



Script: Stalking Sarah

Sarah is a pretty active internet user. She's a regular in chat rooms, often posts info in discussion groups and has visited a heap of websites. She meets some pretty interesting people online as well, people with similar interests...sport, music, movies and stuff like that.

So when some guy follows her through cyberspace, she's pretty freaked out. He emails her, posts comments about her in chat rooms and has somehow found out her mobile number.

This clip could be about anyone. Find out what Sarah did to protect herself.

Sarah:

I use chat rooms and website discussion groups quite frequently, both socially and for study and research. There's this one particular chat room I use on a regular basis and there was this guy that I got to know quite well. He seemed really nice, you know we had the same interests, sport, music – that kind of stuff.

I told him how I played for my local netball team and we discovered that we both had tickets to the Big Day Out which was only a few weeks away. After a few more conversations I gave him my email address, and everything seemed fine and normal.

Anyway, the next time we were chatting he started asking me really personal and gross questions. I realised he was a bit of a freak so I ended the conversation straight away, plus I blocked him from sending me messages.

But then he started harassing me and sending me disgusting emails attaching explicit photos of himself. When I told him to stop it he sent even more abusive messages and graphic photos.

My parents contacted my ISP and changed my email address, as well as blocking him from sending me more messages. But even though I'd blocked him from contacting me online, he knew the chat rooms I used regularly and posted messages there saying false and abusive things about me.

Suddenly I started getting these threatening text messages from an unknown mobile number. The messages were saying that this man was going to find me and do all these terrible things to me. I was really upset so I told my parents, and finally we reported it to the police.



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The police discovered that there were various pieces of information about me on the internet that would've helped the man to track me down. For one thing I posted my name, age and photo on my chat profile which can be viewed by anyone, but on top of that my netball team had a website that listed when and where our games were each week, and my mobile number had been posted online because of a charity event I was organising.

With just a few tiny things I'd told this guy about my life, he was able to find out heaps about me – he knew what my mobile number was, and worst of all he knew where I'd be at certain times of the week when I played sport.

I never knew how easy it was for someone to use the internet to track a person down in the real world, but after this happened I learned there are some things you can do to protect your identity online.

As much as possible you should try to stay anonymous – use an online name that is different to your real name and doesn't reveal your age or gender. Try to avoid posting personal information about yourself on public blogs and public websites, and if you do use a real photo of yourself be really careful where you use it and make sure you never reveal your surname on it.

If you do get emails or messages or have conversations that are threatening or harass you in any way, be sure to save them because they can be used as evidence if situations like the one I was in occur.

It may not seem like a big thing, but the tiny pieces of information we leave behind us on the internet can lead to potentially dangerous situations. And once you put a piece of information or a photo of yourself out there, you can never get that back.