



**WOMEN'S CENTER/IMPACT SELF
DEFENSE PROGRAM**

PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS

Violence against women is not going to stop until those perpetrating the crimes stop. The statistics are staggering. While women are not responsible for stopping the violence perpetrated against them, we do believe that we have a responsibility to share with them as much information as we have available to us.

COMMITMENT TO SAFETY: Have you learned everything you can about personal safety, and if so, do you practice what you've learned? Are you trapped by needing to be nice at all times (better dead than rude)? Have you put off personal safety training/made it a lower priority than many other things?

AWARENESS: Do you know what you're feeling (or do you know more about what other people feel)? Are you conscious of how people intrude on your boundaries physically and/or emotionally? Do you trust your instinct/gut? **Your own awareness to yourself and what is around you is your very first line of defense.** True self-defense begins long before any physical contact. The first, and probably the most important component in self-defense or personal safety is awareness. Always be aware of your own feelings, your surroundings, and your potential attacker's likely strategies against you. Statistically speaking, in almost 90% of the cases of assaults against women, she has some knowledge of who her attacker is. It may be someone she knows well, someone who knows her, a classmate, someone she has seen at various locations (grocery store, laundromat, bank, etc.)

Here are some examples of strategies that could be used against you:

- **Intrusion/Test** - The person subtly checks out your boundaries by physical proximity, comments, demands on your time and attention, etc. This can go on for minutes or months, and depending on your boundaries, you may not even notice.
- **Desensitization** – You become accustomed to his intrusions/tests, and no longer notice when your physical/social/emotional boundaries are crossed.
- **Isolation** – The perpetrator isolates you, or waits for a situation where you're isolated, to provide an opportunity for an assault/rape/attack.

Trust your instincts. If someone makes you uncomfortable, don't discount that feeling. Don't give out a lot of information about yourself until you feel comfortable doing so. Go into any situation knowing where you want to set the boundary for that time and place. Watch for danger signals (thanks to Gavin deBecker for discussing these in his book *The Gift of Fear*):

- Behaviors such as angry outbursts which are intended to intimidate or control
- Doesn't listen to you or doesn't believe you (discounts your "NO")
- Intrudes on your personal space (too close or inappropriate touching)
- Interrupts or makes remarks that are intrusive (such as about your body, other women, etc.)
- Forced teaming (making it seem like you have a mutual problem)
- Loan sharking (doing you favors so you owe him something)
- Typecasting (calling you a snob/racist lesbian; he wants you to try to disprove it)
- Unsolicited promises
- Too many details

Sometimes the attack comes from a total stranger. Typically when men attack women

their primary strategy is to use the advantage of surprise. Studies show us that criminals are adept at choosing targets that appear to be unaware of what's going on around them. By being aware of your surroundings and by projecting a confident presence, many altercations can be avoided. They typically are not looking for a fight, they're looking for someone they perceive to be a victim or easy target. Watch for some of the same danger signals listed above.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY: Can you tell someone clearly what **you** want and insist on it? Are you ready to authentically communicate anger, take control of a situation, and show your ferocity? Do you know how to de-escalate? Can you hold your ground? Does your body language say one thing while your words say something else (i.e. can you present yourself as a powerful person)? Can you express what you want and not back down?

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY: Use your sixth sense or your gut instinct. Whatever you may call it. Your body will have a physical reaction to a potentially violent situation before your brain has had a chance to process all of the information. **Listen to this.** We all have this gift, but very few pay attention to it. Learn to trust this power and use it to your full advantage. Avoid a person or a situation that does not "feel right".

ESCAPE IS ALWAYS YOUR BEST OPTION: What if the unthinkable happens? A predator who demands that you go with him suddenly confronts you--be it in a car, or into an alley, or a building. You should never leave the primary crime scene. You are far more likely to be killed or seriously injured if you go **with** the predator than if you run away (**even if he promises not to hurt you**). Run away, yell for help, throw a rock through a store or car window--do whatever you can to attract attention.

And if the criminal is after your purse or other material items, throw them one way while you run the other. When we talk to women about this, one of reasons for wanting to hold on to that purse or bag is because of all the information in it, such as credit cards, licenses, addresses, etc. When you finish reading this entire list, please sit down and take all the valuables out of your purse (be in a safe place while you do this by the way!!). Write down credit card numbers, license numbers, phone numbers, and any other information you need from what you carry in your bag. Keep that list in a safe place in your home! The last thing you want to do is to let a material possession cause you possible physical danger! It's not worth your life.

