

Primary Prevention-Awareness against Violence/ Sexual Violence Thinking About Self Defense?

NCASA Guidelines for Choosing a Self-Defense Course Prepared for the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Choosing a Self Defense Program

The following guidelines were developed with women's needs in mind, but the information is equally applicable to men seeking a good self-defense course.

Self-defense Philosophy

Ideally, a good self-defense program should reflect these philosophical points in its outlook:

- No one asks for, causes, invites, or deserves to be assaulted. Men and women sometimes exercise poor judgment about safety behavior, but that does not make them responsible for the attack. Attackers are responsible for their attacks and their use of violence to over power, control and abuse another human being.
- Whatever a person's decision in a given self-defense situation, whatever action she/he does or does not take, that person is not at fault. Someone's decision to survive the best way she can must be respected. **Self-defense classes should not be used as judgment against a victim/survivor.**
- **Good self-defense programs do not "tell" an individual what she/he "should" or "should not" do.** A program should offer options, techniques, and a way of analyzing situations. A program may point out what USUALLY works best in MOST situations, but each situation is unique and the final decision rests with the person actually confronted by the situation.
- **Empowerment is the goal of a good self-defense program. The individual's right to make decisions about her/his participation must be respected. Pressure should not be brought to bear in any way to get someone to participate in any activity if she's/he's hesitant or unwilling.**
- **Self-defense is a set of awareness, assertiveness, verbal confrontation skills, safety strategies, and physical techniques that enable someone to successfully prevent, escape, resist and survive violent assaults. A good self-defense course provides psychological awareness and verbal skills, not just physical training.**

Protecting Yourself

We learned not to talk to strangers in preschool. But in our community and schools, we need to reinforce more complicated rules to keep ourselves safe. In a society where crime awareness is necessary, a basic knowledge of security precautions and self-defense techniques can be a helpful tool for anyone who feels threatened.

Safety Tips

General Guidelines (Common Sense Rules)

1. Do not walk down dark streets alone at night. Two or more women have a smaller risk of being attacked than one woman. If you must be out in the street at late hours, consider a buddy system. Always choose well-lit, populated streets.
2. If you are alone on a dark street, walk near the curb to put as much space as possible between yourself and the alleyways and doorways where attackers may lurk. At the same time, do not get too close to parked cars into which an attacker could force you, or in which an attacker may hide. Be aware of your personal space. Attackers often test potential victims by judging how they react (passively or assertively) when their area of comfortable space is invaded. Act alert and confident; walk briskly with your head up. If you feel that you are being followed, turn around and look behind you. If you are followed by a car, turn and walk in the other direction. If you feel threatened, walk briskly, and look for a store or a well-lit, comparatively safe area. If you feel uncomfortable, run! Do not allow yourself to be overtaken. Change directions, cross the street, TAKE ACTION; do not be afraid to appear rude.
3. Carry a whistle with you and blow it if you are accosted by a stranger. In the past, crimes have been prevented when the potential victim has blown her/his whistle.
4. Avoid conversations with strangers. If you feel that you have to answer, do so simply but firmly, and keep walking. Always keep your eye on anyone who is close enough to grab you. If he or she attempts to keep you from leaving, make eye contact and say "LEAVE ME ALONE" or "GO AWAY" in a loud, controlled voice. Be firm about what you want, and be as public as you can. Attract attention: if necessary, move into the street, knock things over, or grab onto a bystander and don't let go. Yell "FIRE!" to attract attention of people who might be weary of getting involved in an aggressive situation.
5. Judge potential attackers based on their behavior, not appearances. Do not rely on preconceived notions of what attackers look like (especially racial stereotypes) to decide who is dangerous. Instead, look for suspicious behavior, such as loitering, looking around excessively, skulking, and aimless walking to determine who is a potential attacker.

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- Remember that you can get help by phone. Know your community's emergency phone number and the phone numbers of the police and fire departments. Store the numbers in your cell phone for easy access. Emergency calls are always free from pay phones. The University of Chicago campus is equipped with white emergency phones (many with blue lights on top). Simply pull or twist the handles to open the door and push the button inside. The police will arrive at the location where the button is pressed. If you are running, pushing the buttons in each of the phones you pass marks your path, so that the police can follow you.
- Read the Security Alerts posted in most campus buildings. Be aware some patterns of crimes that happen, and change your behavior so you will be safer. After the evening buses stop running, there is a late night van service that provides door to door transportation.

