help you plan events and outreach on stalking throughout the year. The website includes an interactive quiz on stalking, downloadable posters and web banners, social media tools, and other resources to help you raise awareness about stalking in your community.

Resources for Practitioners

The Use of Technology to Stalk DVD and Discussion Guide *
This 15-minute DVD is designed to enhance awareness among professionals working with stalking victims of how stalkers use a vast array of technologies available.

The Use of Technology to Stalk Online Course
This self-paced, interactive, online training will increase the ability of criminal justice professionals and victim service providers to recognize how stalkers use technology, how to document these behaviors and collect evidence, and considerations for victim safety.

Visit **www.tech2stalk.com** to register.

Stalking: Real Fear, Real Crime [∓]
This awareness raising video was created in response to the murder of stalking victim Peggy Klinke by a former partner. It also provides considerations for law enforcement when working with stalking cases.
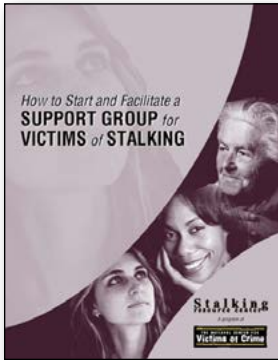

Stalking:
Real Fear
Real Crime
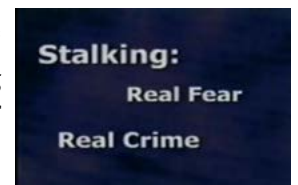
Resources for Practitioners *(cont.)*

Links in the Chain:
Two Communities Respond to Stalking ⸸
This DVD features two jurisdictions that successfully use multidisciplinary, collaborative responses to stalking: The New York Anti-Stalking Task Force and The Family Violence Center, a unit of the San Jose, CA Police Department.

How to Start and Facilitate a Support Group for Victims of Stalking
A guide on how to initiate and run a stalking support group in your agency or community. The guide includes information about designing a support group for stalking victims, recommendations for group membership, tips for facilitators, a sample curriculum, and more.

Responding to Stalking:
A Guide for Community Correction Officers *
This guide is designed to enhance the ability of probation and parole officers to supervise offenders engaged in stalking. Sections include screening offenders, contact with victims, and suggested conditions of supervision.
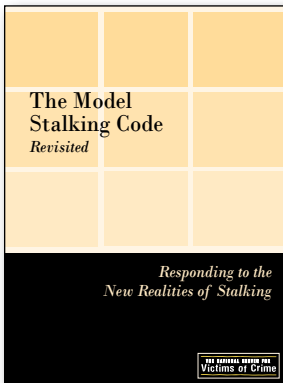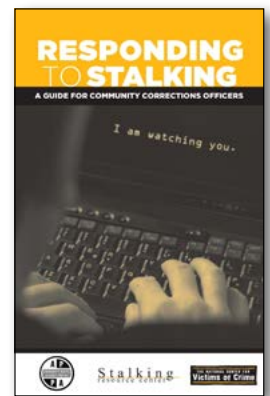
Model Stalking Code Revisited:
Responding to the New Realities of Stalking
This publication contains statutory language and accompanying commentary to help policymakers, advocates, criminal justice professionals and others create stronger, more effective stalking laws and protocols.

Model Campus Stalking Policy
This guide was developed to help universities and colleges create or revise their campus policy on stalking. It provides useful language about defining stalking and important safety considerations for victims. It also includes sample policies that administrators can use in their entirety or adapt for schools' specific needs.
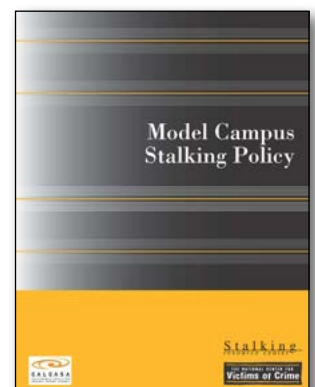
Connecting the Dots:
Recognizing and Responding to Stalking ⸸
This video was produced to enhance the ability of law enforcement first responders to recognize and effectively respond to stalking. The video is designed so that it can either be shown in its entirety (approximately 18 minutes) or as individual chapters.

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* Contact the Stalking Resource Center at **src@ncvc.org** or **202-467-8700** to order.

⸸ View on YouTube or contact the Stalking Resource Center to order.

