

SAFETY NEWS

Are You Being Stalked?

(NAPSA)—January is National Stalking Awareness month, and Dr. Michelle Ward, who studies predatory criminals, is on a mission to empower stalking victims. Dr. Ward has been the victim of stalking herself and hosts the Investigation Discovery series “Stalked: Someone’s Watching,” which airs Wednesdays.

Ward says people are usually stalked by someone they know, so the behavior can initially be difficult to identify. But over time, stalking creates a continuous, unwelcome and threatening presence.

While there are different types of stalkers, their behavior often consists of:

- An increasing amount of contact—following and surveilling the victim, making unannounced visits, making repetitive phone calls, sending unsolicited messages or giving unwanted gifts.

- Forcing an interaction—making threats, initiating lawsuits or spreading gossip about the victim.

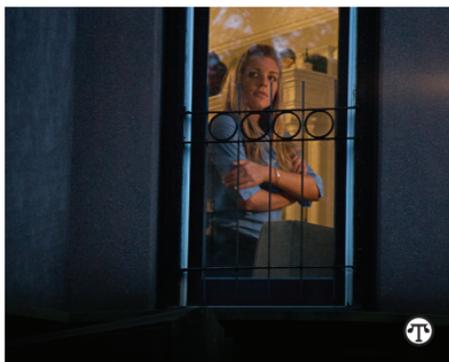
If you’re being stalked, Dr. Ward says that while you’ve done nothing to cause this behavior, there are things you can do to protect yourself.

1. Involve the police. Even if you haven’t been physically threatened, stalking is a crime that police should take seriously. Keep your case officer’s name and number with you.

2. Gather evidence. Establish a pattern of behavior. Keep a journal noting the date and time of every single event. Save all e-mails, text messages, letters and gifts. Screen your calls through voice mail and save the recordings.

3. Do not respond. Even returning unwanted gifts can encourage a stalker.

4. Speak up. Tell friends, co-



There may be more ways than you realize to protect yourself from a stalker.

workers and neighbors to be on the lookout and have them record anything suspicious. Don’t try to deal with your stalker on your own and don’t be afraid to ask for help.

5. Take legal action. Find a legal advocate. If it is deemed safe to do so, get a restraining or protective order against your stalker. If the stalker violates it, police can arrest him or her immediately.

6. Be hard to find and do not have a predictable routine. Get an unlisted number, block all calls from unknown numbers, and screen your calls. Get a P.O. box and don’t give out your home address. Delete your social media profiles. Vary your routine, changing where and when you shop and how you get to and from work. If you think you’re being followed, don’t go home. Stay in a safe place with other people and call the police.

7. Increase your home’s security. If possible, add an electronic home security system, a video surveillance system, floodlights linked to motion detectors—whatever you need to do to feel safe.

For more facts about stalking, Dr. Ward and the series, go to <http://investigation.discovery.com/tv/stalked>.