At Home

- Secure your home! First and foremost, be certain that your door is protected with an adequate lock. This is important even in the residence halls. Even though you may know your housemates well, you should take the precaution to lock the door.
- Windows should also be secured; if you have windows located on a ground floor, it is wise to have secure window locks installed. Never hide your keys in a "secret" place outside of your home; burglars know where to look. Make sure all entries are well-lit.
- Have a peephole on your door and look through it before answering the door. Remember, you have no obligation to invite door-to-door salesmen or anyone else who comes uninvited to your door, into your home. The fear of appearing rude should not stop you from asking an unwanted visitor to leave. (If someone comes to your door in search of help, or wanting to use your phone, you can offer to make the phone call for them; do not let them come in).
- If you are in the lobby of an apartment with a stranger, allow him or her to take the elevator first and wait for the next one. If you are in the elevator and someone whose presence makes you uncomfortable gets on, get off on the next floor. If you do stay on the elevator, be on your guard: face the other passenger, and stand within reach of the call buttons in order to quickly press the alarm, if necessary. **Look alert (an important defense).**
- If you live alone, do not broadcast this fact. It is a good idea not to be listed in the telephone book; however, if you are listed, have only your first initial and last name printed, so that it is not immediately evident that you are a woman living alone.
- Consider posting a "Beware of Dog" sign outside your home, or place a large dog dish and bone outside your door. Though far from foolproof, such props might deter an intruder by the threat of a vicious guard dog.
- If a Utility or sales person or other service person rings your doorbell, ask to see some form of identification before letting the person in. Never let an unexpected repair person into your house. Instead, ask for his/her service number and then call the company to confirm that they were sent to your home.
- Do not leave front or back doors propped open and unattended.
- Never buzz anyone into an apartment or let anyone into a house if you do not know him or her.

Driving

- Routinely check your car's tire pressure and fluid levels, and make sure that you have enough gas to arrive at your destination. Also, keep jumper cables in your car. This way, you can avoid auto trouble that might leave you stranded in remote areas.
- When driving alone, keep car doors locked and windows rolled up. If you open a window, make sure you will be able to close it quickly in the event of trouble.
- If you notice someone following you in another car, do not try to evade them as doing so may lead to an accident. Instead, honk your horn to attract attention and drive to the nearest gas station or police station.
- If you see a stranded motorist, do not stop. Note the location of the car, then drive to the nearest phone and call the police.
- If you are stranded on a well-traveled highway, put on your flashing emergency lights and wait for help inside the car. If you are on a local road within walking distance of a telephone or gas station, lock the car, and walk along the left-hand, curb side of the road, facing oncoming traffic. If stranded in a remote area, it is safest to remain in your car. If a stranger stops, do not roll down your window or accept a ride. Instead, ask him or her to go to make a call for you.
- Park in parking lots or well-lit areas, not in dark streets. Be very alert when getting into your car in a deserted area. Make sure you are not being followed. Carry your keys in your hand so you do not need to stand and fumble for them. As you walk towards your car, check to see that no one is hiding underneath the car or in the back seat. When you arrive home, always take out your keys before getting out of the car.
- Remember that your car horn can be used to attract attention in an emergency.
- NEVER hitchhike or pick up a hitchhiker. Sexual assault is closely associated with hitchhiking, and it is not worth the risk.
- Keeping a cell phone handy in case of an emergency is never a bad idea. It prevents you from getting stranded in remote places. However, do not distract yourself while driving.

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Public Transportation

1. Public transportation stations can be dangerous. When waiting for buses, remain in populated areas, near a ticket booth or newsstand.
2. Never fall asleep in a station or on the bus, train, etc.
3. On the bus, do not listen to a Walkman, ipod, or become engrossed in a book or video game or texting. It is safer to be aware of everything that is going on in your surroundings.
4. Sit in an aisle seat near the driver so that you may obtain help quickly if necessary.
5. If someone near you makes you feel uncomfortable, do not hesitate to move. Do not worry about appearing to be rude. Change your seat or change cars at the earliest opportunity.
6. It is up to you to be aware! The more prepared you are, the less likely you will wander around lost or require the assistance of a stranger.