Working Together to Effectively Address Abuse in Later Life

ALL

Abuse in Later Life

Abuse in Later Life

Abuse in later life (ALL) refers to willful abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of an older adult that occurs within an ongoing relationship where there is an expectation of trust. Power and control dynamics, similar to those seen in typical domestic violence and sexual assault cases, are often present in these deeply personal and painful cases and thus present unique challenges that require a specialized response. For more information, please see the information sheet, *An Overview of Abuse in Later Life,* located at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

These cases are often complicated. The abuser may be a spouse, intimate partner, family member, or caregiver. The older victim may want to maintain a relationship with or protect the abuser. Older victims may be healthy and active or they may have physical or cognitive limitations. These victims may be in contact with the justice system, social services, health care, faith communities, and the aging services network.

The Benefits of Working Together

Given the complexity of abuse in later life cases, a multidisciplinary response is often the most effective approach. The benefits of working together include:

- Gaining a more complete picture of victims' needs by hearing from professionals with various perspectives
- Creating a more complete list of options for victims by raising awareness among professionals of remedies and services that are available or highlighting gaps in available services
- Leveraging additional resources
- Reducing the duplication of services

Engaging Community Partners

An effective collaborative response includes engaging key partners who hold integral roles in addressing abuse in later life. Some of these partners include, but are not limited to, professionals and volunteers who work in organizations that specialize in: aging services, adult protective services (APS), criminal justice systems-based advocacy, civil law, criminal and civil justice systems, culturally-specific services, disability rights, domestic violence, faith, finances, health care, law enforcement, long-term care, mental health, regulatory compliance, sexual assault, and substance abuse.

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Key Partners

Domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy programs are community-based and criminal justice systems-based programs that may offer individual and peer counseling, support groups, emergency and transitional housing, economic and legal advocacy, and medical and court accompaniment to older victims.

The criminal justice system professionals investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate cases of abuse in later life where the conduct may be criminal to hold offenders accountable. With an awareness of available legal remedies and resources, professionals such as law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, probation and parole officers, and victim-witness advocates are critical partners in developing effective intervention strategies to end abuse of older adults, hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent further harm.

When a Crime Has Been Committed

Although many states do not have criminal elder abuse statutes, several forms of abuse against older adults are crimes. Assault, battery, homicide, stalking, harassment, sexual assault, violation of a restraining/protective order, theft, forgery, and disorderly conduct are examples of crimes that can be charged in some elder abuse cases. In addition, many states have laws allowing for enhanced penalties upon conviction for crimes involving victims who are older or cognitively or physically disabled.

The civil justice system may also play a crucial role in responding to cases of abuse in later life. Civil remedies such as protection orders, wills, guardianships, and powers of attorney may help victims and potential victims.

