



# Links in the Chain:

## Two Communities Respond to Stalking

### Discussion Guide



**COPS**

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
**Victims of Crime**





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## *Discussion Guide*

*"I look at it as a chain. And every one of us in the system is a link in that chain. And any weak link will cause the whole effort to fail. And this is why...it's such a wonderful thing to bring all of these people that work in this area together to talk, to communicate, to assist victims and their families."*

-Rolanda Pierre Dixon  
*Deputy District Attorney  
Santa Clara County, California*

The National Center for Victims of Crime and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services produced this 20-minute educational video, *Links in the Chain: Two Communities Respond to Stalking*, to encourage communities to develop multidisciplinary responses to stalking.

Stalking is serious, can be deadly, and is a crime at the federal level and in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories. Many law enforcement agencies, however, still struggle with how to handle it. Stalking prosecutions often fail because jurisdictions don't use the needed and proper resources to make arrests and keep victims safe. Community-oriented policing—partnering and problem-solving using all available resources in your community—is the single most effective way to combat this growing crime which affects 1 in 12 women and 1 in 45 men.

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*Links in the Chain* features two jurisdictions that successfully use multidisciplinary, collaborative responses to stalking. [The New York Anti-Stalking Task Force](#) is a completely volunteer effort that provides a forum for a wide range of professionals from a six-county area to consult with one another about handling their individual stalking cases. [The Family Violence Center](#) is a one-stop unit of the San Jose, California, Police Department featuring victim-centric policing, with law enforcement, prosecution, and victim services disciplines under one roof.

*Links in the Chain* is an excellent training and educational tool for all levels of law enforcement, victim service providers, and community stakeholders who seek to work together to combat stalking.

Use *Links in the Chain* and this accompanying Discussion Guide to motivate and challenge your community to improve its response to stalking. The video provides a general overview of stalking (what stalking is, how often it occurs, how to respond to stalking) and also can be used in conjunction with training that focuses on community policing, victim safety, and community collaboration.

We recommend that you review the video several times before presenting it so that you are familiar with the content and are better prepared yourself to guide the training and discussion.

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*When the training is complete, your participants should understand these main ideas:*

- ***Stalking is a serious and dangerous crime.*** It is crucial to have clearly articulated law enforcement policies in place to recognize and combat stalking.
- ***Communities can help.*** Community-oriented policing means tailoring approaches to the specific needs of the community, building on existing community resources, and collaborating with key partners.
- ***A victim-centric approach produces better results.*** Involving victims and victim service providers in the investigation, reporting, and prosecution phases of a multidisciplinary stalking response increases the likelihood of effective arrests and prosecutions. This approach also increases victim safety.
- ***Partnerships are crucial.*** A community-oriented approach to stalking increases officer and victim safety, frees police officers' time, and gives the prosecution stronger legal cases.

**The New York Anti-Stalking Task Force** provides a monthly forum for professionals from a six-county area in New York State to consult with one another about their individual stalking cases. Task force members include local law enforcement officers, victim advocates, district attorneys, and representatives from the FBI, corrections departments, social service agencies, hospitals, and schools. The task force, a completely volunteer organization, is a nonhierarchical network that relies on peer-to-peer communication and a robust exchange of ideas. Task force members believe that this initiative is successful because a core group of dedicated attendees bring real-life cases to the forum and the task force finds real-life solutions. Members participate because they know that the group is effective in achieving better policing and prosecuting of stalking cases.

**The Family Violence Center** in San Jose, California, was established under a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant that provided funds to establish a facility and train officers on domestic violence and responses to stalking. The San Jose Police Department, a metropolitan force serving more than one million residents, did not have a domestic violence or stalking unit; all domestic violence cases were handled under the jurisdiction of the general assaults unit. The VAWA-funded Family Violence Center now houses three assault units under one roof: domestic violence, threat management/stalking, and child and elder abuse.

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## Questions for Discussion

After showing *Links in the Chain*, allow for at least 15 minutes to discuss audience reactions and explore how your community could improve its response to stalking victims. The following suggested questions, grouped by topic area, will help guide your discussion. Direct quotations from the video will help illuminate particular discussion points.

### Stalking: the Facts

*What is stalking? As defined in the programs in the video, what are some of the elements of stalking? Do you know how stalking is defined in your jurisdiction?*

Legal definitions vary among jurisdictions, but in general stalking is a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

### Marge (victim):

*It's a constant fear, it's a constant worry. It's being anxious, not sleeping. It's sitting in your own house, the place where you should feel the most safe and yet not feel safe at all.*

*Do the statistics in the video surprise you?*

- One in 12 women and 1 in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetimes.
- Seventy-seven percent of female and 64 percent of male victims know their stalkers.
- Eighty-one percent of women stalked by a current or former intimate partner are also physically assaulted by that partner.
- Seventy-six percent of women who were murdered by an intimate partner had been stalked by the person who killed them.
- The average duration of stalking is 1.8 years, but in cases involving intimate partners, the average duration is 2.2 years.
- Stalking is a crime under the laws of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government. For a complete list of state, tribal, and federal laws visit [www.ncvc.org/src](http://www.ncvc.org/src).

