



Dealing with Harassing Calls, Texts, and Messages

A Note on Language



In this toolkit, we will sometimes use the word woman/women and feminine pronouns for simplicity and to recognize the significant impact technology-facilitated violence has on women and girls. We recognize that TFGVB also impacts trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people. We hope that all people impacted by TFGVB will find these documents useful.

Legal Options

Depending on the method and extent of the harassment, [legal remedies](#) may be available. Legal options can be started by you (such as a [Peace Bond](#) requested by you and granted by a judge that can “keep the peace” and restrict the abusive person from doing certain things, such as coming near you or calling you. Note that if a Peace Bond is violated, the behaviour can be charged as a crime). Other legal options involve a criminal investigation conducted by the police that may result in a criminal charge and prosecution of the abusive person. You would need to talk to police or get legal advice if you want to explore these options.

Report to the Police

If you report the harassment to the police, they will investigate to determine whether the abusive person has committed a crime, such as criminal harassment, stalking or, based on other things that the abusive person is doing, whether another crime has been committed. When the police investigate, they will collect and assess the evidence they can obtain to determine if a criminal charge is supported.

You may be able to help the police by providing documentation of the harassment. Keep in mind that this documentation is a piece of evidence that may show that a crime has occurred. The police will need to do their own investigation as well.

Document the Harassment

Whether you seek a peace bond or report it to the police, having some documentation (collecting [screenshots](#) or recording date/time/notes for the abuse) of the abuse could be helpful. You may want to document the harassment because sometimes you may be the only person to have access to it. Depending on how the harassment occurs or the technology platform on which it took place, the messages may be deleted and not retrievable later on.

Talk to the police, a lawyer, or anti-violence worker in your community to learn about what type of evidence would be most useful for the legal options you want to pursue. These professionals will have a more thorough understanding of local laws, local police, and court procedures.

For some people, documenting and keeping a record of the harassment they are experiencing may feel validating; but for others, it may feel traumatic or triggering. Do what feels best for you. Speaking with an anti-violence worker or legal advocate may be helpful to consider your next steps.

For more information, see our handout on [documentation tips](#) and [log template](#). If you are not ready to talk to someone, check out our [Preserving Digital Evidence Toolkit](#) for more information and suggestions about how to document evidence and what to include.

Report Harassment to the Technology Company

You may also want to report the harassment to the tech company. Most technology companies have policies that do not allow users to misuse their platform to harass another person. If they confirm that someone is violating their policy by harassing another person through their platform, they may remove the offending message(s), tell the person to stop, and, in rare cases, ban the person from the platform.

Telephone Company

If the harassment is occurring via phone calls or text messages through a telephone provider, consider reporting it to your wireless company.

Reporting to the phone company may be an option if the harassment isn't at the point where the police can investigate. Keep in mind that through this process, the person making the harassing calls **may** be informed of who made the complaint – you. If you do not want the abusive person to know who made the complaint, this might not be the best option.

Social Media

If the harassing message is made through a social media or a messaging app (such as Snapchat or Facebook messenger), you can report the harassment to the social media company. How the company responds to harassment will depend on its terms of use or community guidelines; in some cases, these guidelines may be narrowly defined and the harassment may not fall under their prohibited content. If the harassment is prohibited, the company may remove the offensive content and encourage you to block the harassing person. In rare cases, the company may suspend the harassing person's account.

Tip: Always document the message and the profile information of the person sending or posting the messages before you report the message and the company removes it. Once the social media company deletes it, it is gone forever.

Strategies to Manage Harassing Messages and Calls

Experiencing harassing calls and messages can be very difficult emotionally. It may feel as though the person is always there, you can't get away, and the only solution is to disengage from all technology so they can't contact you. While you can't make the other person stop harassing you, there may be some things you can do to alleviate the constant bombardment of harassment.

Block the Abusive Person from Contacting You

One strategy can be to block the abusive person from contacting you. You can block someone on your smartphone, through the telephone company, or on the social media platform. Blocking works differently depending on the technology platform or smartphone device, so it's important to test it so you know what to expect, become familiar with how it works, and ensure it works most of the time. Test the blocking feature with someone you trust to see how it works.