The aging services network includes professionals and volunteers who lend ongoing support and services to older adults. These services may include, but are not limited to: transportation assistance, in-home care, nutrition services, and health, prevention, and wellness programs. Because these individuals often work with older adults on a daily or weekly basis, they may witness injuries or hear descriptions or allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or fear.
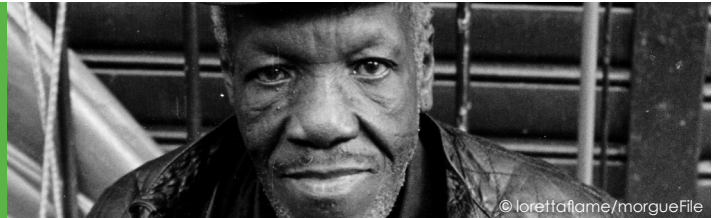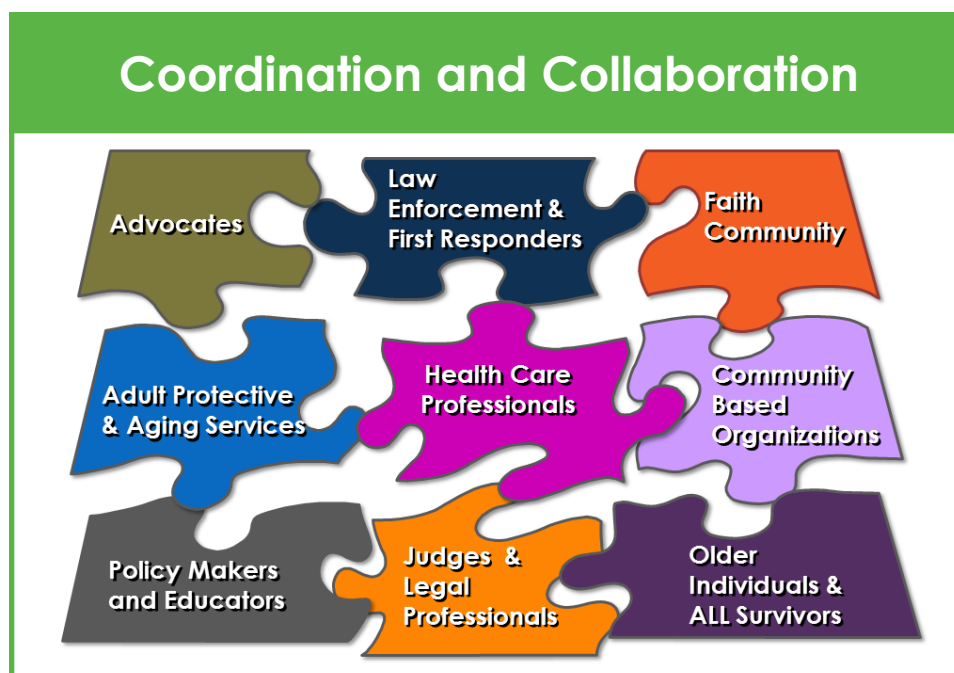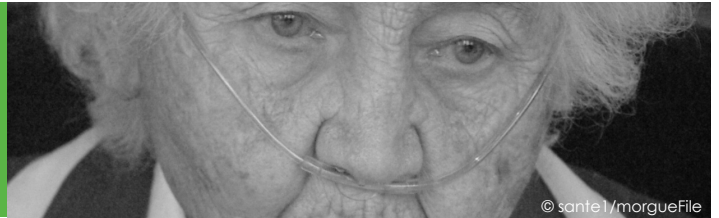
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Adult Protective Services (APS) are investigatory, protective, and social services provided to abused, neglected, or exploited older and/or vulnerable or at-risk adults. APS is typically administered by state or county human services or aging agencies. In almost all states, a broad array of professionals, including doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers, social workers, and aging and disabilities services providers are mandated to report any suspicion of vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation to APS.

Culturally specific programs provide services and support to individuals within given communities. Some older victims may be reluctant to contact law enforcement, social services, or mainstream domestic violence or sexual assault (DV/SA) advocacy programs. These victims may, however, reach out for assistance from culturally specific DV/SA programs or other organizations and programs that advocate for the communities with which they identify.

Faith-based organizations are important because faith holds a central place in the lives of many older adults. It can be a critical resource, a pillar of identity and community, and an essential element in decision-making and healing. Spiritual leaders are trusted supports and faith communities may often be the first place victims and family members turn for help.

Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes, and assisted living facilities. Under the federal Older Americans Act, every state is required to have an Ombudsman Program that addresses or investigates individuals' complaints and advocates for improvements in the long-term care system.

Coordination and Collaboration

Advocates

Law Enforcement & First Responders

Faith Community

Adult Protective & Aging Services

Health Care Professionals

Community Based Organizations

Policy Makers and Educators

Judges & Legal Professionals

Older Individuals & ALL Survivors

Working Together: Developing a Coordinated Community Response (CCR)

Professionals from various agencies and organizations may work together informally on abuse in later life case consultations or specific projects. In some communities, task forces or groups have been formed that meet regularly to address abuse in later life. Examples of multidisciplinary teams include: a Multidisciplinary Case Review Team (M-team), a domestic violence Coordinated Community Response (CCR), or a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) with a focus on abuse in later life, an Elder Abuse Fatality Review Team (EA-FRT), or a Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST).

Abuse in Later Life Coordinated Community Response (ALL-CCR) teams include professionals and community partners from various disciplines who share a broad vision of their community's responsibility for enhancing services and safety for older victims and improving the criminal justice system's response to perpetrators. ALL-CCRs identify current systems' responses and service gaps and coordinate members' efforts in order to create a seamless response to the needs of victims of abuse in later life. For more information on ALL-CCRs, please visit:
www.ncall.us/community/collaboration.