YOUR RIGHT TO FIGHT: Do you know or have you practiced any simple techniques to get out of various situations, from someone grabbing your arm, to a choke hold, to someone getting on top of you while you're sleeping? Unfortunately, no matter how diligently we practice awareness and avoidance techniques, we may find ourselves in a physical confrontation. Whether or not you have self-defense training, and no matter what your age or physical condition, you have options. It is important to understand that you CAN defend yourself physically. Many women worry that they will anger the attacker and get hurt worse if they defend themselves, but statistics clearly show that your odds of survival are far greater if you do fight back. Remember, though, to use the element of surprise to your advantage--strike quickly, and mean business. You may only get one chance. I can tell you, that as a female instructor who has found herself from time to time in-between the woman fighting and the male attacker (mugger as we call them) in class, women are incredibly strong fighters.

AVOID HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS: This is not to be construed in any way as blaming the victim. As we've stated before, violence perpetrated against women is not their fault. But remember, drinking or taking drugs diminishes awareness, reflexes, and ability to handle situations. Make sure people know

where you are, how to reach you, etc. Use the 'buddy system' whenever possible. Be prepared to fend for yourself. For example: If your date is driving or in control of transportation or other arrangements, carry enough money to get home, get a hotel room, or whatever else you need to be safe.

PEPPER SPRAY: Pros and Cons.

Pepper spray, like other self-defense aids, can be a useful tool. If you choose to carry pepper spray, make sure that you know how it works. We suggest that you purchase two of them and try one out so you are familiar with how they work. Spray it in the air to see whether any of the spray comes back on you. If it's windy, chances are some of the spray will get into your eyes as well. Know the expiration date on the can. It is important to understand that there can be significant drawbacks to its use. For example, did you know that it doesn't work on everyone? Surprisingly, even a full-face spray will not incapacitate 15-20% of people. Also, if you're carrying it in your purse, you will only waste time and alert the attacker to your intentions while you fumble for it. Never depend on any self-defense tool or weapon to stop an attacker. Learning to use your own body as your weapon is a much better tactic.

HOME INVASIONS: The primary way to prevent a home invasion is simply to never, ever open your door unless you either are certain you know who's on the other side or can verify that they have a legitimate reason for being there (dressing up as a repair person or even police officer is one trick criminals use—**ask for ID**). In the event that an intruder breaks in while you're home, you should have a safe room in your house to which you can retreat. Such a

room should be equipped with a strong door, deadbolt lock, phone (preferably cell phone), and a can of pepper spray (that you have already tried out & have knowledge that it works) or a fire extinguisher. If you arrive at home and find, for example, your door unlocked or suspect there may be an intruder inside, do not go in! Go to a safe location and call 911. It's important for you to do a 'mental check-list' of how your home/apartment looked when you left it. If it looks any different when you return, **DON'T GO IN UNTIL YOU KNOW IT'S SAFE!**

AVOID CAR JACKING: Always look into your vehicle to make certain it's safe to get in it, and once in, **lock all doors and keep windows up when driving**. Most car-jackings take place when vehicles are stopped at intersections. The criminals approach at a 45-degree angle (in the blind spot), and either pull you out of the driver's seat or jump in the passenger's seat.

A TRAVEL TIP: Violent crimes against women happen in the best and worst hotels around the world. Predators may play the part of a hotel employee, push their way through an open or unlocked door, or obtain a passkey to the room. As with home safety, never open your door unless you are certain the person on the other side is legitimate, and always carry a door wedge with you when you travel. A wedge is often stronger than the door it secures.

SAFETY IN CYBERSPACE: Although the Internet is educational and entertaining, it can also be full of danger if one isn't careful. When communicating on-line, use a nickname and always keep personal information such as home address and phone number confidential. Instruct family members to do the same. Keep current on security issues, frauds, viruses, etc. by periodically referring to such websites as the FTC's website <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/menu-internet.htm>.

SUGGESTED READING:

Bookstores are filled with books on personal safety. Your best bet is to go to the section on women's issues.

The following are a few books we highly recommend that you read:

The Gift of Fear by Gavin deBecker
Protecting the Gift: Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe (and Parents Sane).
by Gavin deBecker
Fearless by Gavin deBecker
Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense by Martha McCaughey
Her Wits About Her: A Collection of Women's Self-Defense Success Stories
by Denise Caignon and Gail Grove

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT US:**

Women's Center- IMPACT U
University of North Dakota
305 Hamline St.
Grand Forks, ND 58203
PHONE: (701) 777-4300
FAX: (701) 777-2307
Website: www.und.edu/dept/womenctr/

E-Mail us at:
undwomenscenter@und.nodak.edu

Kay Mendick
E-Mail: kay_mendick@und.nodak.edu

Tom Erickson
E-Mail: terickson@undeerc.org