Keep in mind that there are limitations to blocking. When you block someone, you are blocking their ability to contact you via a particular phone number or social media account. They can still contact you on a different phone number or social media account. It also prevents you from being able to see what they are posting about you.

- **On Smartphones**

Depending on the type of phone you have, you can block the other person in your phone settings to prevent them from contacting you. Generally, once blocked, any calls or text messages from the blocked phone number will not come through. However, blocking is going to be different on each phone; for example, the device may block incoming calls but not text messages or the blocked person may still be able to leave a voicemail but you won't get a notification. If you're not sure how to block on your phone, search "how to block a number" on the make and model of your phone on a platform like Google and, if possible, test blocking to see how it works on your phone.

- **On Social Media**

If the abusive person is harassing you via a messaging or social media app, you can block that person through the social media or messaging app. Each social media has its own blocking feature and processes, so if you are unsure of how to block someone, search "how to block someone" from the specific social media platform on a platform like Google for instructions. Most social media companies have instructions in their help centres.

In general, most social media companies will not inform the other person that they have been blocked. However, the abusive person may realize that they are being blocked when they are unable to see your social media content or message you.

Other Strategies

Not everyone wants to stop all contact with the harassing person. You may want to continue to have contact with the other person because you want to continue to collect evidence of the harassment. Sometimes, knowing what they are saying or doing can help you determine whether their behaviour will escalate. In some cases, you may need to stay in contact to communicate about children, pets or other joint issues.

Use a Specific Ringtone for the Abusive Person

If you still need to stay in contact, but every time the phone rings it upsets you, one option is to use a specific ringtone for the abusive person. This way, when other people are calling, your phone will ring as normal. But when the abusive person calls, the special ringtone will alert you, and you can decide whether to answer it or silence your phone and ignore it.

Let the Call go to Voicemail

One common strategy is to let the calls go to voicemail. This lets you collect evidence of harassment, but you don't have to talk to the other person. Using this strategy along with giving the person their own ringtone will let you know whether to pick up the call or let it go to voicemail.

Get a Second Phone

Another strategy is to get a second phone. You can use one phone for the abusive person to contact you and another phone for everything else. This way, you're not cutting off all contact, but you can have a safer phone that you can use and you're not constantly bombarded with messages from the abusive person.

Forward Calls from a Specific Phone Number

Some phone companies have a feature that lets you forward calls from a specific number to another phone number. You can forward all calls and messages from the abusive person to another number, which means that even if they dial your number, your phone doesn't ring and you don't get the harassing text messages.

Get a New Phone Number or Social Media Account

In some cases, you may decide to just get a new phone number or social media account. This option is best if you want to cut off all ties, want no communication with the abusive person, and don't think the abusive person will learn about the new phone number or social media account. This solution isn't for everyone because it may be a lot of work to change your number or create a new social media account.

Another limitation to this option is that depending on your situation, it may be fairly easy for the abusive person to discover your new number or account – particularly if you have joint friends or family members – or if they have access to your accounts (such as email), offices, or organizations (e.g. health care offices, schools) where you updated your new number.

Make Your Number Private

If you need to call the abusive person but don't want them to know about the new number, consider turning off your caller ID through your phone settings so it doesn't appear on the receiver's caller ID. The receiver will see "Private Number" or "Caller ID Not Available" on their phone when you ring.

If you don't want your number to be masked all the time, another option is to do this on a call-by-call basis. Each telephone company has its own code that you enter before you dial the number you are calling. Because each telephone carrier has its own code, contact your telephone provider for their caller ID blocking code.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing TFGBV, you are not alone. You can use sheltersafe.ca to find a shelter/transition house near you to discuss options and create a [safety plan](#). You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.

Adapted for Canada with permission from WESNET's Tech Safety project, based on their resource [Dealing with Harassing Call, Texts and Messages](#).

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