THE STUDENT WITH STALKING BEHAVIORS

Description

California Penal Code Section 646.9 describes a stalker as, “Any person who willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows or harasses another person and who makes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for his or her safety, or the safety of his or her immediate family…guilty of the crime of stalking.”

Stalking is more prevalent than previously thought: 16 percent of surveyed women and 5 percent of surveyed men reported being stalked at some time in their life. Approximately 6.6 million people are stalked annually in the United States. Given the prevalence of this behavior in the U.S. it is not surprising to discover that stalking occurs on college campuses fairly frequently.

Warning Signs of Stalking

- Verbal/written threats to hurt, kill or maim
- Paranoia
- Irrational violent statements or associations
- Romantic obsession: persistent calls, letters, gifts or unnecessary office visits
- History of violence
- History of several failed and short lived marriages and/or relationships
- Significant personal/family/financial stressors
- History of mental illness
- Persistent physical actions or boundary crossing
- Verbal/written third party harassment and/or threats
- Frequent hang ups at one’s residence/place of employment immediately upon arrival

Common Characteristics of Stalkers

- Desire for power and control
- Obsessive, bizarre delusions, jealousy, anger, and revenge
- Seek to win or maintain the affection of the victim
- Either intense attraction to the victim or extreme hatred
- Socially maladjusted
- Exhibit low self-esteem
- Emotionally Immature
- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Criminal record
- Mental illness
- Mirror behavior patterns common in domestic violence cases
- Erratic employment or lack thereof
- Unable to succeed in relationships
Response:

The following may be helpful:

1. **Set very clear, strong boundaries** with the student. Specify how much time you can spend answering questions or going over assignments and then end when you have stated you would.
2. Maintain an objective, courteous demeanor when the student approaches you, but avoid overly friendly responses.
3. If the student’s contact/communication (e.g. email, telephone calls and/or office visits) becomes inappropriate or overwhelming, notify the student immediately that only class related communications are acceptable. Any others that verge on personal should be forwarded to the dean of the department, the Vice President of Student Services and Campus Safety. The student should be made aware of this boundary/action early on.
4. If you believe you have a student who is exhibiting these characteristics seek counsel with the psychological counselor. The sooner the better.
5. If the student becomes “attached” or “threatening” notify security immediately.
6. Be prepared to pursue a restraining order if the situation escalates—**only very strong behavioral and legal boundaries will resolve this issue.**

The following is not helpful when dealing with this student:

1. Providing personal information in the classroom that could be misconstrued or used against you by a student with stalking behaviors (e.g. home telephone, address, type of car, etc.).
2. It is common to feel compassion towards an individual that seems so needy and wants to attach. Remember, direct the student to appropriate services or their relationship with you could become out of control. Do not extend yourself beyond the classroom setting. The person will only become more “obsessed” with you.
3. Never transport the student as a “favor” or invite them to your home.
4. Never flatter the student or overly extend yourself with the student.
5. Never present yourself as the student’s advocate. If advocacy is needed refer to appropriate resource.