

# Strategies for Self-Defense

## Notes about Sexual Assault

- No woman can make herself perfectly safe from rape in a rape-minded culture.
- Rape can happen anywhere, at anytime, to anyone. It happens along a continuum. At one end is by someone you know quite well and at the other end is the surprise attack in the middle of the night by a stranger.
- Many rapists will test a woman to see if she can be intimidated. He wants her to be fearful, to be intimidated, and to submit. This testing period is crucial for the rapist because if he cannot intimidate the woman, he will probably not rape her. It is important when approached by an assailant intent upon intimidation that you immediately get in touch with your anger. Think "How dare he try to hurt me!" The key to breaking up a rape is immediate resistance and absolute refusal to be intimidated. Respond with anger instead of fear.
- If robbery is the only motive, it may be best to cooperate — property can be replaced.
- If you suspect an assailant intends to harm or kill you (or if he tries to take you to an isolated area), then you should resist.
- Under certain circumstances, it may not be in your best interest to resist or immediately resist, and you might choose other alternatives. It is important that you choose whether or not to fight back. You must remain in control over what you will or will not do. If you decide not to resist immediately and vigorously, remain calm and in control. Evaluate your options.
- You are born neither a victim nor a resistor, but many of us have been conditioned to behave passively when threatened with physical or sexual assault. By doing so we agree to become victims. You don't have to be a victim, being a resister means you make deliberate choices; you make conscious decisions, you have control.

## Prevention

- The concept of prevention refers to avoiding dangerous situation and creating safe environments. You must be aware of your environment and of situations that can lead to assault so that you can act on your knowledge and prevent assault from happening. Prevention encompasses measures for both physical security and personal safety. If you can prevent a dangerous situation, you won't have to fight.
- Be aware of your surroundings and environment. When passing alleys, turning corners, or approaching places where people could hide, pass wide or look directly at them. Take action to avoid a situation when you feel something is wrong. Walk facing traffic, where you can see suspicious cars approach rather than them coming up from behind.
- Your body language is important. In all your gestures and movements you are sending out specific non-verbal messages. You can transmit signals that say "I'm a strong person". When you say "NO" your body must also say "NO." Body language indicates whether you are a victim or not.
- Hitchhiking is a bad idea.
- Wear clothing that won't hamper movement. Clothes determine how well we defend ourselves in confrontational situations. Shoes must stay on while running or come off quickly — they must give good balance and allow you to kick.
- Scarves, necklaces, and whistles can be used to strangle you.
- Wear long hair under your jacket.
- Shoulder strap purses worn between arm and body are less vulnerable. Backpacks can be used to pull you down to the ground. Wear them over one arm so they can be dropped.



- Jewelry can make a good edge when making a fist.
- A secure house is a deterrent. Lock all doors and windows before you leave; carry keys with you in your pocket rather than your purse. Don't leave them lying around. Don't give out information on answering machines. "I am unable to answer the phone right now" should do and doesn't imply that you are not home.

## Self-Concept

- How well you defend yourself depends directly on how you feel about yourself. If you are more concerned with your attacker's rights and emotional and physical health than your own, you will not defend yourself adequately. We sometimes forget our own priorities, the first of which should be the healthy continuation of our own lives.
- Being physically assaulted does not make you less of a person. You did not provoke the attack, you are its victim.
- Self-doubt and mistrust of our own gut feelings are the greatest barriers to quick reflexes.
- If you doubt your right to make a scene and attract attention, the attack will probably continue.
- If you ignore your intuition which says that a situation is dangerous, you may find yourself in trouble.
- If you take time to ponder the moral and political implications of telling someone to go away, the situation will likely develop past wherein someone could be told to go away.

## Assertive Behavior

**BODY LANGUAGE** Strong assertive postures.

**EYE CONTACT** One of the most important components of assertive behavior — look them in the eye. Turn around and check out your environment frequently.

**TONE OF VOICE** Low with increasing volume. Use of assertive sentence structure. Commands not requests (no "please").

**FORGET MANNERS** Everyday American manners often delay responding to a situation in a way that could

prevent an attack. Remember, the good person will understand, the bad person can kill you.

- We do not need to expend energy deciding whether or not a situation is dangerous. All we need to know is that we want the situation to stop immediately.
- One of the first steps we need to take is to reevaluate the "rules" which dictate our social behavior. If we have some understanding of potentially dangerous situations before finding ourselves in the midst of them, it will be much easier to act in an effective way. The time for reevaluation is before something happens.

**Rules to adjust or "forget".** They keep us in unwanted situations.

### 1. When spoken to we must always acknowledge the other person (with a smile).

- Consider the option of ignoring an unwanted approach.

- Women are conditioned to respond pleasantly. Don't worry about the possibility of hurting someone's feelings.

### 2. We must always answer a question that is asked of us.

- We will often get into danger by dignifying certain questions with an answer.

Example: "What's wrong with you, don't you like me?"

"What's wrong with you, don't you like men? (short, fat, white, black, etc...)"