> ❝ **Since its inception, the Merrimack County Abuse in Later Life CCR team has met monthly to work toward its goals. From an initial membership of 12 community organizations, the collaboration has grown to a diverse group of 22 organizational partners and four representatives of the community-at-large—two of whom are victims/survivors. Team members are working together to educate one another, build supportive inter-agency relationships, and assess and expand community outreach and accessible services for older victims/survivors.** ❞
>
> – New Hampshire Partnership for the Protection of Older Adults, Concord, NH
> Office on Violence Against Women Abuse in Later Life Program Grantee,
> Fiscal Year 2009

Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

An Overview of Elder Abuse: A Growing Problem

ALL
Abuse in Later Life

Elder abuse is a hidden yet growing problem in the United States with significant public health and societal implications. It is a tragedy that impacts older adults of all races, cultures, sexual orientations, social classes, geographic areas, faith communities, mental capacities, and physical abilities. Until victim service providers, the justice system, health care professionals, social service agencies, and other community members work together to address this problem, elder abuse will continue unabated, with devastating consequences for older adults and their loved ones.

Although definitions of elder abuse vary, the term generally refers to any physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, neglect, abandonment, or financial exploitation of an older person either within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust and/or when an older person is targeted based on age or disability (U.S. DOJ, 2013). Older adults may be harmed by spouses or partners in heterosexual, gay, or lesbian relationships, adult children or other family members, caregivers or persons in a position of authority such as guardians, lawyers, or interpreters. In some instances older adults may be targeted by strangers and become victims of sexual assault, stalking, or financial exploitation. The various forms of abuse often co-occur (Acierno, 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011).

Older victims often experience shame, pain, economic loss, spiritual and physical anguish, institutionalization, and poor quality of life (Beaulaurier et al., 2008; Brandl et al., 2007; Dong et al., 2011). Studies suggest that older adults exposed to physical and verbal abuse have a greater mortality risk than those who did not experience violence (Baker, 2009; Dong et al., 2011; Lachs, 1998).

Research estimates that approximately one in ten older adults living in their homes experience elder abuse each year (Acierno et al., 2010; Beach et al., 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011). In addition, evidence is emerging that shows this rate is especially high in racial and ethnic minority groups (Beach et al., 2010; DeLiema et al., 2012). The current economic crisis has further exacerbated the problem, as the frequency of reported financial exploitation of older adults (which is often coupled with other forms of abuse) has increased (Gunther, 2011; MetLife, 2009).

Yet research suggests that cases of elder abuse are significantly underreported. One state study found fewer than 5% of cases come to light (Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011). Furthermore, a significant number of elder abuse cases that are actually reported or identified end up slipping through the cracks due to a lack of coordination among service providers (Brandl et al., 2007; Connolly, 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, as 77 million baby boomers age, the problem is only expected to worsen. Within the next 40 years, the number of individuals age 65 and older is projected to more than double so that in 2050, they will account for over 20% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).
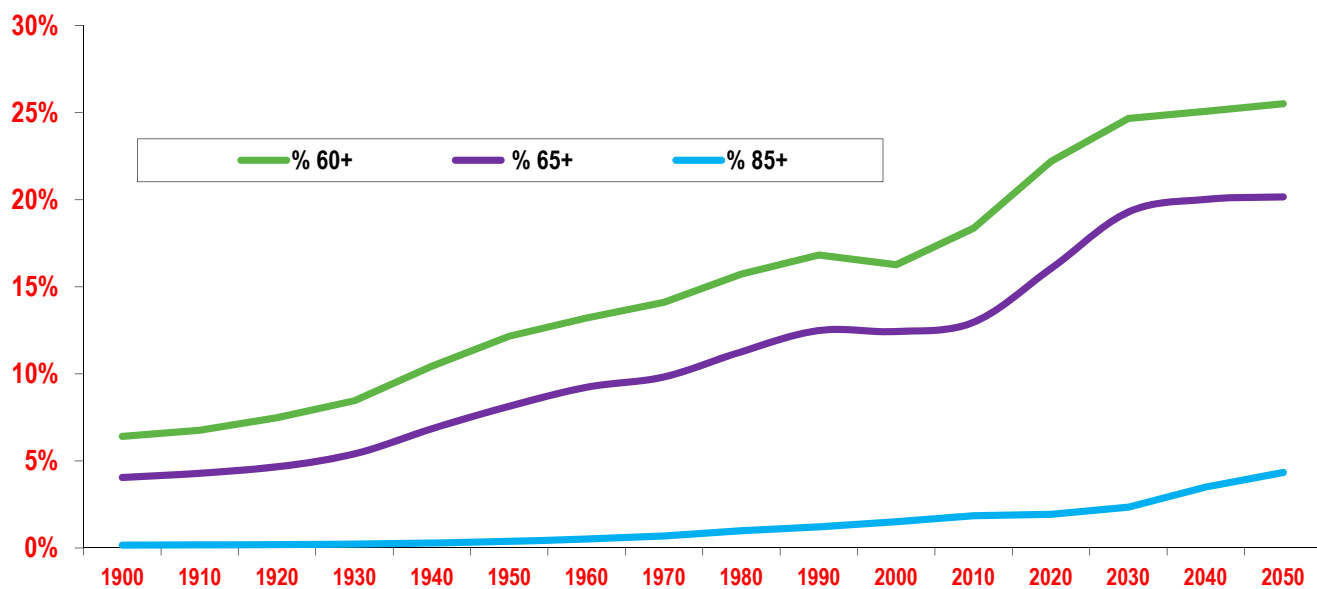
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Older Population by Age: 1900-2050 - Percent 60+, Percent 65+, and 85+

