

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**Video Selections:** **The Impact of Partner Stalking (5:01 minutes)**  
**Stalking Can Happen to Anyone (8:08 minutes)**

**Content:** Four survivors, including one surviving family member, discuss their experiences and the impact of stalking on their lives.

**Background Information:**

The survivors interviewed are not a representative sample of all victims, or survivors, of stalking. They are simply women who have been stalked and were willing to share their stories to help others.

**Note:** The following questions and ideas are intended to help prompt and guide discussion when showing the videos in domestic violence survivor support groups and educational forums. Please do not feel limited by these suggestions. You and the participants in your group or forum may want to lead the discussion in a different direction. Please use your own judgment as to the appropriateness of these questions and ideas for your specific audience.

**Questions and Ideas for Group Discussion:**

**Question 1: Is there anything “special” about the women in the videos that made them more vulnerable to stalking than other women? If you met one of them at a social gathering, would the word “victim” come to mind?**

**Ideas:** The women in the videos do not fit any stereotypical myths about victims of domestic violence. They are not weak, dependent or passive. They do not have low self-esteem, though their self-esteem may have been affected while they were in the abusive relationship. They are just women who, like most of us, hoped for a loving relationship.

**Question 2: How does someone know they are being stalked?**

**Ideas:** Stalking is a pattern of behavior that makes the intended victim fear for her/his safety. Some common stalking behaviors are:

- Following
- Showing up in unexpected places
- Calling or texting repeatedly
- Sending unwanted cards, gifts, or messages
- Driving by or hanging around victim’s home, school or work
- Using technology, like computer spyware, hidden GPS and cameras, to track the victim

- Using public records or on-line search services, hiring investigators, or going through the victim's garbage to get information about the victim
- Keeping tabs on the victim through family, neighbors and friends
- Threatening people or pets the victim loves
- Damaging property

**Question 3: How did stalking impact the lives of the women in the videos?**

**Ideas:** Stalking is often a collection of “incidents” that may not appear dangerous or threatening to anyone but the intended victim. Victims often feel that their fears are dismissed or ignored by others, even when they can sense that they are in danger. Stalkers typically invade every aspect of victims’ personal and professional lives, sometimes causing them to live, as one victim put it, in a “prison without bars.” They never know when or where their stalker is going to strike. For victims of stalking, it is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week nightmare.

Stalking involves a systematic and deliberate set of tactics designed to control or induce fear. The biggest indicator may be the victim’s level of fear or concern for safety which can manifest in changed behavior such as taking safety measures, avoiding places, anxiety, constantly “looking over your shoulder,” and trouble sleeping.

**Question 4: How did the women in the videos describe their state of mind at the time they were reaching out for help? How did that affect their ability to move on with their lives?**

**Ideas:** The women in the videos talk about feeling confused, uncertain, insecure and fearful. One of the women talked about questioning her own sanity with thoughts such as: “What if he is right and I’m just so crazy I don’t realize that I’m crazy?” Another wondered if her husband could read her mind. If you met them today you would find it hard to believe that they ever questioned themselves in that way.

Some victims describe the psychological aspects of domestic violence as “crazy-making.” Victims often feel that the perpetrator has so much power over them that they have lost control of their lives and sometimes even their thoughts. They are afraid that whatever choice they make, even if it is a small choice like what to make for dinner, it will be viewed by the perpetrator as the wrong choice and they will pay for it. Once they were out of the relationship, they had to rebuild confidence in themselves.

**Question 5: People often ask, “Why don’t domestic violence victims just leave?” What happens when the women in the videos decide to get out of the abusive relationship? Are they able to “just leave?” If not, why not?**

**Ideas:** Some of the women in the videos were stalked while they were still in the relationship but all of the women in the videos were stalked, threatened and harassed AFTER they ended the abusive relationship. Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive control and stalking is one of the tactics perpetrators use to try to maintain control. When the victim tries to leave, the perpetrator often steps up efforts to exert control, and sometimes resorts to extreme measures. Leaving is often the most dangerous time for a

victim. That is why it is critical for victims to decide when and how it is safest to end the relationship.

**Question 6: Can survivors of domestic violence really recover and heal from the trauma they experience or will they always feel “damaged”?**

**Ideas:** The women in the videos all worked hard to process the trauma they experienced. They have all successfully moved on with their lives and are no longer defined by the abuse they experienced. Some of them had the help of therapists; others didn't. It took some longer than others to heal. They also approached the healing process in different ways. One survivor talked about getting physically healthy to help her gain emotional strength. A couple of the survivors pursued education to secure their independence and self-sufficiency. Debbie, the surviving sister of stalking victim Peggy Klinke, gained strength by taking action to stop stalking. Debbie has been instrumental in national efforts to address stalking, and remains dedicated to the task.

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