Dear Alice,

My girlfriend just broke up with me after one year of relationship. She didn't give me any reason. She says she has no time to give a reason. Last night, I called her every half hour, but she didn't want to pick up the phone. This morning, she told me that if I keep calling her, or I am around her or her place, or trying to follow her, then she would call the police and sue me. My question is: is it against the law if I am trying to get in touch with her by being at the same place as she is? Is it against the law if I wait for her in front of her door?

— Home alone

Answer

Dear Home Alone,

While it may be unfortunate and hurtful that she doesn’t want to talk with you or discuss reasons for ending the relationship, you really need to back off, stay away, and give her some space. It seems clear that your ex-girlfriend doesn't want to see you, talk to you, or have anything to do with you right now. She has been definite and clear about her wishes.

While the legal definition of stalking may vary depending upon where you live, the United States Department of Justice [2] defines stalking as “a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.” More specific examples of stalking include:

- Following someone or showing up where you know they’ll be
- Giving or sending gifts or messages (written or electronic) that are unwanted
- Inflicting damage to someone’s property
- Threatening to hurt their family, friends, or pets
- Using technology to monitor use or track whereabouts
- Spreading rumors or sharing photos or information about them verbally, in print, or on social media or other places on the Internet
- Accessing personal information about someone through public records, Internet searches, private investigators, the person’s trash, or contacting their friends and family
Adapted from the Stalking Resource Center [3].

Calling her every half hour or showing up somewhere you know she will be can be considered stalking. It is critical for you to know that this is a crime in all 50 states.

If you continue, it would be within your ex-girlfriend’s rights to notify the police and get an order of protection that would not allow you to have contact with her, be on her property, or come within a certain distance of her. She may record these repeated instances of showing up at her place, calling her, and bothering her in other ways to use as evidence for an order of protection. The order would be served to you, and once you have seen it, if you violate the terms, you could be arrested and even face potential jail time. If you’re interested in learning more, the Stalking Resource Center further breaks down the Stalking Orders of Protection [4] by state. If you’re both students at a university or college and she chooses to notify campus officials, there may be additional procedures and sanctions involved. What may result can significantly impact your academic future.

What you’re describing is serious. For the time being, and possibly forever, you'll need to leave your ex-girlfriend alone. Whatever her reasons for breaking up with you, it’s clear that she isn’t willing to discuss them with you right now. Rather than pursuing the reasons for your breakup or why your ex isn’t interested in talking, this may be a good time to focus on you, your feelings, and finding a way to move on. You may find it helpful to speak with a mental health professional about how to cope with your feelings about the breakup and how to move forward in a healthy manner.

Pursuing a calm approach that allows you to focus on the future, while giving your ex the space she requests, can only help you both in the long term.

Alice!
Category:
Relationships [5]
Nonconsensual Relationships [6]

Related questions

Why did she break up with me? [7]
Help me stop stalking my ex and his new partner [8]
Setting boundaries for work relationships [9]

Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [10]
Mental Health Services (CUIMC) [11]
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