Legend: % 60+, % 65+, % 85+

Citation: http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/aging_statistics/future_growth/future_growth.aspx

While great strides have been made in recent decades to improve responses to child abuse and domestic violence, elder abuse lags far behind in terms of recognition and attention. A recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) declared that resources directed to elder abuse are not keeping pace with the growing volume and complexity of cases (U.S. GAO, 2011).

Thankfully, there are several key players that can make a difference. Domestic violence and sexual assault programs provide vital services for victims that need only be expanded in order to help address the growing problem of elder abuse. The justice system has legal resources and remedies to hold offenders accountable. Other professionals from the aging services network, adult protective services, health care, and faith communities identify and assist older victims. However, in order to better serve and protect our older citizens, it is increasingly imperative for service professionals to work together and to gain a better understanding of the complex and devastating issue of elder abuse.

Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

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ALL
Abuse in Later Life

The OVW ALL Grant Program

About the OVW ALL Program

Since 2006, the Office on Violence Against Women's Enhanced Training and Services to End Violence Against and Abuse of Women Later in Life Program (OVW ALL Program) has administered 67 grant programs and eight continuation grant programs. The discretionary grant program is designed to provide funds for local communities to develop services for older victims, create or enhance a coordinated community response, and organize training and cross-training for professionals on elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation, including domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking against victims who are 50 years of age or older. The OVW ALL Program grant recipients represent a cross-section of communities, from large, urban communities, such as Los Angeles and Seattle and to small, rural areas like East Prairie, MO and Clay County, MN. The grantees also include four tribes and represent the four corners of the contiguous United States as well as Alaska.

About NCALL

In 1999, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence created the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) with funding from the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). Since 2002, NCALL has provided technical assistance and training to the grantees of the OVW ALL Program. Today, NCALL is also a nationally-recognized leader on program development, policy, technical assistance, and training that addresses the nexus between domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse and neglect.

OVW ALL Program Purpose Areas

In Fiscal Year 2013, funds under the OVW ALL Program may be used for the following purposes:

- Training programs to assist law enforcement, prosecutors, governmental agencies, victim assistants, and relevant officers of Federal, State, Tribal, Territorial, and local courts in recognizing, addressing, investigating, and prosecuting instances of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking against victims who are 50 years of age or older

