



Cybercrimes: How Maryland Law Can Protect You Transcript

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FEMALE NARRATOR: Online tools are an easy and powerful way for abusers to manipulate and control their partner. This video provides you with information about what crimes may apply if someone uses digital tools such as social media, email, and messenger apps for abuse.

Documenting And Reporting Abusive Behavior

It also addresses how victims can safely document the abuse and use it if they choose to report it to law enforcement or as a basis for a protective order.

Abusers use the internet, email, social media, messenger, and other apps as tools of power and control. They can commit crimes using these digital tools including stalking, harassment, sextortion, and manipulating intimate partners.

It is important to note while individual messages, calls, or contacts might be threatening or annoying, it is the persistent and continuous pattern of these threatening actions or series of acts over time that make it a crime. Non-criminal conduct can also rise to the level of stalking or harassment if it is part of a pattern.

Understanding these crimes and how to gather information to protect yourself against abuse can be empowering and can lead to holding abusers criminally accountable for their actions. Documenting online abuse can also provide the basis for a protective order.

Cyberstalking and online harassment are forms of stalking or harassment using an electronic or digital means of communication such as texting, email, social media, or messaging. Approximately 1 in 4 stalking victims report some form of cyberstalking using e-mail or instant messaging.

Stalking is when an individual approaches or pursues a victim and places them in reasonable fear of either them or someone else suffering: serious bodily injury, assault, rape, or sexual assault (or attempted rape or sexual assault), false imprisonment, or death. Stalking also includes approaching or pursuing a victim where the stalker intends to cause serious emotional distress to the victim. Cyberstalking is when abusers use digital tools to stalk their victims.

Online harassment is when the abuser uses electronic communication that alarms or seriously annoys another person. The abuser must intend to harass, alarm, or annoy the victim. For the behavior to be considered online harassment, the victim must give the abuser a reasonable warning to stop.

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If you are the victim of online harassment, it is essential that you or someone acting on your behalf tell the suspect to stop contacting you. This can be by email, a letter, or a phone call. Any means is okay as long as the abuser is told to stop.

Sextortion and Revenge Porn

Both Sextortion and Revenge Porn include the abuser threatening the victim to accomplish their goals. Threats can include the abuser: accusing the victim of anything that, if true, would be bad for, or ruin, their reputation, threatening physical injury, inflicting emotional distress, causing economic damage to the victim, or causing damage to the victim's property.

Sextortion is when the abuser makes someone engage in sexual activity using these threats. Revenge Porn is when the abuser uses threats to make the victim be the subject of sexually explicit images or videos. Revenge Porn also includes distributing sexually explicit images or videos of the victim with the intent to harm the victim, without the victim's consent, and where the victim expected the images to remain private. If you are the subject of an explicit visual representation and there is a criminal court case, the law strictly protects the images or videos from public release or view.

If you are a victim of any of these crimes, it is important to preserve all communications, images, or videos and do not edit or alter the data in any way. You can preserve the communications by printing them, taking screenshots, or saving them. Keep all saved communications in a safe place. This can be with a friend, in a secure location in your home, or in an online platform the abuser does not have access to. Be sure to keep a log of the abuser's communications and any efforts to stop the communication, including electronic and non-electronic communication. This documentation illustrates the persistent pattern of abuse.

Reporting Abusive Behavior

You can report any of the abusive behaviors in this video to the police. Provide the police with any communications you preserved, and the police will evaluate the case. You may want to apply for a protective order to have a judge consider your case. If so, you can work with a victim service provider, a lawyer, or you can seek one on your own.

Whether you report to the police or seek a protective order, it is important to create a safety plan with your local crisis center or domestic violence service provider. Safety planning can include alternative housing arrangements, limiting contact with the offender, and offering support and services for you and your family.

Abusers may use online or other means to threaten, manipulate, and control their intimate partner. Document any and all abusive conduct. Keep the documentation in a safe place. You can report the abuse to the police or seek a protective order. Help is available. You are not alone.

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Website address: Hruth.org

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