

# S-DASH (2009) Risk Identification Checklist For Use in Stalking and Harassment Cases

**Risk identification is not a predictive process and there is no existing accurate procedure to calculate or foresee which cases will result in homicide or further assault and harm.**

The S-DASH (2009) Risk Checklist was created by Drs Lorraine Sheridan and Karl Roberts in conjunction with Laura Richards, BSc, MSc, FRSA and on behalf of ACPO and in partnership with CAADA.



## **PLEASE DO NOT CHANGE THIS RISK IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST**

If you do have comments or suggestions please send them to:

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## Risk Identification for 'Domestic' Stalking and Harassment Cases

This risk identification can be used in ALL cases of stalking and harassment. It should be completed by professionals if there are two or more incidents of stalking and harassment (reported or unreported) and/or if the victim is extremely frightened. These questions direct you to specific areas that will give you an indication of the victim(s) risk of future violence/harm. Most the behaviours will be about coercive control. Do not think it is any less serious if there has been no physical violence. The more 'yes' answers you have, the higher the risk that the suspect could physically attack the victim at any time.

Please ensure that you write the additional notes about the context of what is going on and link the risk identification responses to a risk management/safety plan.

<b>THE CONTEXT AND DETAIL OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IS VERY IMPORTANT. THESE ARE ALL RISK FACTORS OF SERIOUS HARM. TICK THE RELEVANT BOX AND ADD COMMENT WHERE NECESSARY TO EXPAND <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></b>			
Name of Victim:		Date form completed:	
Name of Abuser:		Date of Birth:	
Name of Professional:		Yes	No
Reference number:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>1. Is the victim very frightened?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Has</b> (Insert name of abuser(s) ..... ) <b>engaged in harassment on previous occasions(s)?</b> (this victim and/or other victims)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Has</b> (Insert name of abuser(s)..... ) <b>ever destroyed or vandalised the victim's property?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4. Does</b> (name of abuser(s).....) <b>visit the victim at work, home, etc., more than three times per week?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Has</b> (.....) <b>loitered around the victim's home, workplace etc?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Has</b> (.....) <b>made any threats of physical or sexual violence in the current harassment incident?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7. Has</b> (.....) <b>harassed any third party since the harassment began?</b> (e.g. friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Has</b> (.....) <b>acted out violently towards people within the current stalking incident?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Has</b> (.....) <b>persuaded other people to help him/her?</b> (wittingly or unwittingly)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>10. Is</b> (.....) <b>known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>11. Is</b> (.....) <b>known to have been violent in the past?</b> (This could be physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other relevant information/additional observations made by Practitioner (e.g. level of fear in victim, details of threats and violence, duration of harassment, various harassing behaviours engaged in by abuser, victim's beliefs concerning abuser's motives, weapons owned by abuser, nature of unwanted 'gifts'/items left for victim, attitude/demeanour of abuser including mental health issues and whether victim has responded in any way to the abuser)			

## **Risk Factor Definitions**

### **Q1. Is the victim 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 abuser(s) engaged in harassment on previous occasions(s)? (this victim and/or other victims)**

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., 1991; Sheridan, 2001). Even though the victim may not know the stalker very well, he or she 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 abuser(s) ever destroyed or vandalised the victim's 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 (perhaps because the offender is unable to attack the victim directly), revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (i.e. destroying her 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 abuser(s) visit the victim 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 abuser(s) loitered around the victim's 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. Alternatively, an attack may be prompted by the stalker's frustration at not achieving his or her aims (such as a relationship with the victim), despite devoting a great many hours to the harassment. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly (even camping out on or in the victim's property), whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. 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 abuser(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. A review of eight studies by Rosenfeld (2004) revealed that the strongest predictors of stalker violence were threats to the victim. Threats have been found to be even stronger predictors in cases of very serious violence (James and Farnham, 2003).

**Q7. Has the abuser(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 abuser(s) acted out violently towards 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 abuser(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 abuser(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 obsessional, 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 abuser(s) known to have been violent in the past? (Physical or psychological. Intelligence or reported)**

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 (James and Farnham, 2003).