

January is National Stalking Awareness Month

Stalking is a serious, dangerous and potentially life threatening crime that is often mislabeled as harmless. The better we understand the facts about stalking, the better we can attempt to stop it.

Stalking affects 3.4 million people in the U.S. each year and it can happen to anyone. Men are victims of stalking but women are at a greater risk than men and young adults are particularly more vulnerable to stalking victimization.

Statistics show that 17 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women are stalked in their lifetime and stalked at a rate at least twice that of any other race. Most stalking victims are stalked by someone they know.

Stalking usually involves repeated and unwanted threatening or harassing behaviors, such as excessive phone calls and/or text messages; following a person in a way that causes him or her to feel fearful or emotionally distressed; appearing at a person's home or place of employment; vandalizing property; cyber stalking, such as threatening emails or instant messaging, leaving unwanted cards, flowers or gifts and any other harassing activity that makes a person fear for his or her safety.

Domestic violence stalking is usually perpetrated by an ex-spouse, ex-boyfriend or ex-lover and frequently occurs when someone tries to leave an abusive relationship. Abusers often become stalkers and tenaciously pursue their victims.

Stalking can be a difficult crime to recognize and just as difficult to express. The majority of stalking victims do not report to the police because their perpetrator uses a variety of tactics to intimidate and harass their victims as well as to manipulate the system.

Stalking cases, which most definitely occur in Indian Country, might last on average about 1-2 years with the trauma lasting a life time. If you are a victim of a stalker now, you need to get help immediately and protect yourself.

Contact law enforcement and let them know that you are a victim of stalking. Even if you don't desire to pursue charges, at least your complaint will be on record.

Contact the DOVE Program at 1-877-830-DOVE (3683) or any domestic violence agency in your area for assistance in how to handle your situation.

Document any contact the stalker makes with you including dates and time for each incident. Save all text messages, emails, notes, and voice mails from the stalker; as much as you might want to delete or throw them away, don't! All these items will serve as proof for your case.

Make sure you take precautions and tell people about your stalker. Tell your family, friends, landlord, and your boss. Tell anyone whom the stalker might use to get more information about you.

Lock your doors immediately upon entering your home and pay attention to your surroundings. Educate yourself and read articles about stalking and Minnesota's stalking laws. Learn self-defense and trust your instincts.

If you feel you have to change your normal behavior because you fear the actions of someone else, such as changing your route home, not going out in the evenings, afraid to stay in your own home alone, you need to call and speak to law enforcement or a domestic violence advocate.

Stalking is clearly a crime and stalkers need to be held accountable. If you are a victim of stalking, you don't need to suffer through it alone, call the DOVE Program's 24 Hour Crisis Line at 1-877-830-3683.

Be safe!

