

Online Sexual Harassment

Responses and considerations for journalists facing online sexual harassment (gendered threats or comments)

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Now

These are the absolute first steps to take. Do this before deciding what to do next.

- **Secure your physical safety.** Make sure you're in a safe place. **Call 911 if it's an emergency** and if you are comfortable working with the police.
- **Do not engage with the perpetrator.**
- **Document the harassment and comments.** Ask a trusted friend or peer document the harassment—especially if you encounter a deluge of messages and comments—by taking screenshots, downloading videos and taking notes
- **Tell a friend, family member, confidant or employer about the situation.** Make sure you don't feel alone and that others know about what you're going through. They may be able to help you document events, report messages to platforms or contact law enforcement. Have an emotional action plan in place to take care of yourself.
- **Turn off location tracking on social media and web browsers.**

Next

Then, choose what to do:

- ❑ **Report the harassment to the relevant platforms.** Use your documentation to help you demonstrate the harm caused. If this is triggering or retraumatizing, consider having a trusted friend or peer reach out to the sites.
- ❑ **Conduct a threat assessment** to understand who is making the comments or threats, what you can protect yourself from and what's at risk. This will help you determine what your next steps need to be
- ❑ Think about your mental state and health: Do you want to reach out to a professional? Maybe a trusted group of colleagues, friends or peer group?

Also

You may want to:

- ❑ **If you've been threatened physically or violently, [consider whether to approach law enforcement](#).** It's good to know that this means presenting evidence of the threats and rehashing your experiences, which can be stressful and overwhelming. It may be best to discuss with a trusted confidant first and then decide. However, if this is an emergency, **call 911 and make sure you're safe.**
 - ❑ We understand this can be contentious and is not a viable option for everyone. The benefit of reporting a threat to law enforcement is that it starts a trail of evidence for your case, in case further threats are made and you decide to take further action in the future. Consider making the report with a friend, family member or colleague if you do not want to approach law enforcement on your own.
- ❑ **Step away if you need a break.** Receiving sexualized and gendered harassment can be overwhelming, upsetting and interrupt your personal and professional life. It's completely O.K. to step away and take care of your emotional well-being. Have a trusted friend or colleague monitor your accounts on social media, email, other relevant platforms or Google alerts set up with your name as a keyword so that someone can keep an eye out for new or escalated threats.
- ❑ **Request help from colleagues or friends if the situation overwhelms you.**

Consider

"Good to know", once you feel more secure and less overwhelmed.

- ❑ Avoid doxxing the person harassing you; it may antagonize them.
- ❑ Remember that you did nothing wrong and this is **not** your fault.
- ❑ Try not to draw extra attention, such as by giving an interview, which might provoke your harasser.
- ❑ Consider contacting a legal resource or attorney.
- ❑ Review any information or photos stored on dormant or alias accounts
- ❑ Take down your contact information online
 - ❑ From social media platforms (your posts, your friends or colleagues' posts, etc)
 - ❑ From data broker websites like Spokeo or InstantPeopleFinder
- ❑ Think and consider possible outcomes before posting any information that may spark attacks or threats

Future

Extra steps to take with time—when you have breathing room.

- ❑ **Use a service like [DeleteMe](#)** to remove your information from white pages and data broker sites. Note that some sites take weeks to process your requests, so if you're worried about escalation, consider getting the process started right away.
- ❑ **Develop secure communications and use digital security best practices.** Make sure that your device isn't compromised (consider switching temporarily to a burner or backup phone) and that you use an encrypted messaging app like Signal. For direct support, you can connect with [AccessNow's Helpline](#). They can help you improve your digital security.
- ❑ **Contact a professional organization for help, including your union if you belong to one.** Many organizations offer direct emergency funds or support, including [IWME](#), [CPJ](#), and [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#).

Additional Resources:

- [Fragile Masculinity: Men, Gender and Online Harassment](#)
- [Online abuse: how women are fighting back](#)
- [Amnesty International: Online Abuse Against Women](#)
- [Women Helping Women online chat and toll-free number](#)
- [Cyber Civil Rights Initiative - Resources for targets of Nonconsensual Porn](#)
- [National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)
- [Chayn Guide to Online Safety](#)
- [Feminist Frequency - Speak Up and Stay Safe Guide](#)
- [About Online Harassment - Stats in the U.S.](#)
- [Know Your Trolls: A 30 Minute Course for Journalists](#)
- [The Difference Between Blocking and Muting](#)