*Stalking is a serious crime. How is that demonstrated in these communities and in your own?*

In San Jose, the police department called the Merge Unit (SWAT team) to make the arrest after assessing the threat of danger: the offender had been known to carry guns, had exhibited violence in the past, and had had prior fights with and had fled from the police.

**Dave Yazzolino:**

*We like to call the Stalking Threat Management Team the homicide prevention unit. Because [of] the women that we reach and the stalkers we put in jail, we think [the team] really prevents homicides.*

At the task force meeting in New York, Carmelo presents his new case to the group; the defendant in the case already has been arrested for child sexual abuse.

**Carmelo Laquidara:**

*It's not just another meaningless meeting or group that your boss tells you 'you have to be a part of, you have to attend these meetings. We all want to be here because we care about stalking and we know that it's a big problem.*

## Community Collaboration

*Why is stalking in particular suited to the community-oriented policing approach?*

To prosecute stalking crimes effectively, there is a real need to be able to work across disciplines and share crucial information with one another.

**Rolanda Pierre Dixon:**

*If you're going to make it work, you have to [make] a community effort. Everyone in the community that touches stalking in any way must come together and work together.*

**Derek Pyle:**

*Within the stalking task force we have probation, we have DAs and we have advocates, and we have people from the schools and hospitals. So now the officer, when he's faced with a situation he's not entirely comfortable with, he can now reach out to people [who] do have the expertise within that narrow band.*

*How is this approach different shown from a traditional, reactive approach to law enforcement?*

The approaches to stalking shown in this video focus on early intervention. Instead of waiting for a crime to occur before acting, these programs are pooling their resources, asking critical questions, and paying attention to the misdemeanors that often form the basis of stalking charges.

**Derek Pile:**

*In dealing with stalking, again, it's kind of a proactive approach to law enforcement, rather than a traditional reactive [one]. So, really, we're trying to plan what the next step is going to be and head off that stalker before it gets to the next deadly step or violent step.*

**Dave Yazzolino:**

*The advice I really give to police officers is to look for stalking in other misdemeanor crimes in the domestic violence realm. Most of the time it's a restraining order or vandalism, an annoying phone call, or just leaving flowers on the doorstep. Once you get that kind of call, ask the right questions, probe a little further, find out how long this has been going on....*

*Though the two communities profiled in the video take different approaches, what are the core goals that both programs are trying to accomplish?*

- Intervene early in stalking cases
- Increase the rate of prosecution and of holding offenders accountable
- Increase resources for law enforcement and victims
- Ensure victim safety

*How would you characterize the collaboration that you saw in both programs?*

The collaboration in both programs is sincere. They genuinely want to help one another. The individuals are in constant contact, willing to share their ideas and perspectives with each other. The collaborations show motivation and a dedication to problem solving.

**Bob Passonno:**

*It's not just an advocate group, nor just a law enforcement [group], but it is a cooperative effort of law enforcement and advocates, and DA's officers and corrections.*

**Rolanda Pierre Dixon:**

*Need to be on a first name basis; need to be connected, you [need] to be discussing these cases on a daily basis; need to be on the same page.*

*What are some unique opportunities that the video showed for exchanging information? How did they create them?*

The task force meeting held in New York is a perfect opportunity to exchange ideas, information, and perspectives with one another. Taking advantage of the many experts in the room, participants can discuss cases and seek ideas about moving forward. Originally started by a victim who wanted to get involved, the task force is completely voluntary. It does not have a budget or stalking grant funding.

Derek Pyle:

*If you have a room of forty people and these are their careers—they specialize in victim safety or law enforcement—you have an enormous collective institutional knowledge within that room.*

In San Jose, the Family Violence Center benefits from many disciplines working under the same roof. The assistant district attorney, child protective services, and victim advocates are on a first-name basis and discuss cases daily as they eat lunch together.