In Social Situations

Avoid accepting drinks from strangers or anyone you do not know well, unless they are handed to you in a sealed container that you open yourself. Rohypnol, a potentially dangerous drug, is odorless and colorless, and is increasing in popularity in the United States. The drug, dissolved in a drink, takes effect in about ten minutes and creates an effect similar to inebriation that can last up to eight hours. In addition to causing a loss of inhibitions, Rohypnol causes extreme drowsiness and relaxation and blocks out short term memory, causing temporary "amnesia" in the period that one is under the drug's influence. Police report an increase in incidents involving "roofie (as the drug is popularly known) rape." Roofie rape crimes can be extremely difficult to prosecute because the victim usually remembers nothing--some victims may not even know that they have been raped. In addition, because a victim under the influence of roofies would not be alert enough to refuse sex or resist her attackers, men who use the drug may not see themselves as criminals or rapists. The pills, illegal in the United States, are cheap and readily available on some high school and college campuses and constitute a threat of which women should be aware.

1. A party or any social situation in which you are surrounded by strangers can be a potentially dangerous one. Make use of the "buddy-system." Attend parties with friends who will watch out for you, and who you are willing to watch.
2. Do not drink to a point where you cannot control your actions.
3. Do not leave a party with someone you do not know, or do not know WELL enough to trust.

Stalking

Stalking is an insidious crime that affects at least 200,000 Americans a year. It has been estimated that 1 in 20 women will become targets of stalking behavior at some point in their lives. These are the best estimates currently available, but as with cases of rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, cases of stalking are under-reported. This is especially true given that stalking has only recently been designated a crime, defined mostly by state statutes. Stalking is not something to joke about. Such behavior can have detrimental psychological and emotional effects on the target, and advanced stalking may lead to an assault. Stalking can last for months and even years, and so cannot be easily dismissed as a problem that will go away in its own in time.

Introduction to Stalking

You are being stalked if you are the specific target of another person's persistent and/or frightening, even "obsessive" behavior. Stalking can be described as an extreme form of harassment, since the harassment is protracted and not limited to a particular environment, such as school or the workplace. The legal definition of stalking is determined by the specific state law; although state statutes vary, most acts of stalking include repeated incidents of the following:

- following a person
- appearing at a person's home or workplace
- making harassing phone calls
- leaving written messages or objects
- vandalizing a person's property

You may be being stalked if someone, anyone:

- calls you at your home, school and/or workplace after you have told him/her to stop
- leaves repeated, harassing or threatening messages on your answering machine or voice mail
- repeatedly "accidentally" runs into you at places you regularly frequent

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- "coincidentally" runs into you at places you do not usually frequent
- observes you from a distance and/or follows you
- drives by your home, school, or place of business
- shows up at your home, school, or office uninvited
- becomes angry when you reject his/her attention
- repeatedly leaves or sends you unwanted letters, notes, or presents
- asks people you know about your habits and/or whereabouts
- has another person contact you or people you know

Who Are Stalkers?

Anyone can be a stalker, including but not limited to: strangers, classmates, casual acquaintances, ex-spouses, ex-partners, coworkers, neighbors, professors etc. Numerous examples have shown that stalkers are not easy to characterize demographically; they are as diverse as the general population and do not come from any particular socio-economic background. Similarly, anyone can become targeted for stalking--none of us are immune. Stalking can affect both women and men, and either sex can be the stalker or the target. But most stalkers have been men, and it has been estimated that 75-80% of stalking cases involve a man stalking a woman. Therefore stalking is an important issue of concern for women, since it threatens their autonomy, safety, and privacy.

What To Do If You Are Being Stalked

- Make sure that you are candid and assertive when telling a stalker that you are uninterested in him/her. You do not want to leave room for misinterpretation.
- Document everything.
- Warn people you know.
- Avoid contact with the stalker; do not attempt to reason with him.
- Notify the police from the beginning by calling 911 or police.
- Establish a good working relationship with one police officer.
- Notify your telephone company. If you alert them early, they can help you have the appropriate services installed to gather calling evidence against the stalker (see below on how to deal with harassing phone calls). Telephone companies have divisions and personnel who specifically deal with harassing phone calls.
- Be your own advocate.
- Instate a restraining order.

Although we hate to admit it, it is very possible that you may be charged with stalking the real offender if you try to contact him, even if just to tell him to stop bothering you. You do not want to cause any confusion as to who is pursuing whom. Moreover, the stalker may interpret any contact on your part as a sign of encouragement. Finally, you cannot always gauge how dangerous the stalker may be, and you do not want to take any risks by coming into close contact with him/her. If you are contacted by the stalker, clearly inform him/her that you do not want any type of contact.