- Providing or enhancing services for victims of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, who are 50 years of age or older
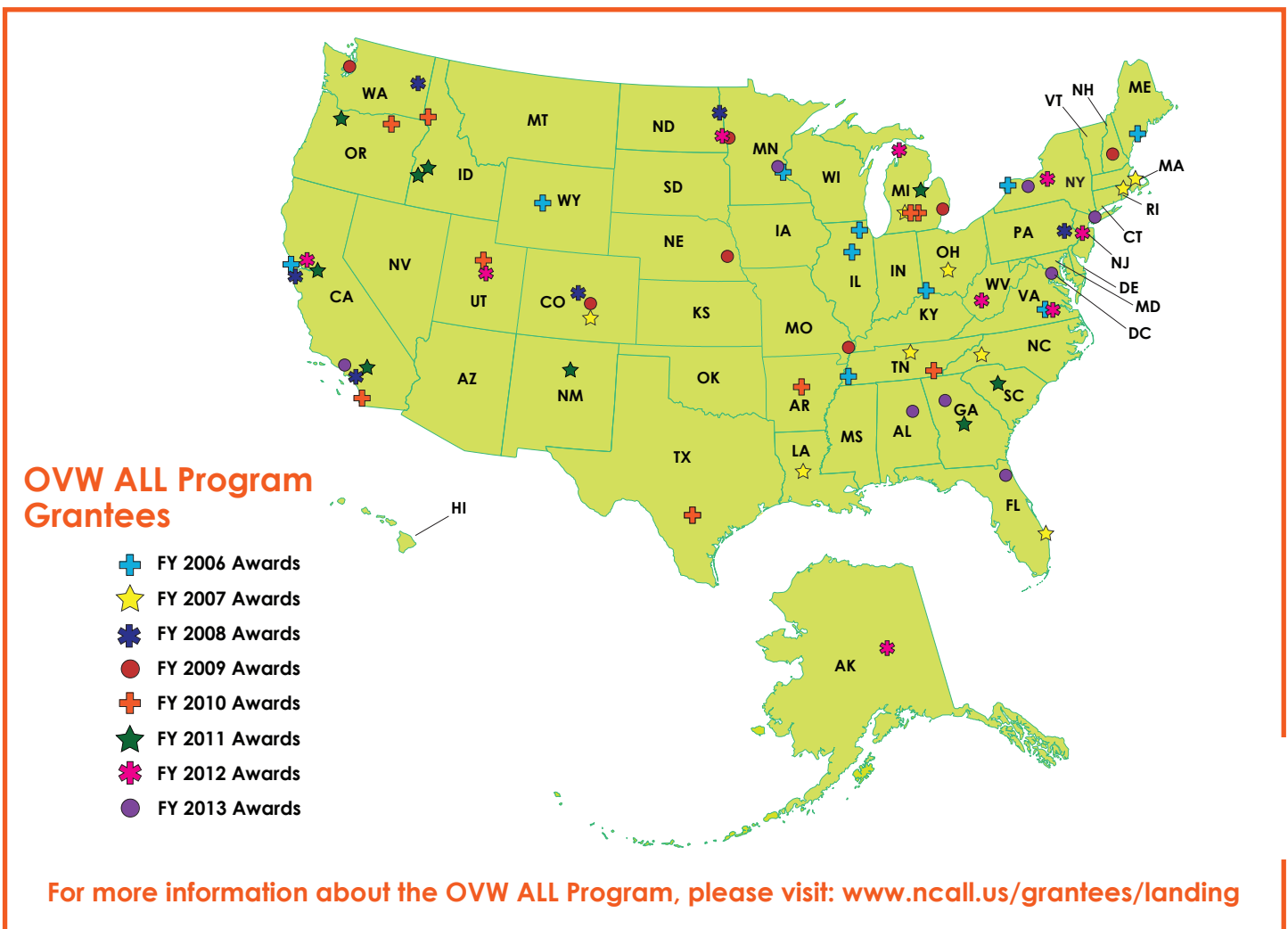
- Creating or supporting multidisciplinary collaborative community responses to victims of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, who are 50 years of age or older, and

- Conducting cross-training for victim service organizations, governmental agencies, courts, law enforcement, and nonprofit, nongovern-mental organizations serving victims of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, who are 50 years of age or older.

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Success in Communities

No matter the size of the community, grantees have reported that the impact of the OVW ALL Program grant on creating systems change has been profound. Consistent among the grantees' reports has been the notion that because of the grant, OVW ALL Program grantees observe a heightened awareness of abuse in later life throughout their communities and witness new or elevated efforts to improve elder victim safety, increase abuser accountability, and expand community awareness around the problems of elder abuse and abuse in later life.

> "The [Abuse in Later Life] Program has been a godsend to our small, economically depressed community in Southeast Michigan. Already the community is reaching out to survivors of elder abuse in a new way and [has] provided more comprehensive wraparound services that it could not have provided absent this grant."
>
> – Lakeshore Legal Aid, St. Clair County, MI
> OVW ALL Program Grantee, Fiscal Year 2009

OVW ALL Program Grantees

- ✚ FY 2006 Awards
- ★ FY 2007 Awards
- ✳ FY 2008 Awards
- ● FY 2009 Awards
- ✚ FY 2010 Awards
- ★ FY 2011 Awards
- ✸ FY 2012 Awards
- ● FY 2013 Awards

For more information about the OVW ALL Program, please visit: www.ncall.us/grantees/landing

Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

Abuse in later life (ALL) is the willful abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of an older adult that is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing relationship (e.g., spouse, partner, family member, or caregiver) with the victim. As such, the term abuse in later life—used by the Office on Violence Against Women, the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, and a number of domestic violence and sexual assault programs throughout the country—calls attention to the **nexus between domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse**.