Emily (last name not provided):

*When I'm working with a client and she needs to find out information about the suspect. The good thing about being here is that I can go up to the officer, to the investigating officer, and ask him questions as far as, you know, if she has a restraining order, has it been served.*

*What do the police officers say about how a collaborative approach helps their work? How would it help in your community?*

**Derek Pyle:**

*I don't expect my officers to have the answer to every question. They don't have to be an expert on stalking. They just need to know...that there are experts in particular fields that they can talk with.*

**Derek Pyle:**

*Police officers appreciate this collaboration once you're able to get started. Now they realize that they have resources at their disposal through other agencies and other parties that are willing to help.*

**Peter Decena:**

*I think being in this environment, this collaborative environment, means that the victims get a wider range of services...being able to plug into these various outlets that are all under this one roof.*

*What role do you think the police can have in initiating change on this issue?*

**Chief Bratton:**

*Police can't do it alone. Can we be one of the trumpeters, basically heralding what needs to be done? Certainly, and we intend to do that—and we are also saying that we want to partner. We need help in this area. Working together, maybe we can have some of the success that we've had in other areas of crime reduction in the country.*

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## *Victim Safety*

*How high a priority is victim safety in these communities? How is that reflected in their work?*

Victim safety is a top priority in both of these communities; victims are actively involved, informed, and treated with respect from beginning to end.

**Derek Pyle:**

*[W]e're not just addressing the actual crime now; we're trying to help the stalking victims with every aspect of how this event is affecting their life.*

**Emily:**

*Of the 400 domestic violence police reports that are filed in San Jose every month, we do make an effort to contact each victim. And we can say, these are the things that are available to you under the law.*

*How do victims benefit from the range of services that a community-oriented approach to stalking provides?*

Victims often are more protected when there is a collaborative effort to put their stalker in jail. Community efforts yield more resources for the victim and often make it easier for victims to find services, file protection orders, and resolve legal matters.

**Becky Black:**

*She talked to an advocate, she saw her detective, she talked to [the] victim witness representative.... So it makes an upsetting, complicated, scary part of someone's life that they should not be having to deal with, it makes it simplified, and not so scary.*

**Derek Pyle:**

*Having a multiagency collaboration and really getting the community stakeholders involved is huge just in managing the case, managing victim fear, and getting a full context on what the situation is.*

*What are the key questions to ask a victim when investigating stalking? Why is context important?*

It is important to ask the victim how long the stalking behaviors have been going on. Context is critical. Stalkers use their knowledge of the victim to create fear. What may appear as innocent to an outsider—sending flowers, notes, or photos—can be frightening to a victim if the stalker has made statements or exhibited behaviors related to those actions that instill fear. Perhaps a stalker has said, "The day I send you roses is the day I will come to kill you." Inquire about past incidents that the victim may not think to report, but that she finds frightening, such as the stalker showing up at her workplace. Pay close attention to stalking behavior in other misdemeanor crimes, especially those related to domestic violence. Ask the victim if she feels that she is in danger. Ask about the victim's fear.

*What is the role of protection orders in dealing with stalking? What happens when they are violated?*

Stalking is a course of conduct. If someone violates a protection order, it is by definition a course of conduct and, therefore, stalking.

Bob Passonno:

*In my opinion, the most dangerous person that you're going to come across is the person that knowingly violates an order of protection. Because we know that there is this behavior over here that has allowed this order of protection to be issued. And now we've got something to violate that order of protection. What have we got? We've got a course of conduct.*

*Collaboration in Your Community*

*What elements of the New York and San Jose models would work best in your community? How could your community improve the way it addresses stalking?*

*How do you deal with stalking in your community? Who leads the stalking efforts? Do police in your area work directly with victim advocates? If not, how would you integrate such partnerships into your work?*

*How is your program different from those featured? What obstacles would you have to overcome to create a collaborative approach?*

*If you were to build a collaborative approach to stalking in your community, who would be involved? Who (what positions) would be the links in your community's chain? Who are the stakeholders? Who are the existing or potential partners? Who needs to be at the table?*

### *National Center for Victims of Crime*

[www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)

The National Center for Victims of Crime is dedicated to forging a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The National Center's toll-free Helpline, 1-800-FYI-CALL, offers supportive counseling, practical information about crime and victimization, and referrals to local community resources, as well as skilled advocacy in the criminal justice and social service systems.

### *Stalking Resource Center*

[www.ncvc.org/src](http://www.ncvc.org/src)

The Stalking Resource Center, a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime, works to raise public awareness of stalking and encourages the development and implementation of multidisciplinary responses to stalking in communities across the country through training, technical assistance, protocol development, and a wide range of resources.

*Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)*

*U.S. Justice Department*

[www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov)

The mission of the COPS Office is to advance community policing in jurisdictions of all sizes across the country. Community policing represents a shift from more traditional law enforcement because it focuses on preventing crime and the fear of crime at the local level. Community policing puts law enforcement professionals on the streets so they can build mutually beneficial relationships with the people they serve. By earning the trust of community members and making those individuals stakeholders in their own safety, community policing makes law enforcement safer and more efficient. The COPS Office provides grants to tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to hire and train community policing professionals, acquire and deploy cutting-edge crime-fighting technologies, and develop and test innovative policing strategies.



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