

Threat Intimidation Guide — FBI

 fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/threat-intimidation-guide



What is a threat?

If someone communicates any statement or indication of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action in an illegal manner, to include in a manner that manipulates the U.S. legal system, that's a threat.

People may also threaten you with blackmail or other negative consequences if you don't comply with certain demands.

If you are in immediate physical danger, call 911.

Contact your local FBI field office or visit tips.fbi.gov to report a threat associated with a federal crime. You can report your tip anonymously.

Types of threats

If you're in imminent danger because of the close proximity of a person who is actively threatening or in the course of taking physical action against you, that's an in-person threat.

If you're facing an in-person threat, such as an active shooter, you have three options:

- **Run:** Identify an escape route. Drop any belongings that may slow you down. If possible, help others escape and call 911.
- **Hide:** Hide from the view of the threat. Lock doors or block entries. Silence your phone and other devices (including vibrate mode) and remain silent until the threat is over.
- **Fight:** Fighting should be your last resort. Do it only when no other action could reasonably protect you in that moment of imminent danger. Attempt to incapacitate the threat. Act with as much physical aggression as possible.

If you're threatened but are not in immediate physical danger, that's a verbal in-person threat.

If you've been verbally threatened:

- Write down or record the threat exactly as it was communicated.
- Record as many descriptive details about the person who made the threat (name, race, gender, height, weight, hair and eye color, voice, clothing, or any other distinguishing features).
- Report the threat to law enforcement.

If someone is threatening you over the phone, that's a phoned threat.

In these cases, try to get as much information on the caller and the threat as possible, unless the threat is nearby or may imminently harm you and/or others.

- Remain calm and do not hang up the phone.
- Keep the caller on the phone as long as possible.
- Try to solicit information from the caller to determine whether the threat is specific, realistic, or poses immediate danger to you and/or others.
- If possible, signal others nearby to listen and notify law enforcement.
- Copy any information from the phone's electronic display.
- Write the exact wording of the threat.
- Record the call if possible.
- Be available to discuss the details with law enforcement personnel.

If someone threatens you over text message, direct/private message, social media, or email, that's an electronic message threat.

To protect yourself from these types of threats, follow these tips:

- Don't open electronic messages or attachments from unknown senders.
- Don't communicate on social media with unknown or unsolicited individuals.
- Make sure your security settings on your devices and your accounts are set to the highest level of protection.

If you do receive an electronic threat:

- Don't delete the messages.
- Leave any messages open on the device.
- Immediately notify law enforcement that you've received a threat.
- Print, photograph, or copy the message information (subject line, date, time, sender, etc.).
- Preserve all electronic evidence.

Cyber attacks can compromise your electronic devices and expose personal information.

To protect yourself from these types of threats, practice good cyber hygiene:

- Use strong passphrases and do not use the same passphrase for multiple websites.
- Set anti-virus and anti-malware applications to automatically update.
- Apply system and software updates as soon as they become available.
- Apply two-factor authentication.
- Backup data regularly.

If you suspect that you have been a victim of a cyber attack:

- Do not delete or alter your computer systems.
- Immediately contact your financial institutions to protect your accounts from identity theft.
- Change passphrases and monitor accounts for suspicious activity.

Who should I contact if I experience threats or intimidation: local police or the FBI?

- If you or others are in immediate physical danger, call the local police by dialing 911.
- If you experience a threat associated with a federal crime, contact your local FBI field office by calling 1-800-CALL-FBI (or 1-800-225-5324) or via tips.fbi.gov. Examples include threats from an agent of a foreign government, organized crime, or a government official. Your report can be anonymous.
- Not all incidents meet the FBI's investigative threshold. If you are the victim of an incident that does not meet the threshold of a federal crime, you may need to report it to your local police department. Local and state jurisdictions have different thresholds for investigating suspected crimes.

What can I expect if I am interviewed by the FBI?

- An FBI agent can meet with you at an FBI field office or at another location.
- The FBI will ask you to provide as much information as possible about the perpetrator and details of the threat you have experienced.
- The FBI will ask you for your contact information to follow up with you if needed.
- The FBI will attempt to protect your identity and confidentiality.

- If appropriate, an FBI victim specialist may be present during the interview to provide information and support, or they may contact you after your interview by phone or mail.

What is the threshold for the FBI to investigate a complaint and/or initiate an investigation?

- The FBI is able to investigate threats that violate U.S. federal law and imply harm or danger to the recipient.
- The ability of the U.S. government to prosecute individuals for threat-related charges is contingent upon several factors, such as the quality of the evidence, the ability to identify individuals who perpetrated the action, the identification of a conspiracy, and/or the ability to arrest the offending individuals.

What can I expect if the FBI initiates an investigation?

- If the FBI believes a federal crime may have been committed, one or more FBI special agents will conduct an investigation. As part of the investigation, the special agents will gather evidence, which may include an interview with you and other victims.
- You may also be asked to describe your experience before a federal grand jury.
- A thorough investigation will be completed. The investigation may take a long time to finish, and you will not be updated on day-to-day case developments. Every effort will be made to tell you about major events in an investigation, such as an arrest or indictment. The FBI is committed to providing such information to you before it is released to the public, when possible. However, the FBI must always be careful not to reveal sensitive information that could hurt the investigation or increase danger to law enforcement.
- An FBI victim specialist will be available to provide identified victims with support, information, and referrals for any local resources that may be needed.

Even if reporting the details of how you were threatened or intimidated does not result in an investigation, it will likely assist other victims by helping the FBI track threats and identify trends.

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