

Stalking Quiz – for police (Eleven Stalking Screening Questions)

This 'quiz' originates from the ACPO approved Stalking Risk Checklist produced by Drs Lorraine Sheridan and Karl Roberts. They are international experts on stalking. Dr Sheridan is a police accredited offender profiler and compiles psychological reports related to offenders, highlighting the risks posed by known or unknown suspects.

How should a police officer use this information?

The public have been given access to this information via www.trustyourinstinct.org to determine how seriously they should take 'obsessive behaviour'. The intention is that anyone filling in the 'quiz' should get a sense of the 'bigger picture' rather than simply a series of incidents in isolation. More information about the Stalking Risk Checklist can be found at www.nss.org.uk

Each of the 11 questions should be answered. Each paragraph underneath contains useful background information.

Q1. Are you very frightened?

Research demonstrates that the victim is frequently the best assessor of risk posed to them (Weisz et al. 2000). Stalking often consists of behaviours that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g. walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition however, these behaviours can become menacing, and the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases (even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence) it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Research indicates that victims are often reluctant to be labelled as 'stalking victims', despite being very frightened, feeling that no one will take their fears seriously (Sheridan et al., 2002).

Q2. Has the suspect(s) engaged in harassment on previous occasions(s)? (you and/or anyone else)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour, and stalkers are no exception to this general rule. Those who stalk strangers and public figures are particularly prone to serial stalking (Dietz et al., 1991a,b; Sheridan, 2001). Even though the victim may not know the stalker very well, s/he may be aware of a local reputation the stalker has for this type of behaviour. Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim (usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker), only to suddenly resume the harassment at a later date.

Q3. Has the suspect(s) ever destroyed or vandalised your property?

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

damage has been identified by researchers as preceding or co-occurring with physical attacks on the victim (Harmon et al., 1995, 1998).

Q4. Does the suspect(s) visit you at work, home, etc., more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place entirely at a distance. Research tells us that nearly all stalking cases will ultimately involve face-to-face contact between victim and stalker (Mullen et al., 2000). Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (i.e. on the victim's daily route to work). Others, particularly stalkers with an obvious mental illness, will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times (Sheridan and Boon, 2002). The research informs us that those stalkers who visit the victim's home, workplace, or other places frequented by the victim more than three times in a week are those who are most likely to attack. It should be borne in mind, however, that some stalkers will have no regular pattern of harassment and in such cases an average of stalker visits could be estimated.

Q5. Has the suspect(s) loitered around your home, workplace etc?

Most stalkers will be seen by their victims. The positive aspect of this is that evidence can be collected, particularly if the victim keeps a log of stalker sightings and behaviour. Stalkers who loiter around places frequented by the victim tend to be those who are most likely to attack their victim. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will share a belief that their behaviour is an appropriate response to circumstances.

Q6. Has the suspect(s) made any threats of physical or sexual violence in the current harassment incidents?

Stalkers frequently threaten their victims, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending wreaths or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats, however, and research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously. Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats.

Q7. Has the suspect(s) harassed any third party since the harassment began? (i.e. friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)

In the majority of stalking cases, secondary victims will be identified. Although stalkers may stalk more than one person at a time, this question relates to associates of a primary victim. Stalkers will involve third parties for several reasons, principally to upset the victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's children), to obtain information on the victim (i.e. by hounding the victim's friends), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's partner), and to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (i.e. work colleagues who state that the victim is not available). Individual stalkers have been known to harass hundreds of third parties who they perceive as connected with the primary victim (Mohandie et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1999).

Q8. Has the suspect(s) acted out violently towards other people within the current stalking incidents?

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

Q9. Has the suspect(s) persuaded other people to help him/her? (Wittingly or unwittingly)

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

Q10. Is the suspect(s) known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?

Substance abuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault on the victim in a significant number of cases (Rosenfeld's 2004 review of 13 relevant studies). The abuse of various substances by stalkers can contribute both to the basis from which the stalking occurs and to individual violent episodes. Binge drinking or drug taking may directly precede an attack, fuelling obsessive, yearning or angry thought patterns, or by lending the stalker the confidence to approach or attack the victim. It is well known that substance abuse compounds the violence risk among those who are already mentally ill (Steadman et al., 1998), although non-mentally ill stalkers may also abuse alcohol and drugs.

Q11. Is the suspect(s) known to have been violent in the past? (Physical or psychological)

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

**Print this off and take it with you to the police station –
give it to the reporting officer**

About the Stalking Quiz

This 'quiz' originates from the ACPO approved Stalking Risk Checklist produced by Drs Lorraine Sheridan and Karl Roberts. They are international experts on stalking.

About the Authors of the Stalking Risk Checklist

Dr Lorraine Sheridan is a Chartered Forensic Psychologist and an international expert on stalking and harassment. She completed Europe's first PhD on stalking and has so far published four books and more than 50 papers on the subject. Her research has taken an applied, interventionist angle and she frequently trains professionals involved in investigating stalking crimes. She is a police accredited offender profiler and compiles psychological reports related to offenders, highlighting the risks posed by known or unknown suspects. She regularly gives case management advice to the police, security personnel, celebrities and others on stalking, harassment, violence, risk assessment, malicious communications and similar topics. After a long stint as a senior academic at the University of Leicester, Lorraine is now a part-time Senior Research Fellow at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. She is a board member of the Division of Forensic Psychology of the British Psychological Society and a founder member of the Association of European Threat Assessment Professionals.

Network for Surviving Stalking is extremely grateful to Lorraine for her time, support and advice - given freely to the charity over a number of years.

Dr Karl Roberts is a Chartered Forensic Psychologist of the British Psychological Society, a Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy and a United Kingdom Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Approved Behavioural Investigative Advisor (BIA). He has worked closely with police since 1992 providing investigative behavioural advice in the form of risk assessments, interview strategies and offender profiles. Since 1992 he has advised on in excess of four hundred major Police inquiries throughout the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA.