

Self-Defense for Girls and Women: Awareness

Author/Instructor: Jade de la Cruz

1. Be aware of your surroundings:

Use your senses, mainly our eyes & ears. Look & listen. Tune in to your surroundings.

2. Be aware of your internal body signals, intuition and feelings:

We experience our feelings and intuition in the body so it is important to be aware of warning signals in the body such as a tightness in the stomach, tingly feelings on the skin, the heart beating faster, feeling hot, or breathing faster. These are all signs of adrenaline and signs that we are perceiving danger and feeling uncomfortable or scared.

Remember, if you feel uncomfortable, do something about it! If you don't feel safe, then leave wherever you are, go to a safe place and get help from someone you trust.

3. Be aware of your own body language: What are you communicating with your facial expressions? With your hands? With how you are standing, sitting or walking? Do you look confident or do you look timid & vulnerable? Stay aware and make adjustments as needed. Appearing confident minimizes your chances of being harassed or attacked.

4. Who can be a dangerous person:

All of us have our own sense for who is safe and who is not. Most people *are* safe and we need to remember that ANYONE (or someone from any group) can be a dangerous person! (Not just the stereotype of the adult, male, creepy stranger) Most often in an assault or harassment situation, the dangerous person is someone we know. This could be someone younger or older than you are, a boy or a girl, man or woman, a stranger, an acquaintance, a neighbor, teacher, friend, someone you are dating, a spouse or someone in your family. Even people who have always been kind to us can have a dangerous side of them that we have never seen before. We could face a dangerous situation with someone that we love and trust who has never been abusive or dangerous before.

This does not mean that we are afraid of everyone! *Most people are safe and friendly and will help us if we are in danger.* This means that **we trust ourselves** to be aware, we trust our intuition and trust that we will take action to get ourselves safe no matter who it is. We cannot assume that just because we know someone and we have never felt uncomfortable with them before that they will *always* be perfectly safe.

We decide to take action to keep ourselves safe based on how we feel and based on how the person is behaving..... NOT based on who the person is, how appropriate they have been in the past, how they are dressed, skin color, gender, age, etc.

5. Be aware of possible dangerous situations. The basic categories include....

(1) Kidnapping or abduction (2) Physical assault (also called “battery”) (3) Sexual assault (attempted rape, rape or sexual battery) (4) Molest (also called “childhood sexual abuse”) (5) Sexual Harassment (which can be just verbal, just physical or both)

6. Be aware of House Safety:

Decide with the people in your household the safe routes into and out of your house in the case of an emergency (like a fire or a burglar). Together, practice going out of these various safety routes from different parts of your home, especially if some of the routes are through windows! *Practice until it is easy to do.* Decide together which doors and windows should be locked, how you will lock them and when.

7. Be aware (informed) of the psychology of the attacker:

A dangerous person is looking for an easy target, he or she does not want to get hurt or be caught. When you yell and fight back, you are showing the attacker that you are NOT an easy target. The attacker expects us to be helpless and either not try to resist or fight back or if we do that we will be ineffective. When you respond loud and strong the attacker is often shocked and does not know what to do. The dangerous person will often stop trying to hurt you and run away if you are hurting them, yelling and threatening to tell.

8. Notice the attitudes and body language of others:

Pay attention to a person's tone of voice, facial expressions, hand gestures and attitudes of the people around you. Paying attention to these things can help us understand what the person is doing that is uncomfortable for us.

9. Look for Self-defense openings:

When to walk away from something inappropriate or when to run away from danger.
Where are your escape routes, and if you need to use physical self-defense, which **vulnerable targets** are available and within reach for you to strike and kick.

10. Look for your Options.

Don't think like a victim. You have choices. Depending on the situation, you can walk away, run away, break up with an abusive person, end an abusive or unhealthy friendship, be assertive and speak directly and firmly, yell commands, fight back, call the police, seek help and support, talk to a counselor, etc.

11. Know your rights:

You have the right to decide who touches you, how and when. You have the right to tell someone to stop doing *whatever it is* that you don't like! Whether you feel uncomfortable or scared. You have the right to stand up for yourself! We have the legal & ethical right to fight back physically *if we are in immanent danger of serious bodily injury.*

12. Remember to take really good care of yourself!

Self-defense = self-love = self-care. Get enough sleep. Eat healthy. Drink water. Take time to rest. Have fun, laugh, play and get exercise. Do things you enjoy that help you feel good about yourself. Spend time with people who like you and respect you. Affirm yourself often: I like who I am! I deserve to feel safe and be safe and to be treated with respect! I am intelligent and creative and beautiful, inside and out! I take care of myself! I honor all my feelings and needs (as well as the feelings and needs of others).