



**Threat Assessment and
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Workplace Violence Specialist

1 Women Must Be Wary of Would-Be Stalkers

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By Mindelle Jacobs
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Women are sometimes too nice for their own good, afraid to give a persistent and unwelcome suitor a firm brush-off.

Most of the time, men eventually get the message and move on. But sometimes gentle rejection merely spurs them on.

In the minds of these men - blinded by possessiveness or mental illness - the women they're pursuing are just playing coy.

They imagine that if they persist, the women they want will love them back. Then, one day, they step over the line and become stalkers.

Women can unwittingly encourage such behaviour by not nipping the situation in the bud, says Heather Gray, who runs a workplace violence and threat assessment company, TAMA Inc.

Attention that becomes obsessive may seem romantic but it's dangerous, says Gray, a former cop who spoke at a stalking symposium in Edmonton yesterday.

Women need to recognize the behavioural traits of a potential stalker and cut off all communication right away, she said in an interview during a break in the seminar.

If you're dating a guy who immediately wants to get seriously involved, drop him like a hot potato, said Gray.

Women should also steer clear of control freaks - men who try to dictate who you talk to, where you go and what you wear.

Use your feminine intuition, added Gray. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Get out of the relationship before things deteriorate.

"You want to cut your losses," warned Gray. Don't write him and don't call - even if it's to tell him not to phone.

Gray knows what she's talking about. After leaving policing in 2001 to start her own company, she trained in Los Angeles with Gavin de Becker, one of the world's foremost authorities on predicting violent behaviour and threat assessment.

Her aim is to avert stalking and violence by evaluating the level of risk and rallying the appropriate resources to help potential offenders and victims.

Earlier, she told the symposium that in her years as a cop, she regularly encountered stalking situations but couldn't lay a charge because there was no such offence in the Criminal Code.

That changed 10 years ago, with the passing of the criminal harassment provision, known informally as the stalking law.

Now, for instance, people can be charged with repeatedly following or communicating with another person.

As well, if a stalker kills his victim, he is automatically convicted of first-degree murder, even if the killing wasn't deliberate.

When abusive relationships end, stalking follows in 75% of the cases, by the way.

Unfortunately in such cases, the victims have a natural inclination to be sympathetic to their stalkers, Calgary police Det. Gord Robertson told the symposium.

The best way to protect the victim is to intervene early and make it clear to stalkers that they won't be treated leniently, he said.

Risk assessment isn't an exact science but if mistakes are made, "let's make them on behalf of the victim," he said.

Katherine Whitbread, who was stalked for more than a decade by a man she briefly befriended in high school, is one of the most well-known stalking victims in Canada.



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Her stalker, Simon Gagnon, was found not criminally responsible and is in Alberta Hospital.

But the vast majority of stalkers aren't mentally ill. They're just angry, dangerous men.

In fact, 91% of accused stalkers are men and 88% of victims are women. As well, stalking is usually linked to domestic relationships - not casual dating.

Gray believes stalking is much more widespread than police statistics reveal.

And think about this. Two-thirds of restraining orders are violated. So ditch that piece of bad news before things get out of control.

"Stalking is like a long rape," writes Linden Gross in her book *Surviving a Stalker*. "The stalker's objective is to force you into surrender."

Don't let the stalkers win.