Other terms are also used to define abuse of older adults. Elder abuse is a broad term that applies to abuse, neglect, and exploitation of an older individual in a trusting relationship with the offender. Elder abuse also includes harm that occurs because an older person is targeted based on age or disability (U.S. DOJ, 2013), such as in contractor scams. In many jurisdictions, elder abuse may also include self-neglect. Abuse of vulnerable, dependent, or at-risk adults generally refers to harm of persons 18 or older who are unable to protect themselves or report the abuse.

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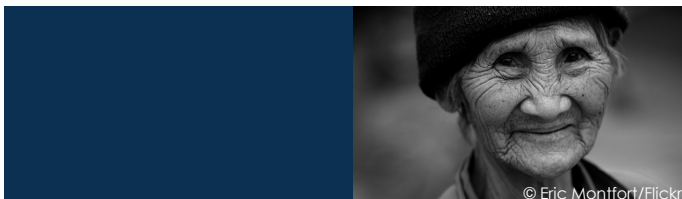
Abuse in later life is the segment of elder abuse that focuses specifically on those cases where the abuse is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing relationship (e.g., spouse, partner, family member, or caregiver) with the victim. Sexual abuse and stalking by an offender who is known to the victim or a stranger is also included in the definition. Older persons who fit the statutory definition in their jurisdiction of

vulnerable adults and are in a relationship with their abuser may also be victims of abuse in later life. Power and control dynamics, similar to those seen in domestic violence and sexual assault cases involving younger victims, are often present in abuse in later life situations. Older victims may benefit from services provided by domestic and sexual violence programs.

Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life

To formulate an appropriate response to cases of abuse in later life, it is critical to understand the dynamics present. Perpetrators will often strive to exert their power and control over victims so they can coerce or manipulate some benefit for themselves, such as money, a place to stay, access to prescription medication, or sexual gratification (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007). These abusers are often greedy and feel entitled to do whatever necessary to get what they want. They may financially exploit an older adult, feeling entitled to take a Social Security check or empty a bank account. In order to maintain power and control, these abusers typically use various coercive tactics including physical and psychological abuse and isolation. Abusers may intimidate their victims and prevent them from reporting the exploitation or abuse out of fear of retaliation. They may also lie and manipulate family members, friends, and professionals in order to hide or justify their behavior (Bancroft, 2003; Stark, 2007).

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In addition to cases of abuse in later life, older adults may be harmed even if power and control dynamics or greed are not present. Domestic and sexual violence advocates may have a role to play in these situations as well. For example, sometimes an older adult is harmed by a well-intended caregiver who provides inadequate or inappropriate care. In other cases, an older adult is harmed by a person with an organic medical or mental health condition who is unable to control his or her behavior. In these situations, often the older individual experiences fear and trauma. Many of these older adults who have been harmed can benefit from remedies offered by domestic or sexual violence programs, such as safety planning, emergency housing, or legal advocacy.

Additional factors may be present, further complicating abuse in later life cases. If the abuser is an adult child, victims often protect their child rather than focusing on their own personal safety. Older victims may feel shame, guilt, and embarrassment because they are being abused by their child. Some victims have physical or cognitive limitations that abusers can target to manipulate them through the breaking of assistive devices, the denying of health care or comfort measures, and threats to place them in a nursing home.

Forms of Abuse in Later Life

Abuse in later life includes **physical, psychological, and sexualabuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Harassment and stalking** may also be included. Often forms of abuse co-occur in cases involving abuse in later life.

Self-Neglect: While many state statutes include self-neglect as a form of elder abuse, cases of self-neglect do not fall within the definition of abuse in later life. The phrase abuse in later life was created to acknowledge that older victims

generally know and are in a relationship with their abuser. Since there are no offenders when self-neglect occurs, these cases are outside the scope of abuse in later life. Domestic violence and sexual assault victim advocates and criminal justice professionals are less likely to be involved in cases of self-neglect, which typically involve responses by adult protective services, social services agency workers, and health care providers.

Relationship Between Victim and Abuser

Older victims may be abused by **intimate partners, adult children, grandchildren, or other family members, caregivers, or persons in positions of authority**. Society expects that these relationships are based on trust and care. In the majority of abuse in later life cases the perpetrator is the victim's family member or intimate partner (Acierno et al., 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011). Intimate partner violence may have been present for the entire duration of the relationship or it may emerge later in life as the couple ages. Abuse can occur in heterosexual, lesbian or gay relationships.