How to Handle Phone Calls

Telephone companies offer different services to help stop harassing calls:

- Caller ID
- Call Trace (*57, has a per-use charge)
- Return Call (*69, has a per-use charge)
- Call Block (*60 to active, *80 to de-activate, has a per-use charge)

Introduction to Self-Defense

Basics

The underlying principles of self-defense instruction are self-respect, self-reliance, and autonomy. By learning simple techniques of self-defense, you can affirm that you are competent and capable of taking care of yourself. Although techniques of self-defense are not difficult to learn, the basic skills are not always instinctive. By familiarizing yourself with a few simple physical actions you can reduce the anxiety over the possibility of attack and enable yourself to deal with aggression when threatened. Essentially, learning self-defense is learning how to avoid being targeted as the victim.

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The main objective of a self-defense course is not to learn how to challenge an assault or defeat an attacker, but rather to learn how to avoid the assault. Knowing self-defense techniques does not mean that it is safe to walk alone through dangerous places. Avoiding a dangerous area altogether is the best form of self-defense.

Remember that the best techniques are being aware and avoiding the need to use self-defense. The main point of fighting is to create an opportunity to run. In other words, catch your attacker off guard, then flee. When employing self-defense techniques, your main resources are your voice, your fingers and thumbs, your hands, your knees, and your legs.

NOTE: Self-defense classes are routinely offered in Chicago (see end of chapter for listing). It is recommended that you take a class if you wish to learn the proper self-defense techniques. It is extremely difficult to learn the proper techniques through a written description only.

The following are some basic tactics of self-defense:

1. Thumb gouge to the eyes: Grasp your assailant's head between your hands with your palms against his/her ears, then plunge your thumbs into his/her eyes. This tactic can be effective in immobilizing an attacker.
2. Groin pull: Though harder to execute than the thumb gouge, the groin pull, in which you squeeze, twist, and pull the assailant's testicles, is another good way to try to immobilize your attacker.
3. Finger jab to the eyes: Hold your wrist firmly, with fingers slightly curved, and jab all four fingers into the assailant's eyes. This tactic is useful if the assailant is holding one of your arms, ruling out the thumb gouge.
4. Knee blow to the groin: This tactic is effective in immobilizing your attacker; however, it is only effective when the assailant is standing directly in front of you. It also has the disadvantage of being rather predictable; in other words, this is a defense your attacker may anticipate.
5. Yelling: Always accompany your counterattacks with loud, forceful shouts.

Purse Weapons

Some women may feel that carrying a self-defense aid with them offers more protection than just the knowledge or training of physical defense techniques. While such weapons may be helpful in some cases, it is important to remember that they have their disadvantages as well; you should not put all of your trust in a weapon which might fail you.

Tear gas and mace, two common self-defense tools carried by women, have distinct disadvantages. Defense sprays are only effective if you carry them in your hand while walking in a potentially dangerous area. If a can of mace is in your purse, you may waste the time in which you could be fleeing from your attacker, fumbling for it. Also, if you are downwind from your attacker, you may end up feeling the effects of the spray more so than your attacker. Finally, it might take several seconds for the spray to take effect or the spray might fail to incapacitate your attacker. In such cases, your attempt at self-defense might serve as a further provocation to your attacker.

While screaming is an effective attention-getter and can throw an attacker off-guard, carrying a noisemaker can also be helpful. A whistle or a compressed air siren, which will emit a continuous high-pitched sound, can be effective. Find a compressed air siren that emits a sound when you pull a plug. You can throw the plug and make it impossible to stop the sound of the siren. Keep your noisemaker on a keychain or in your pocket, not around your neck on a cord (an assailant could attempt to strangle you with a cord). Again, in order to be effective, you must have the noisemaker in your hand. It will do you little good if you have to dig into your pocket to pull it out.

Pencils, keys, flashlights, even rolled up newspapers can all serve as defense weapons in an emergency. However, in an attack situation it might be easier to rely on your own hands and feet for defense.

Resources

There are numerous books available which describe self-defense techniques in detail. There are also several self-defense courses available for women. If you are interested in taking a self-defense course, observe a class, and enroll if you are comfortable with it. **Learning self-defense does not make you paranoid or aggressive. In a world where violence is a part of life, self-defense and street smarts are sensible ideas.**