

SELF-DEFENSE: BASIC CONCEPTS

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The following are excerpts and adaptations from the book entitled *Scenarios In Self-Defense*. by Mary Brandl and Anita Bendickson. To order a complete copy or for information on streaming/purchasing the DVD, please visit our website www.beprosafe.com.

What Is Self-Defense?

Self-defense is any available means of safely avoiding or escaping a potentially dangerous encounter. It needn't involve fighting, or even a direct physical encounter. Since no self-defense techniques are guaranteed, our goal is not to "win," but rather to get away from a potentially dangerous situation safely.

Psychology of Attacks---Disrupting the Attack Scenario

Most attackers have thought their actions out to some degree. They have developed a scenario - either conscious or unconscious - of how their attack will proceed. This is true whether the attacker is a stranger or someone you thought was a friend. This scenario is every attacker's security blanket. It is his or her assurance that the attack is going "well". By disrupting an attacker's scenario, you put yourself on more even ground with your attacker. You exploit the attacker's weaknesses and assert your own strength.

Attacks vary in seriousness (presence of weapons, degree of isolation, etc.) and in purpose (rape, mugging, being discovered while burglarizing, etc.). Assessing the seriousness and purpose behind an attack will help you determine what means to use to act - whether to use physical, verbal or other forms of resistance.

Middle Ground Self-Defense---Act Early

Attackers need to get close in order to attack. The first part of their scenario depends on it. Most attackers' scenarios include ploys or approaches that allow them to get within hand-shaking distance...without signaling the potential victim that an attack is starting. Even on the occasions when an attacker is using a weapon, he or she will almost invariably move in *before* wielding a gun or knife. Usually the approach is casual: "Have you got a match?" "Do you have change for a dollar?" There are also many approaches which do not include speech, they can be non-verbal.

---Trust Your Feelings

Victims often report that something made them feel "uneasy" even before the attack began. This seems to be especially true when the assailant is a stranger. The most useful thing you can do to upset an attacker's scenario and regain the initiative is to *trust your feelings*. You don't need to wait to find out why you feel uneasy before acting!

---Set a Boundary

To interrupt a casual approach, set an unmistakable boundary using:

- **DISTANCE:**

If you don't feel right about a person or situation, get or keep some distance. Don't assume that an attacker will always be a stranger.

- **STRONG BODY LANGUAGE:**

If you can take a good, deep breath, you are probably in a strong body position. For the strongest position, place your feet slightly apart, with some space between them from side to side as well as from front to back. This is like having your heels on the diagonal corners of a square. Relax your joints. Place shoulders directly over your hips. You can look at someone without making it easy for them to talk to you by centering your vision in the triangle made up of the area between their eyes and shoulders.

- **ASSERTIVE VERBAL RESPONSES:**

If a verbal response is called for, using commands and statements in a firm but non-challenging tone is perhaps your most valuable response for ending a situation. Use simple statements and commands that refer only to what "I want" or "I don't want".

Physical Resistance---

While many situations can be averted early, there are times when physical resistance may be the only chance you have to get away safely. However, if you decide to respond physically, it is imperative that you make your strike as effective as possible. Use your strengths against the attacker's weaknesses and *give it everything you've got. Use all the speed and energy you can.* If you commit to a physical response, you must be willing to injure your attacker.

To use your body most effectively, you need a strong base, with your weight centered and low. (See "Strong Body Language" above.) You can get into this position by either stepping as you strike, or by starting from this position and rotating your hips and body into your strike.

---Your Arms as Weapons

To strike with your arms, hand or fist, bend your arm at the elbow. You can pull your fist back by your side or you can raise your bent arm to shoulder level across the front of your body with your fist close to your opposite shoulder. You can then unleash your energy by uncoiling your arm and body into a strike from either starting point. Hard surfaces to strike with are your fist, fingers/nails, heel of your hand, edges of your hand, and elbows.

---Your Legs as Weapons

If you are stomping, coil the leg and drive the foot downward into your target. If you are kicking straight ahead, coil your leg and snap it out and back quickly for extra power. To kick backward, coil and drive the whole leg back into the target. Hard surfaces to use are your knees, ball of the foot, outside edge of the foot, and the heel.

---Targets

Regardless of an attacker's size or strength, he or she has weak areas. If you choose your target carefully, even a fairly weak blow can be very painful and potentially disabling. Your targets can be divided into three main body areas. Generally, the most serious targets are above the shoulders.

THE HEAD: Includes the eyes, temples, ears (boxing), nose, under the chin, and the front and sides of the throat. To remember, think of the five senses plus breathing.

MID-BODY: Includes the solar plexus, stomach, groin. Mid-body targets are usually less serious. To remember, continue to think of breathing and what interrupts breathing.

LOWER-BODY: Knees, shins, ankles, and instep. The knee is the most serious lower-body target. To remember, think of interrupting mobility.

To identify available targets and weapons, ask yourself: What do I have free? What targets are available?

Fear and Panic---Breathe Deeply and Visualize In Advance

Fear can actually be helpful. It gives you a burst of adrenaline. Panic is anything but helpful. It can keep you from thinking straight, considering your options, and acting decisively. If you start to feel afraid, take a couple of deep breaths. Although you don't need every option, visualize a few preferred self-defense options in advance. The more positive options you have considered, the more resources you'll have in a crisis. This is not paranoid thinking. It is prepared thinking.