Victim Gender

Females, males, and those who don't identify with a specific gender identity may be victims of abuse in later life. The majority of older victims of intimate partner violence and sexual abuse in later life are women (Acierno, 2013; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013).

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Victim Age

When defining elder abuse, most states, tribes, and organizations use a minimum age threshold that ranges from 50 to 70. The term abuse in later life applies to victims who are age **50 and older** for the following reasons:

- By age 50 there is a significant decrease in the number of victims accessing services from domestic violence and sexual assault programs. This is partly because many services for domestic and sexual assault victims focus on meeting the needs of younger women and their children. Most domestic and sexual violence programs do not have programming tailored to meet the unique needs of victims of abuse in later life, such as financial planning for persons who do not yet qualify for Social Security or support groups exclusively for older women.

- Victims who are age 50 and older may need economic assistance to obtain safe housing and live independently if they choose to leave their abuser. However, victims who are age 50 to 62 may be ineligible for financial assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program because they may not be parenting children. They also may be ineligible for Social Security and aging network services because they are too young. Few options exist to assist victims in this age group who want to become independent from their abuser but do not have the financial resources to do so.

- Age 50 includes older victims who have a shorter life expectancy because they experienced trauma, lived in poverty, or lacked access to health care.

Where Abuse Happens

Abuse in later life can take place in **any setting** (e.g., a house, apartment, residential health care setting, a doctor's office, or in a public place, such as at work or in a courthouse). Most often, it occurs where the victim resides.

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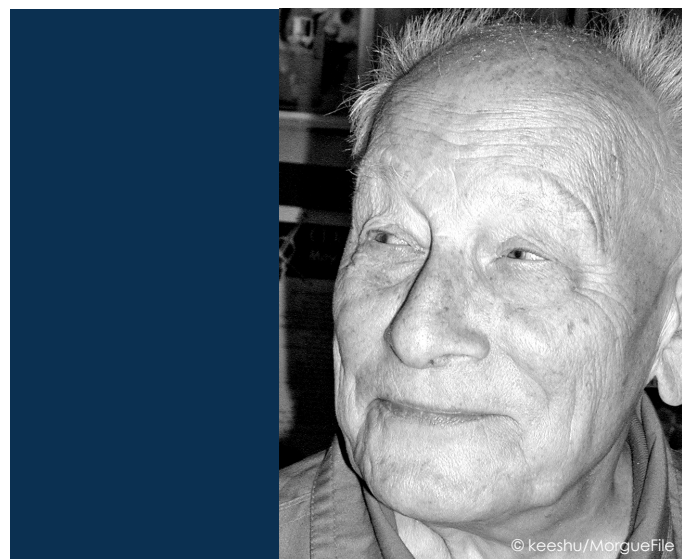
Responding to Abuse in Later Life

By understanding the unique dynamics of abuse in later life, domestic and sexual violence advocates can make a difference. Many older victims of abuse benefit from remedies offered by domestic or sexual violence programs such as safety planning, individual or group counseling, emergency housing, and medical or legal advocacy. The criminal justice system may play a beneficial role by holding the offender accountable. Given the complexity of these cases, collaboration with the aging services network, adult protective services, health care providers, and others is often essential.

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Additional information sheets may be found at: **www.ncall.us/content/ALL**.

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STALKING: KNOW IT. NAME IT. STOP IT.

Stalking Response Tips

for Victim Advocates

Did You Know…

Stalking is a dangerous crime that affects an estimated 7.5 million women and men each year. Stalking—generally defined as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear—is a crime under the laws of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, and the federal government. Stalking can have devastating and long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological effects on victims. The prevalence of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than in the general population. Victim advocates can help victims devise a safety plan, navigate the criminal justice system, assert their rights as crime victims, and obtain the services and support they need and to which they are entitled.

How Victim Advocates Can Help

1. Recognize that stalking is a pattern of conduct, and a stalking victim's level of fear and need may vary and change based on the stalker's behaviors.

2. Realize that stalking victims may maintain contact with their offenders to keep themselves (or loved ones) safe. Work with victims to establish safety plans.

3. Collaborate with others in your community, such as law enforcement, prosecutors, and community corrections, to help protect victims of stalking. Health care providers and members of faith communities also can be vital resources.

4. Work with law enforcement, prosecutors, and others to educate victims about the ongoing dynamics of stalking cases and what evidence and documentation may be required if they choose to report to the police.

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For More Information

National Stalking Awareness Month
www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

Stalking Resource Center
www.victimsofcrime.org/src

Stalking
resource center