- A barrage of questions is a common technique rapists, muggers, panhandlers, and others use as a ploy to gain our attention, monopolize our time, and therefore increase our investment in talking with them. You simply don't have to answer. It's important to realize that there is nothing wrong with you — all you need to know is that you don't want a situation to continue.

### 3. We must not bother people or make a scene because we are uncomfortable.

- Soliciting help is not only effective and often necessary, but can also serve as a future deterrent to public actions by the offender.

### 4. Always accept the kindness of strangers (help with bundles, etc...)

- Refuse offers of assistance, keep moving.
- Be sure he is gone before you open your door (don't let



anyone know you live alone).

5. We must be open and gracious to service personnel.

- You should check the i.d. of any person you don't know. Call their office to confirm their call.

6. A woman in difficulty should always defer to the protection and judgement of men.

- You can rely on yourself.

7. Men should carry the financial burden in social affairs.

- Men sometimes think that you owe them something if they pay for the date. Establish at the onset of a date that you will pay your own way if this could be an issue.

## Sexual Harassment

- **There is no single response to harassment that is always appropriate.** On the street the best response may be no response, ignoring cat calls, etc. Sexual harassment in the workplace, whether verbal or physical, is against the law. If you are harassed, respond assertively. If that does not help, document the harassment and use your company's grievance procedure. There are other avenues such as the EEOC, and various county services.

**Sexual harassment exercise.** Come up with a scenario like an associate who gets very touchy/feely when you are in his office and try completing the chant: **When you...I feel...so I want you to...or I will.** It could be: "When you touch me I feel that my privacy has been invaded. I want you to stop it, or I won't come into your office anymore."

## Self-Defense

In self-defense you must:

1. Fight back immediately with an absolutely committed response to an attack.

2. Combine effective "weapons" (techniques) with vulnerable targets.

3. Trust your intuition (listen to your feelings) and act on it (them).

4. Be aware of your environment.

5. Practice (physically and mentally).

- Your primary goal is to create pain in the attacker; breaking away is not sufficient. Something must be done to stop the assailant long enough for you to get away. The attacker is not kind or gentle and is willing to hurt you. A gentle response is not appropriate. Your appropriate response is rage — you've been attacked and have no responsibility for his welfare, only your own.

- You must use all your speed, power, and anger. Stop the attack by hurting him badly, not just enough to make him angry.

- Self-defense is not a contest of strength, go for vulnerable targets.

- Send out messages that you respect yourself; that you have confidence in yourself; that you are alert and not vulnerable to attack (body language). "Don't mess with me" signals can be verbal or non-verbal.

- When an alarm goes off in your mind telling you something is not exactly right, then something is not exactly right. Take measures to avoid a situation — our intuition makes us aware of danger, but we rarely pay attention to it.

- Practice will increase your skill, confidence, assertiveness, and make your self-defense more effective.

- Play "what if" games. Use your imagination to construct scenarios of attack. Picture yourself in familiar situations (home, work, etc.) and imagine what you'd do if attacked — always see yourself winning!

- Realize that every attack scenario is different. When the time comes you will trust your instincts and fight with everything you've got. Or submit with everything you've got. Never let go of the thought that you will survive.

## Targets

HEAD

eyes

nose

ears (strike both ears simultaneously)



NECK front  
sides (carotids)  
back

RIBS side of torso  
solar plexus

GROIN

KNEES front  
sides  
back

SHINS

FEET instep

- What you choose as a target depends on the situation, what weapons are free, and what distance is between you and the attacker.

## Body Weapons

VOICE kiai (shout), language

HEAD head butt

TEETH biting

ELBOWS upward elbow strike  
back elbow strike  
roundhouse elbow strike  
back roundhouse elbow strike  
side elbow strike  
downward elbow strike

HANDS Palm heel strike  
finger and thumb strikes (eye gauges and claw hand)  
hammer fist strike (top and bottom of fist)  
punch  
extended knuckle punch  
chop (inner and outer)  
double handed strike

KNEE upward knee strike

FEET front snap kick  
front thrust kick

side kick  
downward stomp kick  
horse kick

- Sometimes you can stop an attack just by yelling.
- Strike through your target.
- Don't "telegraph" your strike.
- Practice using your different body "weapons".
- Utilize the principles of force, stability, distance, and speed.

## Blocks

SLAP BLOCK grasping or slapping

LOW FOREARM BLOCK

MIDDLE FOREARM BLOCK inner and outer

HIGH FOREARM BLOCK " "

DOUBLE FOREARM BLOCK

BODY MOVEMENT

- Move back on blocks, use all of your force.
- Utilize the principles of force, stability, distance, and speed.

## Stance

- The way you stand is important. Your stance gives out messages about your assertiveness and ability to take care of yourself.
- When dealing with an attacker, a strong stance will support you and give you strength and balance for whatever "weapon" (technique) you use.
- You should be able to move out of your stance quickly.
- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, and one foot slightly ahead on the other.